# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

**SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 270**

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FORTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SESSION 1995–96**

COMPRISING PERIOD
22 January—2 February 1996

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*22 January 1996*

# THE
# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SIXTH SERIES** **VOLUME 270**

**FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1995–96**


## House of Commons

*Monday 22 January 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### WALES

#### Urban Investment Grant

1. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what expenditure has been made recently from the urban investment grant scheme to encourage private sector investment in rundown areas. [8829]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones):** More than £14 million has been awarded in the past two calendar years.

**Mr. Dunn:** I recognise that this policy has brought enormous benefits to different communities in Wales, but will my hon. Friend please give the House some idea of the number of jobs that have been created as a result?

**Mr. Jones:** I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that the investment of taxpayers' money in the urban investment grant scheme has levered in some £80 million of private investment, and that has created or safeguarded approximately 2,000 jobs in Wales.

**Mr. Rogers:** I am sure that the Minister will have read the complaint in the *Western Mail* this morning from a small Welsh business man who was looking for grants from the Welsh Office but did not obtain them, when Tesco has received £11 million in grants to transplant its operation a few miles down the road into Wales. As the Minister will know, I wrote to him last week on the same issue, as a company in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) is receiving the same treatment. Why do not small Welsh companies get the same treatment as the large multinational companies when they apply for grants from the Welsh Office?

**Mr. Jones:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to correct the inaccuracies in the *Western Mail* story this morning and to give him a reassurance that all companies that come to the Welsh Office for assistance, be they indigenous companies or those from outside Wales, are treated on exactly the same basis.

#### Unemployment

2. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his plans to tackle unemployment in Wales. [8830]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague):** Between spring 1985 and spring 1995, employment in Wales grew by 10.5 per cent., which is well ahead of the Great Britain average of 6.3 per cent. Unemployment continues to fall. The Government will pursue their key economic objectives of permanently low inflation, sound public finances and improving the supply side performance of the economy. That policy has brought about a stronger recovery in the UK than in any other major European country.

**Mr. Ainger:** Is the Secretary of State aware that, in some parts of Wales, unemployment is getting worse, particularly in my constituency, where the December figures showed that we have 25 per cent. male unemployment? Year on year, it is getting worse, not better. May I take issue with the letter that the

hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) wrote to me, in which, describing the situation in south Pembrokeshire, he said that

"current progress is extremely encouraging",

when unemployment is getting worse? Why will the Secretary of State not address the issue of structural change—something that is particularly needed in peripheral areas and areas of high unemployment? Why will he not restore the cuts, which amount to some £23 million, that were imposed on the Welsh Development Agency by his predecessor last year and that have been compounded by his refusal to restore the cuts next year? That is the only way in which we shall be able to tackle our long-term unemployment, particularly in the peripheral areas of Wales.

**Mr. Hague:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, I and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary recognise that unemployment in certain parts of Wales, including his constituency, is higher than the average figures in certain parts of Wales. Part of the answer to that is the overall economic framework, which I have explained. In addition, since the west Wales task force was formed in 1992, more than £17 million has been allocated to local authorities for specific projects and strategies in the area. We have allocated a further £2.5 million for next year. Further support is available for projects such as Pembroke dock, if a good-quality strategy is submitted by the local authority—something that has not been done to date.

Our overall economic policies, backed by such measures, are the right measures to take, and not the imposition of a social chapter or minimum wage on this country and on the hon. Gentleman's constituents, which would cost them their jobs instead of creating them.

**Sir Wyn Roberts:** I compliment my right hon. Friend on the progress made in increasing the number of jobs available in the Principality. Will he confirm that, in terms of inward investment alone, the Welsh Development Agency aims to create or safeguard some 10,000 jobs this year? Does he agree that the WDA has a very good chance of achieving that target, given that some 7,300 jobs were created or safeguarded in 1994-95? Would not the only threat to such progress be posed by the remote possibility of a Labour Government?

**Mr. Hague:** My right hon. Friend is right in every respect. He is right, for instance, about the WDA's target. As the whole House knows, inward investment has brought tens of thousands of jobs to Wales over the years. The WDA's target for the current year is 10,000, and it is working hard to achieve that. It is working on a number of projects at present.

As my hon. Friend says, the only threat to the job prospects that have been created would be posed by a Labour Government, who would introduce a Welsh Assembly, the social chapter and a minimum wage.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** Does the Secretary of State accept that the problem relates not just to unemployment, but to the kind of jobs that are attracted to Wales? The vast majority are part-time, low-paid, soul-destroying, non-union jobs. Is he aware that a survey carried out with the Department of Employment in my constituency shows that the hourly rate for jobs advertised worked out at just over £3 an hour? Would he work for that kind of money?

**Mr. Hague:** Of course we want skill levels and wages in the Welsh economy to rise over the years. Wages have risen in recent years, and I very much want that to continue. We are also working hard to achieve an improvement in skill levels, particularly in the manufacturing sector. Last week, I emphasised that to the chairmen of the training and enterprise councils. Over time, such improvements help to raise wage levels.

**Mr. Ron Davies:** Will the Secretary of State confirm that, if either of the two sites proposed for a Euro freight depot in Wales—Magor or Wentloog—is used, the Welsh economy and Welsh prestige will receive a massive boost, thousands of jobs will be created and there will be a much wider impact on existing and potential investors in Wales?

If the right hon. Gentleman agrees with that, will he explain why, during his six months in office, he has done nothing to support either application, thus allowing a massive 1,000-acre competitor north of Bristol to steal a march? Only one of the sites can be viable: if the Bristol scheme proceeds, the Welsh projects will fail. Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that, if that happens, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that Wales will have lost out because of the incompetence and indecision that are the hallmarks of the right hon. Gentleman's administration of the Welsh Office?

**Mr. Hague:** As usual, the hon. Gentleman's question bears little resemblance to reality. There are projects to create rail freight terminals in South Wales, both of which involve applications for grants. Those applications—some for European grants, others for freight facilities grants—are being assessed, but in many instances more information is required. There has been no delay on the part of my officials in the assessment of those projects, and there would be nothing to stop the projects proceeding if they were not dependent on public funds. Before we commit public funds, it is important for Ministers to be satisfied that there is a strong case for doing so.

### Private Finance Initiative (NHS)

3. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what use has been made so far of the private finance initiative to boost the resources available to the NHS in Wales. [8831]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards):** We fully expect the private finance initiative to contribute significantly to the capital investment within the NHS in Wales. There are currently around 20 major projects with a total investment of £160 million in the pipeline.

**Mr. Whittingdale:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the £6.5 million scheme for a new car park at the University hospital of Wales in Cardiff is just one example of the way in which the NHS in Wales is benefiting from the private finance initiative? Is it not the case that the scheme could never have gone ahead on the current time scale if it had had to wait for public funding?

**Mr. Richards:** My hon. Friend is right. It is interesting to see Labour Members laughing at this. That is because they do not understand the private finance initiative. At present, the most advanced project that we have is the

north Wales cancer centre, worth some £15 million. Two large consortiums have already been short-listed and invitations to tender will take place shortly. Four other major projects in the national health service in Wales have been advertised in the European *Journal*.

**Mr. Rowlands:** What about another finance initiative: the general practitioner out-of-hours services that have been proposed? In the Rhymney valley, for example, that could mean a return journey of 26 miles in the middle of the night for elderly patients. It may be convenient to GPs. Conservative Members might be happy about it, but the patients are not getting the service that they deserve. Will the Minister consider those initiatives as well to ensure that they deliver service to the patients?

**Mr. Richards:** We are obviously aware of the pressures that have arisen in the primary care sector, but I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that, under this Government, patients will always come first, and not trade union members working in the health service.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Is not the point that the PFI involves money available over and above that in the Government capital funding programme and that, if it were left to the Labour party, additional medical facilities and hospitals alike would not be available in Wales or anywhere else in the United Kingdom?

**Mr. Richards:** My hon. Friend is correct. Conservative Members want the PFI to become the main source of funding of capital investment in the national health service in Wales. I notice that Labour Members continue to laugh at that. Perhaps I should tell them what the four other projects currently advertised are, because some of them affect their constituencies. There is provision for a new community hospital at Chepstow worth £6 million; a day surgery unit at the Nevill Hall and District NHS trust worth £1.8 million; radiotherapy equipment at the Velindre NHS trust worth £4 million; and an acute psychiatric unit in Abergavenny, Gwent worth £6 million.

**Mr. Dafis:** Does the Minister recognise that, in relation to a hospital that has only a limited market—to use the terminology that is now used—the private finance initiative is hardly relevant? I think of Bronglais General hospital in mid-Wales. When is he going to reply to my letter to him dated 13 October, part of our on-going correspondence about that hospital and the problems that it faces in the long term because of the way in which the NHS market is likely to operate?

**Mr. Richards:** The hon. Gentleman is being narrow minded about the private finance initiative. Clearly, his party does not understand the PFI's fundamental principles any more than do Labour Members. In the current financial year, we expect the NHS to spend about £125 million. The PFI will produce £10 million on top of that. That is hardly insignificant.

As to the hon. Gentleman's letter dated 13 October, I shall take that matter up immediately this Question Time is over.

**Primary Schools (Expenditure)**

4. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per pupil in primary schools in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the figure for 1978-79, at constant prices. [8832]

**Mr. Richards:** In 1993-94, the most recent year for which figures are available, £1,608 was spent per pupil in LEA-maintained primary and nursery schools in Wales at 1994-95 prices. That compares with £1,105 in 1979-80, again at 1994-95 prices—the earliest period for which figures are available. That is an increase in real terms of 45 per cent.—I say again: 45 per cent.

**Sir David Knox:** Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures scarcely sustain claims of cuts in education? Does he think that that impressive expenditure increase in primary schools in Wales has been accompanied by a comparable improvement in standards?

**Mr. Richards:** My hon. Friend is correct. Spending on books and equipment in Wales increased in real terms between 1979-80 and 1993-94 by 89 per cent. Spending on teachers' salaries over the same period in real terms increased by 38 per cent., and during that time the pupil-teacher ratio has been about 22 pupils per class. My hon. Friend is also correct about standards, which in schools in Wales are much higher and better now than they were in 1979. However, we still have room for improvement and we are working hard on the implementation of policies that will ensure rising standards.

**Mr. Barry Jones:** May I remind the Minister of the difficulties that are facing the new Flintshire county council, specifically with education? Does he know that, on the basis of the moneys that have so far been allocated by the Secretary of State, special needs children, those from under-privileged homes and, specifically, teachers will lose out hugely? Will he look again at the moneys that have been allocated to that new council and present proposals so that the county will not begin its new life with inadequate Government money?

**Mr. Richards:** It is sad that the hon. Gentleman continues the annual tradition of Clwyd education authority—frightening parents and children about funding for education. He knows perfectly well that it is for local authorities, in this case the new Flintshire education authority, to decide how much to spend on education and how to allocate the money.

**Mr. Sweeney:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the considerable increase in Government spending since 1979 on teachers' salaries, on nursery and primary education and on books and equipment shows the Government's determination to improve the standard of education in Wales? Does he further agree that it would be far better for all parties to support the Government's initiative on nursery education so that opportunity and choice can be enhanced and made available to more people in Wales?

**Mr. Richards:** My hon. Friend is correct. The figures that I quoted for the primary sector are similar to the

figures for the secondary sector. Despite Labour's opposition to the nursery voucher scheme in Wales, I have no doubt that its Front-Bench spokesmen will, as usual, display their hypocrisy by taking full advantage of it in due course.

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** There would be no question of hypocrisy in these matters on my part. The impressive figures for the increase in expenditure in primary education are principally the result of paying teachers half-decent salaries in the past few years, and of local authorities spending more on education. Will the Minister confirm that, in the past few years, the Welsh Office revenue support grant has made up a smaller share of local government spending and that LEAs have gone into their reserves to maintain services? Despite that, the pupil-teacher ratio is now edging up in primary schools. The average class size is going up and nearly 12,000 more pupils are being taught in classes of more than 30. Primary schools are being underfunded by the Government and they desperately need more money.

**Mr. Richards:** The hon. Gentleman must have asked about a dozen questions there, or certainly made about a dozen assertions, all of them incorrect.

**Mr. Griffiths:** They are from the Minister's statistics.

**Mr. Richards:** The truth of the matter is that Opposition Members believe the lies that are being peddled about statistics, and that explains why the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) chose a selective grant-maintained school for her son.

**Mr. Gallie:** What progress has been made in Wales on establishing grant-maintained schools? If progress has been made, could my hon. Friend suggest any action to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, as progress in the matter has perhaps not been so great in Scotland? Then, in the interests of—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman has been waiting for a long time to ask his question. I thought that he might have been more direct, but he seems to be circumventing the question on the Order Paper. If the hon. Gentleman has a direct question about Wales, I must hear it.

**Mr. Gallie:** What progress has been with regard to grant-maintained schools and primary schools in Wales?

**Madam Speaker:** Well done.

**Mr. Richards:** If my hon. Friend is patient, he will hear in a few moments our proposal to make grant-maintained schools even more popular in Wales by giving them the opportunity to borrow money in the private sector. I am sure that Opposition Members whose children attend grant-maintained schools will want to support the Government in this matter.

## Rural Railway Lines

5. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received over the past two years on the subject of rural railway lines in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [8833]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Twenty-one representations in the two years ended 31 December 1995.

**Mr. Llwyd:** Is the Minister aware that the first three franchisees to be allocated services are intent on reviewing fares every four months? Did not the Government give an assurance that price rises would be in accordance with inflation? What assurance can the Minister possibly give to those of us in Wales who are very concerned about rural lines in particular, and all railway lines in Wales in general? When will the Government realise that we need a properly funded and integrated public transport system in Wales?

**Mr. Jones:** My right hon. Friend's assurance on fares remains firmly in place, and there has been no change in that matter whatsoever. The same opportunities for the provision of socially necessary railway services in Wales to be supported by the taxpayer exist. The hon. Gentleman ought to move forward to the 20th century and recognise the real opportunities that privatisation presents, in the same way as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones)—according to the *Western Mail* this morning—has seen the possibilities of freight traffic on the north Wales line.

**Mr. Donald Anderson:** Will the Minister invite the Secretary of State to travel the 120-mile stretch of the heart of Wales line from Swansea to Shrewsbury to see the most beautiful line in Wales? Will he further ensure that the Welsh Office is represented at a very senior level at the special conference to be held in Llandrindod Wells on 23 March? The conference will look at the potential of the line, and at the potential for integrated transport, green tourism and job creation along its length.

**Mr. Jones:** It is always good to be represented on any appropriate occasion, and I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is looked into. I share the hon. Gentleman's admiration for the excellent heart of Wales line and the beautiful scenery through which it passes. I do not need to pass on such an invitation to my right hon. Friend—although I know that he would take it up with alacrity—because he has already travelled on parts of the line.

## Local Government Finance

6. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met leaders of local authorities to discuss the local government financial settlement. [8834]

**Mr. Hague:** I chaired a meeting of the Welsh consultative council on local government finance on 18 December 1995.

**Mr. Jones:** I trust that those who were present at the meeting made the Secretary of State aware of the effect of the Government's grant to local authorities on the council taxes in Wales that are soon to be announced. Is the Secretary of State aware that we shall see increases of 30 or 40 per cent. in council tax across Wales? What effect does he believe that that will have on the Welsh economy and on the feel-good factor in Wales? What

effect is the rise likely to have on the prospects at the next election of the pitifully few Conservative Members who represent Welsh constituencies?

**Mr. Hague:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, council tax levels are set by local authorities. Notwithstanding that, I expect that there will be a large differential between English and Welsh council taxes for the foreseeable future. Local authority leaders made certain representations to me at the meeting on 18 December and further representations in the period of consultation, which ended on 5 January. I shall, of course, consider those representations.

**Mr. Wigley:** Is the Secretary of State aware that, if local authorities such as mine restricted their council tax increase to the 3 per cent. present rate of inflation, in order to balance their books, they would have to cut some 50 teaching posts, close 15 rural schools, withdraw social services from 1,500 vulnerable people and close leisure centres for one or two days a week? Is that the objective of the settlement that he has made?

**Mr. Hague:** No. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have increased the amount of money that central Government will give to local government in the coming year. It is not possible to satisfy every demand for money on every occasion, as the hon. Gentleman knows, but I have increased the money that is given to local government. It is up to local government to play its part, in being as efficient as possible and running its services as well as it can, to ensure that we get the best possible value for money.

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** In particular, what excuses does the Secretary of State have to offer to the residents of the politically independent area of the new Powys unitary authority, who face a minimum increase of 15 to 20 per cent. in their council tax just to maintain services?

**Mr. Hague:** I welcome the hon. and learned Gentleman—on a day when the Liberal party has told us that it stands for high taxes, is soft on Europe and is naive on the economy, I wonder that he asks me about a possible tax increase. The question is similar to those that I was asked earlier, and therefore the answer is similar: I am giving an increased amount of money to local government during the coming year, although the actual level of council tax is set by local authorities. I expect Welsh council taxes will be far below English council taxes in the coming year.

**Mr. Hanson:** Is the Secretary of State aware that in Flintshire there is not only concern about education—mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones)—but growing concern among the leaders of that authority about the future of Theatr Clwyd and the 100 jobs that it creates in my constituency, plus the many more knock-on-effect jobs in the town of Mold? Will the Secretary of State agree today to review the settlement to see whether there is any further assistance that he can give Flintshire, to ensure that that excellent facility continues as a source of pride in north Wales?

**Mr. Hague:** As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), I received many representations in the consultation that ended on 5 January and I shall consider all those representations, including those that I received from Flintshire.

### Unemployment Statistics

7. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the most recent unemployment figure for Wales; and what is the European Union average. [8835]

**Mr. Richards:** The latest available unemployment rate for Wales on an internationally comparable basis is 8.3 per cent. for autumn 1995. The European Union rate in October 1995 was 10.6 per cent.

**Mr. Marshall:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that unemployment in Wales is lower than in Spain, Italy, France and Germany, all of which follow the sorts of policies advocated by the Labour and Liberal parties? Is that why the Liberal Democrats are regarded as naive on the economy?

**Mr. Richards:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The Liberal Democrats are indeed naive, when they bother to turn up. When he talks about the Welsh economy, that reflects the fact that Wales does not have any of the economic and welfare baggage of the European Union, such as the social chapter or the minimum wage. Perhaps more importantly, Wales does not intend to take on board any of the federal European political baggage, which other countries want to do.

Let me illustrate to my hon. Friend what that means to Wales in terms of jobs—I hope that Opposition Members will listen. It means investment by Bosch of Germany resulting in 1,000 jobs; by L'Oreal of France, more than 500 jobs; by FRAM of Italy, more than 500 jobs; Valeo of France, 660 jobs; Kronospan of Leichtenstein, 420 jobs; MVO Spa of Italy, more than 44 jobs; Axa France, 277 jobs. I am sure that there are more jobs to come where they came from.

**Mr. Alan Williams:** Is not the tragedy for Wales in the truth of the Minister's boast—that this may be the Government's best year for unemployment? Is it not a fact that in this, their best year, more than 10 million more working days will be lost through unemployment than were lost in 1979? Does not the horrendous number of lost days that must have accumulated over the past 16 years explain the poverty and deprivation that has become all too common in Wales?

**Mr. Richards:** The tragedy for Wales is that the Labour party still has such a high representation there. None of us will forget the tragedy of days lost through strikes when Labour was in power and until we changed the law. When the right hon. Gentleman talks of days lost through unemployment, I should remind him that inflation is down, interest rates are down, unemployment is down, productivity is up, average earnings are up, output is up and confidence is up. The only thing that could undermine that confidence is the Labour party.

**Mr. Sykes:** I know that my hon. Friend needs no more ammunition than he has already fired this afternoon but will he tell the people of Wales about a large company in my constituency that found that, because of the social

chapter, it could not afford to build a factory in France and decided, therefore, to double its production line in Scarborough, thus guaranteeing the jobs of my constituents?

**Mr. Richards:** I am delighted that my hon. Friend has drawn that example to the attention of the House. He is an experienced industrialist and employer—matters of which the Labour party has very little experience.

**Mr. Morgan:** I apologise for my late arrival, which was due to train failure. *[Interruption.]* I am grateful to the hon. Members who have put the word "Tory" into praetorian guard by being here today.

Does the Minister accept that, contrary to the impression that he has given that Wales is a land flowing with jobs, milk and honey, his own recent publication "Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales 1994/95" shows that Wales' gross domestic product per head is 15 per cent. below the British average and 20 per cent. below the United Kingdom average and that Wales therefore produces tax receipts 20 per cent. below the UK average? Does not that suggest that, in spite of the investments that he mentioned—some of which, including FRAM, are 20 years old—Wales does not flow with milk and honey and would have a far higher standard of living if the standard of living of some of the countries that he mentioned as bad examples applied?

**Mr. Richards:** The hon. Gentleman has forgotten the state that Wales was in when we inherited it in 1979, with clapped-out public sector industries that cost the UK taxpayer £50 million a week. Since we privatised them, they have contributed some £50 million a week to the Exchequer. He cannot seriously expect anyone to believe that Wales is not now an infinitely better place in which to work and live than it was in 1979.

### Inward Investment

8. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to meet the board of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss its policy on inward investment. [8836]

**Mr. Hague:** I regularly meet the board of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss a wide range of issues.

**Mr. Davies:** When the Secretary of State next meets the board, will he point out that the M4 corridor does not stop at Bridgend and ask why a constituency such as mine, which still has 30 per cent. of its work force engaged in productive industries and which has a long tradition of manufacturing engineering, has had no major investment at all for the past 10 years?

**Mr. Hague:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to point to that strong tradition in his constituency and I should certainly like us to maintain and improve our efforts to ensure that the spread of inward investment around Wales increases. Of course, inward investors are attracted to particular sites, but the Welsh Development Agency has targets to ensure a greater spread of inward investment. Llanelli has major inward investment employers such as Calsonic and Camford Pressings from Germany, although they have been there for some time. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that there will be a great deal of effort to maximise inward investment into all parts of Wales.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to discuss with the Welsh Development Agency the difficulties that it would face should this country ever be under a Labour Government who were committed to a social chapter and a minimum wage, which would destroy inward investment?

**Mr. Hague:** Some of the factors that attract inward investors are lower tax on companies and less regulation than is to be found in the rest of the European Community, and one factor in producing them is not being part of the social chapter. Were we to sign up to it, it would undoubtedly damage our inward investment prospects.

**Mr. Ron Davies:** Will the Secretary of State join me in commending the Welsh Development Agency, jointly with the Cardiff business school, on producing for Wales the United Kingdom's first regional technology plan? Given the importance of that project, does he think it appropriate that he should have deceived the WDA into thinking that he would launch the plan in Cardiff on Wednesday this week? Will he confirm that, contrary to the press releases that have been put out, he has no intention of being there and has chosen instead to be at a Conservative party function in London? Does not that demonstrate precisely what is wrong with the Government—people's needs are playing second fiddle to the Tory party's needs?

**Mr. Hague:** I shall be attending a meeting of the Cabinet, and the hon. Gentleman would be angry with me if I did not. I shall deliver my speech at the launch of the regional technology plan by video tape. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will enjoy listening to every word of my speech and that his questions will be better informed in future.

### Modern Apprenticeships

9. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has been taken to allow more young people to benefit from modern apprenticeships in Wales. [8837]

**Mr. Hague:** I have made additional funds available for modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships so that, by the end of 1996-97, more than 8,500 young people in Wales will have been able to start such training since the initiative began. That will result in a substantial injection of new, highly skilled and qualified workers into manufacturing industry in Wales.

**Mr. Butler:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on increasing spending year on year by 14 per cent. Does not that show the Government's commitment to producing a skilled work force from our young folk? Does he feel that Welsh employers have managed to measure up satisfactorily to the challenge presented to employers and to young people by the modern apprenticeship scheme?

**Mr. Hague:** I thank my hon. Friend. He is right about the priorities that I have given to the training of young

people. The budget for training young people will be £53 million next year which, as he said, is an increase of 14 per cent. I have also asked the training and enterprise councils to make manufacturing skills their top priority, not only in Government schemes but by encouraging companies to do the same. We have a steadily improving performance on training in Wales and I shall do my best to continue to encourage it.

**Mr. Hain:** Does not the Secretary of State realise that that is all nonsense? The Government's figures show that the number of recognised trade apprenticeships has fallen from 19,000 four years ago to less than 10,000 now? There has been a collapse in job opportunities for young people. Crime is rising, there is a lack of hope and young people throughout the valleys in south Wales feel tremendous despair because they cannot get trade apprenticeships, which the Government have cut year after year.

**Mr. Hague:** As I have explained, the Government's policies are directed towards increasing opportunities. I have already listed the ways in which we are doing that. Moreover, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take comfort from the survey released today by Dun and Bradstreet, which shows that nearly two thirds of Welsh firms—the highest proportion in the whole of Great Britain—expect to increase their employment.

### School Sports

10. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he has taken to encourage participation in sport in schools and to raise the standard of sports provision in schools. [8838]

**Mr. Richards:** Last September, my right hon. Friend published "Young People and Sport in Wales", which sets out a comprehensive programme of action for sport for children of school age. He invited the Sports Council to Wales to consult widely and advise him on a number of specific issues arising out of the document. My right hon. Friend expects to receive that advice shortly.

**Mr. Amess:** Is my hon. Friend aware that my Welsh constituents in Basildon will be delighted with that news, irrespective of the type of school to which they send their children? Will he confirm that plans to change national lottery funding so that individuals may benefit from lottery money will considerably help young people and sport generally in Wales?

**Mr. Richards:** I am delighted that my hon. Friend is in touch with his Welsh constituents in Basildon. However, matters involving the national lottery are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

### Trade Mission (Indonesia)

11. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the prospective cost of the Welsh Office-led trade mission to Indonesia; and if he will make a statement. [8839]

**Mr. Hague:** It is £18,000, including a visit to Singapore. My Department's trade mission programme provides excellent value for money and has given a significant boost to the Welsh economy by helping many small and medium-sized companies to improve their overseas sales performance.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** Is not his attitude typical of those who used to trade with Saddam Hussein despite the evidence that he was torturing and killing his own people? Does he not realise that the human rights record of Indonesia is one of the worst in the world? Indonesia killed 200,000 people when it illegally invaded East Timor. Does he not realise that the people of Wales are outraged that he and his team in the Welsh Office consider the matter to be of no significance?

**Mr. Hague:** United Kingdom exports to Indonesia increased by 42 per cent. in 1995. The people of Wales would be outraged if we said that Wales were to have no share in that increase, which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) and those who went with him, promoted. The people who went on the trade mission were not arms suppliers, but people seeking to trade with Indonesia in many different sectors. They have brought back orders worth several hundreds of thousands of pounds, which should be welcomed by all right hon. and hon. Members.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Vickers

27. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will ask the Director of Public Prosecutions to call for a report on the memorandum of 6 September 1995 written by Sir Colin Chandler, chief executive of Vickers, to his fellow executive David Hastie; and if he will make a statement. [8858]

**The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell):** No, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Galloway:** The cynical and casual attachment to the principles of British law implicit in that most cynical of answers is probably why this will be the last time that we shall see the Attorney-General in his current position. The Vickers memorandum catches the chief executives of Vickers and British Aerospace red handed as accomplices before the fact of a conspiracy against Mohammed al-Masari, a refugee living lawfully and peacefully in this country. If not kidnapping and murder, what could the executives have been referring to when they used the cynical and chilling phrases, "stifle him personally" and "direct intervention against him"? Why have not those executives explained their words? Why have they gone to ground so shamefacedly? Why is the discredited Attorney-General covering up for them today?

**The Attorney-General:** The House might think that the hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. If he seriously thinks that there are any grounds for suggesting that there has been criminality in relation to that memorandum, he will no doubt report it to the police.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the professor enjoys the hospitality of this country and should not behave in a way that puts jobs for people in this country at risk?

**The Attorney-General:** My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is fully entitled to take foreign affairs considerations and the relationship with important allies into account in making his decisions.

### Magistrates Courts (Paperwork)

28. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to reduce the paperwork involved in bringing criminal charges in magistrates courts. [8859]

**The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer):** In cases where pleas of guilty are anticipated, abbreviated files are being introduced which are expected to reduce paperwork by 5 million sheets annually.

**Mr. Brazier:** That is a welcome answer. An independent inquiry into paperwork in the police force has been conducted by PA Management Consultants, and there is a strong case for having an outside look at the paperwork element of the Crown Prosecution Service because there are concerns, legitimate or not, about delays. We should consider widening the scope of cases that can be handled by the use of guilty pleas through the post, which greatly reduces cost and time in the prosecution process.

**The Solicitor-General:** My hon. Friend's latter suggestion is already the subject of discussion. The Crown Prosecution Service does not impose case format on the police unilaterally: it is the result of joint discussions between the Crown Prosecution Service, the police and the legal profession.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** Would the Solicitor-General be prepared to call in the papers in the case of my constituent, Miss Elaine Steele, to review the prosecution brought against her?

**The Solicitor-General:** The Crown Prosecution Service conducts 1.4 million cases annually, so the hon. Gentleman will understand if I do not have the facts of that case at my fingertips at present. Naturally, I shall look into the matter if he asks me to.

### Discontinuances

29. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Attorney-General what progress has been made in reducing the number of discontinuances; and if he will make a statement. [8860]

**The Solicitor-General:** The rate of discontinuance has fallen from 13.4 per cent. of cases for the year ending September 1993 to 11.9 per cent. of cases for the year ending September 1995.

**Mr. Whittingdale:** Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the discontinuance of prosecution often causes great frustration to the police and distress to the victims of crime? Can he confirm, therefore, that the very welcome reduction in the number of discontinuances that he mentioned is the result of closer co-operation and liaison between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service?

**The Solicitor-General:** Yes, I can confirm that. Although the matter is of concern, it is of less concern than before as the police and the Crown Prosecution Service are working together very closely at local level to ensure that the quality of files is as high as it can be.

My hon. Friend will realise that some cases will always have to be discontinued. Some 30 per cent. of cases are presently discontinued because they cannot proceed due to the defendant producing documents at court or witnesses refusing, or failing, to attend.

### Serious Fraud (Prosecutions)

30. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about prosecutions for serious fraud. [8861]

**The Attorney-General:** The Serious Fraud Office has so far brought to trial and concluded some 145 cases of serious and complex fraud involving some 325 defendants. That has led to the conviction of at least one defendant in more than 75 per cent. of those cases. Where there has been only one conviction, it has usually been of the principal defendant.

**Mr. Banks:** I do not think that the country will be particularly satisfied with that answer because the spectacular prosecutions are going down very badly. I think that the House is entitled to ask the Attorney-General what is going on inside the Serious Fraud Office. Is it harassing honest business men, is it incompetent, or are white collar crooks simply getting away with it? My gut feeling is that the Maxwell brothers are about as innocent as O. J. Simpson. Is not the real problem self-regulation in the City? There might be a case for getting rid of the jury system in complex fraud cases, but, quite frankly, self-regulation for crooks will never work.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Before the Attorney-General replies, I must point out that there are a number of other charges pending involving the Maxwell brothers and the House's sub judice rule prevents any further discussion of those matters. Of course, general references to the work of the Serious Fraud Office are entirely permissible, but I hope that the House will be cautious about these matters.

**The Attorney-General:** I take fully on board the points that you have made, Madam Speaker, and I think that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman may regret the observations that he has just made.

The case was investigated with what independent commentators regard generally as great skill, it was prosecuted entirely fairly with great professionalism, the court handled it in an exemplary fashion and the jury considered the matter and reached its decision. That is British justice. We keep under careful review how we should proceed in future, but we should not distort the position.

**Mr. Dykes:** Is not this a moment when the whole House, the Government and everyone else should defend and support the Serious Fraud Office, and not attack it for irrational reasons, bearing in mind the fact that that institution is crucial to the future of the country in tackling serious fraud cases, that it needs more resources and more staff in future and that it has a very good record? Is not it important also for the Government to consider further,

without excessive delay, the need to have a professional panel of assessors instead of an amateur jury in the trial of such cases?

**The Attorney-General:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the Serious Fraud Office has proved its worth during its seven years. Very complex cases are now being brought to trial with a professionalism and skill that cannot be compared with what went before. If we did not have the Serious Fraud Office in its present form, we would need to invent it.

The whole House will acknowledge that trial by jury is a very important part of our liberties, from which it and the country would never move lightly, but that does not mean that it is necessarily the only way to conduct a trial. When the Maxwell case is over, we shall consider calmly, carefully and thoughtfully whether there is a way in which similar cases might be tried better than by jury. We should certainly make no change unless we were confident that it would be an improvement.

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree with Lord Devlin that the object of any tyrant would be to overthrow trial by jury? Does he believe that that applies as much to fraud cases, where there are judgments of honesty and dishonesty to be made, as to any other case in which dishonesty is charged? Will he reflect on the effect of his remarks following the verdict in the Maxwell trial, which have given the impression of criticism of a jury that listened for 131 days to evidence and argument, and returned a verdict on the basis of that evidence and argument?

**The Attorney-General:** I am sure that no one who has listened to my comments in the round will have received that impression. I have been studiously careful to be very balanced on the subject.

The hon. and learned Gentleman refers to Lord Devlin, who was head of my chambers and a greatly respected Law Lord, but other greatly respected Law Lords take different views and it is a subject on which very experienced people hold different views. When we come to consider the issue, we shall certainly consider it extremely carefully before we make any change—and I am not saying whether we shall make any change.

**Mr. John Morris:** Will the Attorney-General reject recent criticism of the jury system in fraud trials—there is no evidence that it has failed, and I know so far of no better way of assessing dishonesty—and of the SFO, changes in both of which have been rejected by Parliament in recent years?

Will the Government, instead of considering the matter internally, as the Attorney-General appeared to suggest at the weekend, appoint a senior judicial figure of the calibre of Lord Roskill to examine, with the assistance of financial experts, the system of prevention, investigation, prosecution and trial of alleged large-scale financial wrongdoing?

**The Attorney-General:** I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for the support that he has rightly given to the SFO. He, like me, recognises the enormous advances that it has made in the seven years of its existence. I can assure him that, in keeping under review the best way of trying even the most complex and difficult cases, we shall bear his words, among others, in mind.

## Over-lenient Sentences (Appeals)

31. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Attorney-General how many successful appeals have been made against over-lenient sentences. [8862]

**The Attorney-General:** Since the introduction of the power to refer unduly lenient sentences in February 1989, the Court of Appeal has heard 213 references, of which 177—83 per cent.—resulted in increased sentences.

**Mr. Hawkins:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, for the general public, the introduction of the power to appeal against over-lenient sentences and to ensure that criminals receive a proper sentence has been hugely popular? Is not that another demonstration of the Government's commitment to law and order, on which Labour so signally seeks to undermine us?

**The Attorney-General:** My hon. Friend makes two good points. The power has been most beneficial, and it is exercised with great care. The Opposition opposed the power when it was introduced, but have been good enough to realise that it is beneficial and to say so. I am glad to think that that view spreads across far wider fields of policy. I hope that we shall always hold the high ground and that the Opposition will seek to assault us upon it.

## Crown Prosecution Service

32. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to review the operation of the Crown Prosecution Service; and if he will make a statement. [8863]

**The Attorney-General:** The Crown Prosecution Service is in the process of developing initiatives with the police on training, and on the provision of prosecutors in police stations and police crime support units, to give early advice and assist in the prompt and efficient preparation of cases for court. Like other departments, the Crown Prosecution Service is implementing a senior management review.

**Mr. O'Brien:** Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman take note of concerns expressed by my constituents? In one case, a young man was knocked off his motor bike by a car, whose driver accepted guilt at the scene of the accident. There were also two witnesses to the accident, yet the CPS is refusing to take that case forward. My constituents would like changes in the service. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure me that changes will be considered?

**The Attorney-General:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, whenever there is criticism of the CPS's handling of case, I examine the matter with immense care. If the hon. Gentleman will be good enough to write to me with details, I shall ensure that the case he has in mind is carefully reviewed. If it is concluded, I shall give the hon. Gentleman an explanation; if it is still in process, I shall ensure that it is reviewed.

## Points of Order

3.31 pm

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you confirm that today's Order Paper was properly circulated? It appears that a number of hon. Members with an interest in grant-maintained schools are not present for the debate.

**Madam Speaker:** All the papers needed for the debate are available to hon. Members. It is not for the Speaker to determine which hon. Members are present and which absent themselves.

**Mr. Ray Powell** (Ogmore): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I raise this matter not because my oral question was 12th on the Order Paper and only Question 11 was reached. I refer to an issue that I have raised with you on numerous occasions in the past. As you well know, there are 38 Members of Parliament for Wales. Although I appreciate that this is a United Kingdom Parliament, right hon. and hon. Members representing Wales rarely have an opportunity to question the Executive, particularly the Secretary of State for Wales. Today, Madam Speaker, you called six Conservative Members who do not represent Welsh seats, four Labour Members who represent Welsh seats and one Welsh nationalist. Surely it is time that Labour Members representing Wales should have the opportunity to examine and question the Executive.

My question related to representation of constituents in the whole of Bridgend, who in all probability will face a 38 per cent. increase in their council tax as a result of the measly contribution that the Secretary of State is offering. Is not it true—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I think that I understand the hon. Gentleman's point—*[Interruption.]* I can deal with this matter, thank you. It is sad that the hon. Gentleman missed out today, but he answered his own question at the beginning of his remarks, when he pointed out that this is a United Kingdom Parliament and that any hon. Members may put questions to any Department of State.

I shall take the House into my confidence in regard to today's Order Paper. My research has shown me that 20 Welsh Members and 18 English Members tabled questions. Of those, 13 Welsh Members and 17 English Members were successful in the ballot. I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that only 20 out of 38 Welsh Members actually tabled questions. If Welsh Members wish to increase their quota, they should table more questions. If there is some great fault with Welsh questions, perhaps Welsh Members might like to refer the matter to the Procedure Committee, but much of the answer lies in Welsh Members tabling more questions.

We shall now proceed.

**Mr. Sebastian Coe** (Falmouth and Camborne): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Is it a different point of order?

**Mr. Marlow:** Yes. Would it be in order to have three cheers for the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who has done for this Parliament what the Sheffield rally did for the general election campaign? In other words, she has let the country know the true nature of the Labour party.

**Madam Speaker:** That is not a point of order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) has a genuine point of order.

**Mr. Coe:** It is certainly a different one. I rise to seek your guidance, Madam Speaker. There was much interest in my constituency this morning about a document that has appeared, paid for by the taxpayer and produced for the benefit of some hon. Members. Do you have the power to ensure that that document is placed in the House of Commons Library, especially as it describes the policies of the Liberal Democrats as naive, and in favour of higher taxes and crippling home owners? Surely, that is the least that we could expect from a party that is wedded to open government.

**Madam Speaker:** It may be a point of order for me, but I should like to see the document to which the hon. Gentleman refers before I make a ruling. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] So would the House.

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Madam Speaker:** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

PUBLIC PASSENGER TRANSPORT

That the Public Service Vehicles (Operators' Licences) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2908) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Public Service Vehicles (Operators' Licences) (Fees) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2909) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—[*Mr. Knapman.*]

*Question agreed to.*

# Orders of the Day

## Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

3.37 pm

**Mr. Nigel Spearing** (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Bill has five clauses relating to nursery education and gives powers to the Secretary of State to make arrangements thereto. When I heard about the Bill, I made inquiries about certain documents that relate to the operation of the Bill, if passed, and other consultation papers and administration arrangements. I was supplied with those documents and I passed them to those who are advising me on the merits of the Bill.

I assumed that, as those documents were public documents, I could pick up duplicate copies from the Vote Office today or I could consult them in the Library. I found that the documents were not available from the Vote Office. The Library may have them as deposited papers, and my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench may have been supplied with them, as may other hon. Members. However, I have not been able to obtain them for the purposes of the debate. As papers related to the Bill should be available, I wish to ask the Secretary of State—and I have given the right hon. Lady notice of my question—where the documents were distributed, and to whom. Did they go to the Library; did they go to the Front Bench; and why are they not in the Vote Office?

**Madam Speaker:** The Secretary of State may wish to make a point further to that point of order. As far as I understand matters, on Second Reading, the Bill is all that is required for our debate. Any supplementary papers that may be of help are usually supplied as a courtesy by the Secretary of State who is handling the Bill. If the Secretary of State wishes to comment on that, I am sure that it would be helpful to the House.

**The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard):** I shall comment. Absolutely no discourtesy to the House was intended. Sets of the documents have been placed in the Library and they were supplied to the Vote Office. I understand that they have run out, but we can certainly ensure that full sets of documents, not only those that the hon. Gentleman may have seen, but the consultation documents that preceded the drafting of the Bill, can be made available very quickly. There is no problem. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, who is always meticulous about such matters, and to the House. No discourtesy was intended.

**Madam Speaker:** The House will be obliged to the right hon. Lady.

3.39 pm

**Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has two purposes. It provides for the expansion of the education of under-fives; it removes the statutory bar preventing grant-maintained schools from borrowing on the commercial market; and it builds further on the main themes of the Government's education policy. It focuses on improvement in standards of achievement and encouragement of parental choice, diversity and the aspirations of parents and children—all parents and all children.

On all those themes—encouragement of parental choice, diversity of provision, and the aspirations of all parents for their children—the Opposition are in complete disarray. We have heard the shadow transport spokesman enunciating Labour education policy—indeed, I am interested to see the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) in his place this afternoon. It seemed earlier today that he might have been reshuffled in favour of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short). Let us hope that that does not come about.

Nothing now can hide, however, the basic contradiction and deep division at the heart of Labour education policy: choice and diversity for some Labour Front Benchers, but clearly stated and oft-repeated policy intentions to remove that choice and that diversity from everyone else. Small wonder that the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) has found it necessary to resign as chairman of the Labour education committee. As he says in *The Guardian* today:

"It was not me who opposed party policy".

I am not sure what sort of advertisement that is for the hon. Gentleman's education, but I quote it verbatim.

**Mr. Roger Sims** (Chislehurst): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the school at the centre of this controversy produced the first parliamentary ombudsman and three Conservative Members of Parliament—of whom I am proud to be one? It has also given a first-class start to many hundreds of young men who have succeeded in the professions and in business. Is my right hon. Friend further aware that just down the road from it is Kemnal technology college, of which I am proud to be a governor? It offers an all-round education to young men, leading to a range of technical qualifications. Are not those examples of diversity and choice in education of which all parents can take advantage?

**Mrs. Shephard:** They are indeed. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his rather striking tie—I believe that it is the tie of his old school. I am delighted to hear him speak so warmly of his old school, which is clearly an excellent school with an excellent record. It is of course part of Conservative party policy to promote such schools and to promote diversity. We do not seek to abolish them.

**Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours** (Workington): The right hon. Lady spends her time at the Dispatch Box defending state schools. Can she explain why three quarters of all Conservative Members of Parliament have sent their children to the private sector—to public schools—or intend to send them to private schools? If the state sector of education is so wonderful, why do Tory Members buy their way around it?

**Mrs. Shephard:** Oh dear, oh dear. The hon. Gentleman will have to do a great deal better than that. We believe in choice and diversity and in the private and public sectors. We believe in access for everyone to independent schools, through the assisted places scheme, and we believe in a diverse system: grant-maintained, local

*[Mrs. Shephard]*

education authority, selective, non-selective and specialist schools. It is only the Labour party that wishes to march back to the 1960s and reimpose the comprehensive uniformity of those drab years.

**Mr. William O'Brien** (Normanton): Will the Secretary of State come back to the business of the House—that is, nursery provision—and tell us how parents can have a choice if there is no place for their child to attend a nursery school? As she will be aware, from letters that I have sent to her, in my constituency we have requested nursery places, but she is refusing to provide them. Will she explain where the choice is if there are no nursery places for people's children?

**Mrs. Shephard:** Happily, but later in the debate.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), when asking my right hon. Friend his question, was clearly coming to the aid of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), because he clearly believes in choice—at least for himself, as he is listed as having gone to Keswick school; he then chose the Sorbonne in Paris. It is all right for him, but not all right for anybody else.

**Mrs. Shephard:** That is a shame, is it not? I shall now try to make some progress.

As I said earlier, as Opposition Members should agree, the Bill should be bipartisan. There are some 8 million pupils at state schools in England and Wales. They and their parents, if Opposition Members will allow me to use the expression, have a stake in the system, because schools are accountable to parents, and run by governors who are accountable to the wider community, for the benefit of children. Those parents, governors, the wider community, and, of course, the children, are stakeholders in education, and it is the Conservative Government who have made them so.

**Mr. Bob Dunn** (Dartford): My right hon. Friend will be aware that in my constituency I have four grant-maintained grammar schools. If children cannot be selected for admission to those schools on the basis of interview or examination, those schools will cease to be grammar schools. Does she agree with me on that?

**Mrs. Shephard:** Of course I agree with my hon. Friend on that. He makes the excellent point that camouflaged comments about interview procedures hide the intention of Opposition Members to abolish grammar schools, which some of them value for their own children.

I should like to make a little progress. The Prime Minister has made a commitment that new nursery education places will be made available for four-year-olds during the lifetime of this Parliament. Over time, there will be a nursery place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish it, in a state, independent or voluntary setting. That commitment is vividly illustrated by the £390 million of new money that we are making available for the scheme over the first three years, which with the £565 million coming from local authorities makes a total of some £750 million per year, which is a substantial investment.

Phase 1 is already under way. The first children to benefit will start in April this year.

**Mr. David Hanson** (Delyn): Will the Secretary of State tell me—before anybody asks, I went to Verdin comprehensive school—whether the number of nursery places in authorities such as my own, where all four-year-olds currently get a nursery place, will be diminished through voucher schemes, which will force authorities to reduce the number of places in the public sector? People will then have no choice at all, because such places will not exist.

**Mrs. Shephard:** The hon. Gentleman is completely misguided about the matter. If the quality of education provided in nursery schools in his authority is very good, parents will choose it, and local authorities will lose nothing. It is just possible, however, that some parents in his local authority area—as in mine—would like to choose between local authority, independent and playgroup provision. Let me also remind him that, at present, the quality of provision is uneven; one of the effects of the Bill will be an improvement in inspection and standards. Consumers of the service in his authority, as in all authorities, stand to gain.

**Mr. Iain Mills** (Meriden): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that Solihull benefits from far better provision than the Government's scheme? Will she exempt it, and other local education authorities, from such schemes?

**Mrs. Shephard:** As my hon. Friend knows, I have visited nursery schools in Solihull and was very impressed. There is no doubt that, if the parents of Solihull find that provision as excellent as I did, that is what they will choose. The Solihull authority has nothing to fear.

Phase 2, which will apply throughout England and Wales, will start in April 1997.

**Mr. Nick Ainger** (Pembroke): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I should like to make a little progress, if I may.

I shall say something about Scotland and Northern Ireland later.

The Bill's proposals for nursery education break important new ground in three respects. For the first time—across the board, in all sectors—through the new funding mechanism, parents will be in charge. They will choose the setting—state, independent or voluntary. For the first time, too, all providers in the state, voluntary and independent sectors will be required to work towards the same educational outcomes; and, for the first time, all providers will have to satisfy a common inspection regime.

Parental choice has underpinned the whole range of our education policies. First, we put parents on governing bodies. We gave them a greater chance of choosing a school for their children, through open enrolment. We gave them more kinds of school from which to choose: grant-maintained, city technology colleges, specialist schools, local authority schools, selective and non-selective schools and independent schools, made available through

the assisted places scheme. Through local management of schools, we have given parents and governors a much greater say in the running of their schools.

In other words, we have given parents a fundamental share—a stake—in the process of their children's education. We did that because we believe in choice and diversity for all. Some Opposition Members are happy to benefit from the Government's policies of choice and diversity for their own children, while seeking to remove that choice and diversity from everyone else.

**Mr. George Walden** (Buckingham): Can my right hon. Friend give a figure for what the Treasury calls the deadweight cost of her scheme—the millions of pounds that will be handed out to well-to-do parents who are already paying out of their private income for children to go to nursery school? Will she also explain why she is prepared to countenance that deadweight cost in the case of nurseries? When I suggested that certain ex-direct-grant schools that wanted to go into the state sector should be allowed to do so, the Government told me that that was impossible, not least because of the deadweight costs.

**Mrs. Shephard:** I cannot give my hon. Friend a detailed answer in regard to the deadweight cost. What is important is that there is choice for everyone, whether they come from the middle class or not. We want to benefit all people, including people who may not hitherto have thought of going into the independent sector or of being able to obtain high-quality nursery provision. I believe that my hon. Friend will agree that those principles are important. He also knows that my door is always open if he wishes to discuss with me his interesting ideas about closer liaison between the private and public sectors.

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way when she has already done so a number of times. Does she agree that not only parents who are currently using the existing private sector provision are better off? My wife runs a successful playgroup, and the vast majority of children go on to our excellent village state primary. They will be very grateful for the scheme, and many parents who are struggling to pay will be very glad of the vouchers.

**Mrs. Shephard:** It is true that the policies are not designed to put out of business either independent providers or playgroup providers. My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

We have tailored an education system to each individual—we do not expect the individual to fit a uniform system. The introduction of the nursery education voucher is another step in that direction. It builds on the influence that parents have gained under our policies. It reinforces the key role of parents in choosing the right setting for their children, a principle so firmly supported by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). It gives them the opportunity to influence the education provided.

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): Before my right hon. Friend moves on from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and speculates perhaps on how the hon. Lady will vote on this matter of choice and diversity tonight, does my right hon. Friend agree that the point about the hon. Lady is not that she is doing the best for her children, which any hon. Member on either side of the House would accept, but that she is claiming rights for her own children that she is committed to denying to the children of other parents? Is not that what makes her action so contemptible?

**Mrs. Shephard:** My hon. Friend makes the point perfectly and I think that the faces of Labour Members tell their own story.

**Mr. Spearing:** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I will in a moment. I have taken about 10 interventions. I must try to make a little progress now.

This country has a long history of nursery education, going back to the Macmillan sisters, Susan Isaacs and beyond, in state and private schools. The evolution of their ideas has produced a rich diversity of pre-school provision through the playgroup movement—now itself evolved into the Pre-School Learning Alliance—in private nursery schools, through the Montessori movement, in local authority nursery schools, and in reception and nursery classes of primary schools, so that nine out of 10 of our under-fives already receive some pre-school education experience.

As I have said, however, it is not part of the Government's policy to seek to impose on that flourishing and varied sector the dead hand of uniformity, nor to seek to put out of business independent providers such as Montessori and others, or the pre-school playgroups that have served young children with such distinction in the past 35 years.

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Southend, East): Does the Secretary of State agree that choice in education is vital and will be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House? Will she try to explain to the House that, if one does not have choice, the only alternative is class segregation? Will she be reminded, in particular, of her experience in Southend-on-Sea, where all my children have attended state schools and where one quarter of all children go to the four grammar schools? If one abolishes those, the choice that we have to enable an able, working-class child to break out of his environment simply disappears. Will she therefore try to persuade Labour Members who are shouting at her that this is good social common sense?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I agree with my hon. Friend that choice is vital and that selective schools have an important role to play in that choice and in the quality of education.

**Mr. David Blunkett** (Sheffield, Brightside): Perhaps the Secretary of State will therefore tell the House what plans she and her Government have to extend grammar school education to every part of England and Wales, and when she intends to bring those proposals forward to satisfy the demands made by her Back Benchers this afternoon.

**Mrs. Shephard:** That is grand stuff coming from the hon. Gentleman. I should have thought that, given the problems in his party, it might be he who should be bringing forward such proposals. As he knows, however, we are consulting on admissions procedures.

*[Mrs. Shephard]*

I have spoken about variety and about the flourishing sector that exists for the under-fives. We want to use that variety to encourage partnerships of provision and expertise, and to encourage enterprise and innovation. Good-quality education can be provided in all kinds of settings.

**Mr. Spearing:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady; the failure in relation to the documents is not typical of her meticulous work. Does she agree, however, that the choice that she is advocating is to be implemented by use of parental vouchers, that the use of vouchers will probably diminish the number of three-year-olds at nursery schools, that vouchers must be given up to local education authorities in infant school reception classes for children below the age of five, and that they are likely to be issued in different colours, one for each day of the week? It is possible that they will be redeemable at more than one establishment per pupil. Finally, there is a risk that they will become negotiable tender. Are not all those points correct?

**Mrs. Shephard:** No, and I intend to cover most of them in my speech. The practical details of the way in which the scheme will work are currently being tested in phase 1, as the hon. Gentleman will know. I recommend to him the documents that he has and the consultation material, which will also help him in his quest for information.

When welcoming the scheme, the National Private Day Nurseries Association stated:

"It will stimulate the market to provide more places. It will give parents improved choices and drive up standards through healthy competition."

What we do not want is uniformity of provision, but what we must have is uniformity of quality because this is an education policy designed to improve the achievements of all children: it is not a question of child minding and child care.

**Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Blackpool, South): On the issue of parental choice and the avoidance of uniformity, does my right hon. Friend agree that part of the hypocrisy of Opposition Members is that they argue one thing to benefit their own children while seeking to deny that same choice to other people? It is a case of, "We are all right, Jack and Harriet, pull up the ladder." Is not their policy obviously unharmonised?

**Mrs. Shephard:** We support the right of parents to choose. Labour is in difficulty because while some of its Front-Bench Members seek to exercise that choice, which we support, for the benefit of their children, Labour's policies seek to deny those choices to the children of everyone else. That is unacceptable.

**Mr. Roy Hattersley** (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The right hon. Lady has commended parental choice 10 times in 20 minutes. Does she recall the Prime Minister's speech in Birmingham in September, in which he promised that Church schools would be allowed to change their status without consulting the parents? Is that still the Government's policy and how does it square with parental choice?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I think that the right hon. Gentleman has been out to lunch. He has obviously missed the announcement about voluntary-aided schools. We put six options to VA schools and others on whether they would like to have a fast track to grant-maintained status, and on other matters. While they supported the present arrangements for schools going grant-maintained, VA schools did not want to have a special case made for them. As I have confirmed in the House on many occasions when the right hon. Gentleman has not been present—out to lunch I dare say again—in the consultations nothing was ruled in and nothing was ruled out. I made that clear a number of times, and we accepted the views of VA schools and others.

**Mr. Hattersley** *rose—*

**Mrs. Shephard:** I must make some progress. I have taken about 15 interventions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] Very well, but this is the last one.

**Mr. Hattersley:** We all know that the Church rebuffed the Prime Minister: it was one of his many humiliations during the autumn. Will the right hon. Lady now answer the question that I asked her? How did the Prime Minister's offer of allowing schools to opt out without consulting parents square with the avowed policy of parental choice?

**Mrs. Shephard:** Mainly because my right hon. Friend did not make it—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman did not listen to my answer. I said that six options were put to VA schools—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, I did. Church schools were consulted on the sixth option. It is a great pity that the right hon. Gentleman, who intervened twice, did not listen to the answers that he was given.

I now intend to make some progress. I have taken a number of interesting and jolly interventions, but the House will begin to lose patience if I do not do so.

We are proposing a series of measures to ensure quality. First, parents will be in control. All the providers to which grants will be made will be required to publish information for parents. That will include details of their staffing, admission arrangements and the education programme on offer. Parents will be able to see whether their children will be offered the opportunities that will help them make the most of their pre-school year in just the same way as they can make judgments from the prospectuses of primary and secondary schools.

**Mr. Cynog Dafis** (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I will of course give way in a little while, but I want to make progress.

Secondly, I have gladly accepted in full the advice that I received from the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority on the goals for learning for children by the time they enter compulsory education. Different children will of course make progress at different rates, but all children should be able to follow a programme towards the outcome. I want children to start compulsory school excited by the prospect of learning and keen to question and investigate.

Thirdly, inspection is essential in ensuring that there is good-quality provision. The Office of Standards in Education will be responsible for drawing up an

inspection framework for recruiting and training inspectors, and for organising inspections and monitoring them. For most non-maintained providers, that will be a new development. For many that think that they already deliver good-quality education provision for young children, that will be an opportunity to demonstrate that fact and to be recognised for it in an inspection report. The inspections will concentrate on the education quality of the places supported by the grant. They should be rigorous but not disruptive, and should apply with equal rigour to all settings. Providers that have been given an initial validation if they have met certain qualifying conditions will get their final validation after a successful inspection.

**Mr. Dafis:** The Secretary of State suggested that consultation was of the essence and added that the Government listened to consultation in relation to Church schools. Can she confirm that the outcome of such consultation in Wales was a universal rejection of the scheme? Will she therefore pay heed to that consultation and make sure that the scheme does not go ahead in Wales at all?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I know that there is to be no phase 1 in Wales, but I am quite sure that once parents in Wales have caught on to the fact that parents in England are benefiting a year earlier than they are likely to, enthusiasm will then grow in Wales and pressure will be put on the providers.

There have been some worries that institutions will not be inspected until they have begun to exchange vouchers, but those worries can be set to rest because there will not be free entry to the scheme. Providers will be eligible only if they are a maintained school, a finally registered independent school, a local authority day nursery or an institution registered under the Children Act 1989, and if they agree to these three fundamentals—to publish specified information for parents; to work towards the SCAA desirable learning outcomes; and to agree to regular inspection and work through a self-assessment schedule that shows what the inspectors will examine and gives an idea of what standards are required.

Quality and the maintenance and enhancement of standards are of supreme importance.

**Dr. Keith Hampson** (Leeds, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend remember a report by the university of Leeds four years ago, on the primary education structure in Leeds? Although standards are critical, as my right hon. Friend says, that report highlighted the real problem with state provision as against the flexible and innovative measures that she is proposing. That totally independent report was critical of the way in which teachers felt under pressure to adopt good practice as set down by local authorities. Teachers felt straitjacketed, and believed that their career prospects would be blighted unless they followed that good practice. Does not my right hon. Friend's scheme provide the innovation and flexibility that a state scheme cannot give?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I am not familiar with the report that my hon. Friend quoted, but I must say that the scheme will encourage innovation and imaginative co-operation between providers, all of which, with quality assured, will be for the benefit of the children's early education.

When those matters were considered in the House on 21 November last year, the hon. Member for Brightside claimed that, for example, a regime that puts the emphasis on parental choice is "absolute nonsense". Given the events of the weekend, the hon. Gentleman should take up that statement with an increasing number of hon. Members on the Labour Front Bench.

The hon. Member for Brightside apparently believes that a regime that puts the emphasis on quality of outcome, inspection and validation is also absolute nonsense. I cannot believe that he will hold to that after hearing this debate. Does he believe that our aim to increase the number of four-year-olds receiving nursery education is also absolute nonsense? It may be that the hon. Member for Ladywood will have different things to say about that.

I should like to say something about the funding system. There will be a document—for convenience we can call it a voucher or, if it suits the Opposition better, an individual learning credit—which has no face value, is not transferable and is not what lawyers might call a means of exchange. The voucher is an administrative tool for determining the grants to be paid to the providers chosen by parents, in exchange for providing the service of nursery education.

The mechanics of the voucher scheme will be perfectly straightforward. Parents with children in the eligible age range will receive an application form and apply to the voucher agency. The agency will issue a voucher. The parents will choose the provider and present the voucher. The provider will return the voucher to the voucher agency. The validity of the voucher will be checked, and passed to the Department for Education and Employment for payment of the grant.

The hon. Member for Brightside called that scheme an "administrative nightmare". I can suggest only that he perhaps has other nightmares to worry about now—the Labour party's education policies. There are more myths to dispel about the voucher scheme funding.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth** (East Surrey): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. She has been generous in giving way and splendidly robust on the subject of the Labour party's education policy. I wonder whether during her speech she might find time to comment on the Liberal Democrats' policy, because we have been told by the excellent Mr. Gareth Roberts, the senior researcher for the Liberal Democrats, that all they want to do is to throw money at education and that their policies are interchangeable with Labour's. That is an amazingly accurate description. Could my right hon. Friend comment on that?

**Mrs. Shephard:** That description is likely to be proved during the debate, but of course we shall all be noticing.

There are more myths to dispel about the voucher scheme funding—for example, the claim that local education authorities will lose out. That is not so. Funding will come from two sources: the new money that I mentioned, which is £390 million during three years, put together with around £565 million from local authority budgets. Let me be clear about it: the only money to be deducted from local authority budgets will be the voucher value for four-year-olds already in state schools. If those schools continue to recruit the same number of

*[Mrs. Shephard]*

four-year-olds as they do now, all that money will be returned and the local authority budget will be unchanged. If local authority schools recruit more four-year-olds, the funding will increase. If local education authorities provide what parents want, they will not lose out.

Let me examine another myth. It has been claimed that places for three-year-olds are threatened. That is not so. Local authority spending on three-year-olds is unaffected by the funding for vouchers because it applies only to four-year-olds. Local authorities can continue to spend just as much as now and provide just as many places.

There is another myth. It has been claimed that reception class places will be reduced from full time to part time. Again, that is not so. If local authority schools continue to recruit as many four-year-olds as they do now, the funding will be the same and there will be no need to change the number of full-time places that they provide. Moreover, contrary to another myth, expansion of places for four-year-olds will bring benefits to children with special educational needs. There will be the potential to detect special needs earlier. That will be good for parents, their children and their children's future education.

If recruitment of four-year-olds by local authority schools is maintained, the funding mechanism for vouchers will not touch resources for special needs. We want the places for special needs children to be good as well, so we shall discuss with interested parties the impact of requiring all providers to have regard to the special educational needs code of practice. In the meantime, providers must tell parents of their special needs policies.

Other myths, about the future of nursery schools and grants for pre-school playgroups, can also be dispelled. None of those is under threat. There is opportunity and funded growth for the whole sector.

The plans to monitor standards across the board have received a warm welcome from the pre-school movement. The chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance said:

"We welcome the plan to bring pre-schools within a common inspection framework which will be regulated by Ofsted".

She added:

"Vouchers will also provide much needed financial assistance to the parents of four year-olds using our member pre-schools".

Parental choice will also raise quality. A head teacher in Wandsworth was reported as saying about the voucher scheme:

"This arrangement pushes me to raise standards. We cannot afford to be lax or complacent. Anything that forces me to give my utmost should be welcomed".

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): Now that the Prime Minister's plans for fast-track opt-outs for Church schools have been dropped, are we to understand that the Secretary of State has finally convinced the Prime Minister that it is standards, not structures, that are important?

**Mrs. Shephard:** Standards are extremely important and a great deal of what I have been saying has been to do with them. What a pity that Labour Members, including the hon. Lady, do not seem to understand that choice and diversity contribute to raising standards—although, of course, some of her colleagues do understand that.

It is a pity that more local authorities did not volunteer for the first phase of the scheme. We have a good selection of areas for a thorough test. The pity of it is that some four-year-old children have been denied an opportunity to have a full year of nursery education in 1996-97. It is a pity for them that the opportunity for more innovative and exciting collaboration between the maintained, private and voluntary sectors has been put off for a year.

**Sir Jim Spicer** (West Dorset): My right hon. Friend knows that Norfolk local education authority is Lib-Lab controlled. However, in reply to my investigations it said that it had had no choice but to volunteer because the scheme was of benefit to children. Can she explain why Liberal-controlled Dorset county council, despite being given every incentive to take up the opportunity, turned it down flat, not after investigating it, but on purely dogmatic grounds on day one?

**Mrs. Shephard:** That is pathetic and reprehensible on the part of Dorset local education authority. By contrast, the chairman of Norfolk county council's education committee looks forward to

"almost doubling our nursery provision"

in the lifetime of the council. More provision is being planned by the independent sector and playgroups, often in imaginative partnerships with the local education authority. I am delighted that all that is happening in Norfolk and I regret that it is not happening in Dorset.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Labour party, which claims that state provision of nursery education is vital and fought the most recent county council elections in Kent on that policy, has proposed no new nursery units for my constituency? When a grant-maintained primary school proposed such a unit, the Lib-Lab pact in charge of Kent county council tried to block it at every point and it was only my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), who got it through. Where is the great enthusiasm for state nursery education in that?

**Mrs. Shephard:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. He—and Kent, Dorset and elsewhere—will want to look at phase 1 because it gives us the opportunity to see how the system works. We shall be watching the new funding mechanism carefully.

By September this year, two batches of vouchers will have been issued and grant payment will be well under way. There will be plenty of time for monitoring the arrangements before phase 2 starts and evidence will be accumulating from inspection reports.

We favour quality, choice, opportunity and giving parents and their children a real share in their destiny. We are not concentrating on the interests of institutions and their structures for those stakeholders whom Opposition Members favour; rather, we are caring for each individual. I suppose that we might look forward to hearing a little more about stakeholders in this debate. A definition would come in handy, but I doubt whether it would say much about parental choice or diversity. What embarrassing words those are for the Opposition today.

The second topic of this two-topic Bill is the provision that enables grant-maintained schools to borrow commercially.

**Mr. Hattersley:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I rise to ask for your protection, as Back Benchers must from time to time against Ministers. Twenty minutes ago, the Secretary of State accused me of inventing something that I claimed the Prime Minister had said, which was that Church schools could convert to being grant-maintained without consulting parents. I now have the extract from the Prime Minister's speech. I do not wish to weary the House with it; I simply want to give the Secretary of State an opportunity to apologise—[HON. MEMBERS: "Read it."] I would gladly read the extract, but I know that the House wants to move on to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), so that we may hear something constructive for a change.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will give the extract to the Opposition Front Bench so that it can be incorporated in that speech. It might then clear the air a little. [HON. MEMBERS: "He already has it."] In that case, I call the Secretary of State.

**Mrs. Shephard:** I am not sure whether I am supposed to comment on a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** There is no need for the Secretary of State to respond as the point of order was to me.

**Hon. Members:** Apologise.

**Mrs. Shephard:** Madam Speaker has given me instructions, and I propose to take them.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. It is for the Speaker of this House, not other Members, to deal with points of order. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) asked the Secretary of State whether she would apologise. It is up to her whether she apologises or not. I do not force Members of this House to apologise unless they have used unparliamentary language. No unparliamentary language has been used.

**Mrs. Shephard:** For the avoidance of doubt, however—

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The Secretary of State is just making a point on this matter. I have already given my guidance on it. The hon. Gentleman should listen for a change.

**Mrs. Shephard:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

For the avoidance of doubt and to comfort the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), he will recall that I said that the VA school sector was offered a range of six options. He will find the word "option" in those used by the Prime Minister.

The proposal for grant-maintained schools to borrow commercially underpins our commitment to the grant-maintained sector and to increasing parents' choice of schools. It adds to the freedoms and independence enjoyed by grant-maintained schools, which they so much value. Those schools are thriving because of that independence. Nowhere are choice, diversity and parental involvement better demonstrated than in GM schools.

Head teachers and governors in GM schools have been pressing for some time to have the power to borrow commercially. They are keen to explore the opportunities for commercial borrowing and to develop their premises further in the interests of parents and pupils. They have many plans for building work in which the ability to borrow could prove invaluable. Those include new sports facilities, halls and other improvements to their facilities. Their building proposals will enhance their educational work; add to the facilities available to the local community; in many cases generate extra revenue, including revenue from dual and commercial use; and enable grant-maintained schools to take part in the private finance initiative and make the capital grant go further. I know that the Opposition support the private finance initiative. They call it "partnership for investment", but it is the PFI to us.

As grant-maintained schools have developed, we have given them increasingly greater powers. We extended their freedoms in the Education Act 1993 and they are now ready for the new power to borrow and charge for their assets. Their proposals will be subject to the consent of the holder of my office and there will be conditions to safeguard the schools' assets.

**Mr. Walden:** Is my right hon. Friend aware of the risk of encouraging grant-maintained schools, which I support, to overextend themselves when they borrow to improve the schools' physical facilities, while under-using their most important freedom—to sack incompetent staff and assemble high-quality, aspiring staff, who are so often lacking in many of our secondary schools today?

**Mrs. Shephard:** It is obviously important to have appropriate safeguards and I have it in mind to delegate the power to give consent to operate the safeguards to the Funding Agency for Schools.

The House will perceive that the Labour party is in some difficulty over the issue and over most other aspects of its education policy, as far as it goes. It is facing in a number of different directions at once on the issue of grant-maintained schools and, even for political contortionists, that is difficult.

Despite careful camouflage, the Labour party's official position, so often articulated in the House by the hon. Member for Brightside, is what it has always been: to abolish grant-maintained status and deny schools the benefits of self-government. But what is the unofficial position? Who can say? Perhaps we shall hear it this afternoon. Perhaps, as I speak, there are flurries of activity involving the hon. Member for Peckham, the Opposition Chief Whip, the spin doctors and others.

I am curious to know what, if anything, the Labour party will do about the grant-maintained aspect of the Bill in Committee. I understand that when the proposal was first announced, the hon. Member for Brightside was so impressed that he suggested that local authority schools

*[Mrs. Shephard]*

should be given the same powers. He even tabled a parliamentary question to find out how much that would cost. Does that foreshadow proposals from the Labour party for more freedoms for local authority schools? How much closer does he think such schools should get to grant-maintained status without taking that vital step and opting out of local authority control? All those issues are lost in confusion and disarray.

The House will expect me to go quickly through the Bill's clauses and schedules. Clauses 1 to 5 and schedules 1 and 2 deal with the nursery scheme. Clause 1 is the main provision; it empowers the Secretary of State to make grants for nursery education within the context of the funding regime that I have described. To put it simply, the clause defines "nursery education" as applying to children below the age of five and leaves the precise age range to which the new scheme applies to be specified in the arrangements that we shall be making. In the first instance, the new scheme will apply to four-year-olds, but the clause enables us to extend the age range downwards at a later date.

Clause 2 enables the Secretary of State to delegate the power of paying and administering the grant.

Clause 3 enables the Secretary of State to impose requirements on the providers—including local education authorities, voluntary organisations and independent schools—that participate in the scheme.

Clause 4 applies schedule 1, which provides for inspection, and draws on the provisions of the Education (Schools) Act 1992. That will be a new development for many schools and other providers in the private and voluntary sectors, and a further development of the Ofsted inspection framework for state schools. The existing arrangements for the registration and annual inspection of day care under the Children Act 1989 will be left in place, as will the Ofsted regime under the 1992 Act.

Clause 5 applies schedule 2, which provides for passing on to those operating the scheme the information needed to identify parents with children eligible for the scheme, and restricts its further disclosure. The schedule is modelled on provisions in the Social Security Administration Act 1992.

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): On that point, can the Secretary of State give an assurance to the parents in the four areas selected for the experiment that if they choose, for whatever reason, not to take the £1,000, their children will not be excluded from the experiment?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the debate. It is good to see him—he has missed the debate so far. I am not absolutely clear what he means by his question, but if he would like to write to me, I should be delighted to reassure him.

Schedule 3 contains a number of consequential amendments. Paragraph 2 introduces a useful relaxation in the existing powers of local education authorities to direct schools as to the times when children can start school. Paragraph 9 provides for necessary adjustments to the legislation in the capping of local authority budgets.

Clause 6 lifts the statutory bar on grant-maintained schools' power to borrow other than from the Funding Agency for Schools and the bar on charging assets in connection with such loans, subject to the Secretary of State's consent. Schedule 3(10) provides that the Secretary of State may by order delegate to the Funding Agency for Schools the power to consent to such loans and the charging of assets. Clauses 7 to 10 and schedule 4 are technical and supplementary.

The Bill concerns the education system in England and Wales. The Education (Scotland) Bill now in Committee in another place contains comparable provisions introducing a similar regime for nursery education in Scotland. The Government intend to introduce appropriate legislation to provide for a similar system for nursery education in Northern Ireland.

The Bill puts the Opposition on the spot. Will they oppose it? Opposition Members may put forward some interesting technical points, which we can look at, but I do not see how—given the fact that they support education for under-fives and some of them support grant-maintained schools—they can do anything but support the Bill.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will know that Mystic Meg has tipped that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will be Prime Minister by November. While I understand that the Secretary of State wants to give a good presentation of her abilities to the House, is it fair that she has been on her feet for almost one hour? Is that reasonable, and can something be done about it?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** That is not a question for the Chair. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) knows that individual Front Benchers have the discretion to decide how long to speak about a particular Bill.

**Mrs. Shephard:** Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Ms Hilary Armstrong** (North-West Durham): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs. Shephard:** No, I shall not take an intervention at the moment. The fact that I have taken 25 interventions—there have also been seven points of order—may account for the time that I have spent presenting this Second Reading speech. I shall take no more interventions.

As I was saying, given that Opposition Members support education for under-fives and some of them support grant-maintained schools, how can they do other than support the Bill? Furthermore, given the fact that some of them appear to enjoy choice and diversity when it comes to their children, can we look for their support? Given the deep division and complete confusion that is Labour party policy, I advise my right hon. and hon. Friends not to hold their breath.

The two measures will increase choice, opportunity and flexibility in their sectors. They will increase the share of individuals in their education. What will the Labour party do? Will it support the measures in the interests of individuals, or oppose them because they are not designed to further the cause of institutional uniformity? For it is institutions and organisations that are Labour's stakeholders—especially their paymasters, the Trades Union Congress. Will the Opposition for once declare for choice, diversity and opportunity—the real measures that

enrich society—or will they oppose the measures and remain faithful to their socialist tradition of collective uniformity?

On the Conservative Benches, we have acted on abiding principles. We have extended benefits in which all can share. The beneficiaries include: parents, to whom we offer choice and diversity of education provision; governors, to whom we offer flexibility and the means of expanding education; schools, to which we offer ever wider opportunities; and the nation, to which we offer the prospect of an even sounder educational foundation. Above all, we are offering vastly increased opportunities to children—for whose benefit our education system is designed—to enter and to benefit from the world of learning. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.33 pm

**Mr. David Blunkett** (Sheffield, Brightside): I begin this afternoon by wishing the Secretary of State a very happy birthday—I sincerely hope that it improves from here on.

The Government's legislative programme is in tatters: their education plans have been either abandoned or shelved, and where the Government continue to implement them they do so without conviction. Two thirds of the proposals that were announced last year as the predicted legislative programme for the coming Session have now been either abandoned or shelved. The Education (Student Loans) Bill turned out to be a fiasco. The Government's proposals to extend grant-maintained status, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, have already bitten the dust.

The Secretary of State has turned into a Norfolk market gardener, walking behind the Prime Minister like someone following a rag and bone man with a diarrhoeic horse, shovelling up the mess that follows every idea about education that the Prime Minister comes out with.

**Mr. Nicholls:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Blunkett:** It must have been the term "diarrhoeic horse" that got the hon. Gentleman to his feet. Before I give way, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook mentioned the Prime Minister, I shall enlighten the Secretary of State in her belief that the Prime Minister did not commit the Government to a massive extension of grant-maintained status in his speech on 12 September 1995. If the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) will forgive me, I shall read parts of the Prime Minister's speech.

The Prime Minister said:

"All state schools should gain the benefits of becoming self-governing independent schools".

*[Interruption.]* "Quite right," Conservative Members say. "Where are the proposals for all state schools to become GM?"

**Sir Donald Thompson** (Calder Valley): Where are they?

**Mr. Blunkett:** The Prime Minister said:

"Many Church schools have already become grant-maintained"—

which is not strictly true, as the Church schools will tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He said:

"More want to."

Actually, more do not want to, and they have made it abundantly clear.

The Prime Minister said:

"Gillian Shephard will next month be consulting about the options",

and the options were:

"a fast track route to full self-governing status".

He continued:

"If a school's governors, with the prime interests of parents at heart, and the trustees representing the Churches' interests, agree on self-government, then they should be able to take that step simply and quickly."

**Mr. Dunn:** That was consulting.

**Sir Donald Thompson:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I will in a moment.

The Prime Minister said:

"Nor is today's instalment"—

that was 12 September—

"anything like the final word in the moves towards full self-government for our schools".

Apart from the self-evident fact that all six options that the Prime Minister promised on 12 September have been set aside by a Secretary of State who does not agree with him, who did not agree with him and who never does agree with him, the churches rejected all the nonsense about forcing those schools to become grant-maintained because, like Labour Members, they believe that real diversity, real choice, does not involve making all state schools become grant-maintained so that there is only one status and one option.

That is the difference between Labour Members—plus the Secretary of State—and a Prime Minister who knows nothing about education and illustrates it every time he gets to his feet. The voucher system and the minimal extension of the powers of grant-maintained schools link in admirably with the whole Government programme, which has been about dividing one school against another, dividing parents against one another and fragmenting the education service.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr. Blunkett:** I give way to the Minister.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire):** The hon. Gentleman—no doubt because he wants to disguise splits in other matters—is making a meal of reiterating two of the things that he said and adding a third. First, he says that the Prime Minister spoke about the option of a fast track; we agree. Secondly, the Prime Minister said that the proposals were subject to consultation; we agree. The difference between Labour and the Government is that we listen to consultation. When the hon. Gentleman's party produced its proposals for church schools last year, it did not consult even the churches.

**Mr. Blunkett:** I only have to repeat the Prime Minister's words:

"Nor is today's instalment anything like the final word."

*[Mr. Blunkett]*

Where is the final word? What is the final word? On which of the options are the Government still consulting? Which of the options that the Prime Minister laid out on 12 September will be brought before the House, in the Bill?

**Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** The hon. Gentleman mentioned choice and diversity in approving tones, as coming from his party. Will he say what choice and diversity the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) wants, and whether the hon. Gentleman proposes to provide them for her?

**Hon. Members:** Answer.

**Mr. Blunkett:** I am happy to answer. Every parent in every community, whether or not they are a Member of Parliament, should have the right to exercise a preference for their child to go to the school of their choice. That preference should not be blocked by any mechanism that prevents a child from entering that school on the basis of his prior attainment at the age of 11 or on the interview of his parents by a head which then excludes that child because the parents do not meet a particular set of criteria. That is why we are against and will remain against selection, why any debate about selection is a past and dead agenda, and why we will turn to the future to offer every parent, whichever school they approach, the excellence that some have sought for themselves in the past and which others have been denied—excellence for everyone, rather than privilege for a few is the way in which we shall proceed.

I challenged the Secretary of State to indicate this afternoon whether she was going to extend grammar schools to the whole of England and Wales and the blocking of preference through selection to all parents. She clearly indicated that she was not. The only steps the Secretary of State has taken on the selection issue was to extend the 10 per cent. selection by grant-maintained schools to 15 per cent. I want to make the position clear. Do you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know how many schools from the grant-maintained sector have exercised that preference already available to them?

**Mr. Nicholls** *rose—*

**Mr. Michael Brown** (Brigg and Cleethorpes) *rose—*

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cirencester and Tewkesbury) *rose—*

**Mr. Blunkett:** I am intent on giving real information to Conservative Members.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman is not giving way at this juncture.

**Mr. Michael Brown** *rose—*

**Mr. Clifton-Brown** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. That ruling applies particularly to the two hon. Members who rose when I was on my feet. It is clear that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is not giving way at this juncture or in the minutes that immediately follow it.

**Mr. Blunkett:** Out of all the schools—

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you be kind enough to advise the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave way at least 25 times?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Brightside will bear that information in mind.

**Mr. Blunkett:** I am still answering the last question. When I have done so, I will give way again.

Of the 1,100 grant-maintained schools, 43 exercised the option of even partial selection and 160 exercised historic full selection at the age of 11. Seven million children in 25,000 schools deserve equal opportunity from an education system that provides excellence for everyone. No school is threatened by this party with abolition based on its status. All parents will be able to exercise a preference. All children will be promised the kind of education that all of us expect for ourselves.

**Mr. Michael Brown** *rose—*

**Mr. Clifton-Brown** *rose—*

**Mr. Nicholls** *rose—*

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** *rose—*

**Mr. Blunkett:** I will give way in one moment. Historically, the Conservative party has pretended to promise to the many that which it has been prepared to deliver only to the few. That is the difference between us.

**Dr. Hampson:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The noise in the Chamber has been so intense that many hon. Members on both sides of the House failed to hear the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). Did he or did he not say that no grammar school would be closed on the basis of selection?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I said that no school would be abolished on the basis of its status, nor will it. Children will be able to enter schools on the preference of their parents, based on an open and fair admissions policy that discriminates against no one.

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that lengthy explanation, but as I did not quite follow his remarks, does he agree with that which he wrote in the Sheffield newspaper *The Star* some time ago? I believe that I am quoting the hon. Gentleman accurately when I say that he wrote, "I am having no truck with middle-class left-wing parents who preach one thing and send their children to other schools outside the area."

**Mr. Blunkett:** I am delighted to say that we are in total unity on this side of the House. We are all preaching one

simple fact—to lift the standard of education for every child in this country, rather than to have an obsession with the few. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. There is little point hon. Members asking questions if they will not stay quiet to hear the answers.

**Mr. Blunkett:** I refer to the one part of the Bill that does deal with the extension of grant-maintained status.

**Mr. Michael Brown:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I will.

**Mr. Brown:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman all about selection, because I failed my 11 plus and went to a secondary modern school. The hon. Gentleman should answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). What does he tell the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), having said that left-wing people from the middle classes should not do one thing and preach another? Does the hon. Gentleman accept or condemn the hon. Lady's actions?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I would be delighted to provide the hon. Gentleman with a packet of atenolol. If he gets any more worked up, he will probably need one. I dealt with the questions put by the Secretary of State and by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I must move on, and I will take questions on the Bill.

**Mr. Dunn:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there any way that the House can be adjourned, so that we may check the record of the hon. Gentleman's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson)?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. It does not require the adjournment of the House for anything to be checked. I hope that hon. Members will now listen to the hon. Member for Brightside.

**Mr. Blunkett:** I have heard of unretentive memories but that beats the band.

The truth is that the Prime Minister, on 12 September, promised a massive change, and the massive change turns out to be—

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Blunkett:** No. I wish to make some progress.

**Mr. James Pawsey** (Rugby and Kenilworth): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have given a ruling that the House should listen to what the hon. Gentleman says, yet he refuses to respond to the questions put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson).

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that it is for the hon. Member who is speaking to decide how to answer any question that is raised.

**Mr. Blunkett:** The Bill proposes that grant-maintained schools should be able to borrow against some of their assets. On closer examination, it turns out that they cannot borrow against most of their assets at all. They cannot borrow against core functions and, according to the Prime Minister—although his statement may be open to variation—they should not be able to sell off or borrow against their playing fields either, although they would be able to borrow against surplus land and surplus premises. That is an interesting contradiction.

If a school is under pressure and its admissions are oversubscribed, the Government have promised that they will allow it to borrow to expand. Under the Bill, a school that is under pressure, with all its premises in use, no space available and no surplus to be sold off, will not be able to borrow against its assets because its assets are in core use. The only schools that will be able to borrow against their assets will be the ones that are not under pressure, and which have empty accommodation, surplus places and low demand for admission to the school. So the Government have contradicted themselves on their declared aim and principle for the GM sector.

The Government are allowing the GM sector to borrow under the excuse that local authorities can sell lands and premises to raise capital receipts. But the same reason was given for why GM schools, since their inception, have received, on average, two and a half times more capital allocations than maintained schools. Is it both? GM schools have received more money through the Funding Agency for Schools to compensate them. Will they also be allowed special privileges to borrow on the market? Or is that reason a feeble excuse to divide the system again so that a few schools can have a privilege that is not permitted to the many?

I shall answer the Secretary of State who posed a question to me in her speech. Yes, we will consider ways to ensure that all schools have the same facility as will be made available to grant-maintained schools in the Bill. What is good enough for one set of children is good enough for all children. If we improve the standard of building and repair and the provision of equipment and materials, we will do it for all children and not just for 1,100 schools.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** I accept that the hon. Gentleman's personal position is quite clear—he does not approve of grant-maintained schools and therefore, as he has just said, he would not seek to give to some what others may not have. It is wrong to quote people out of context, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is also wrong for someone who seeks high political office to say and preach one thing about schooling but then proceed to take decisions that he would wholly disapprove of?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I have dealt with that question already. It is quite clear that the hon. Member was not listening to my speech, because I was waiting for him to intervene to give his support for providing the necessary capital resources to ensure that all the schools in his constituency could have the repair and maintenance that they need.

**Mr. Marlow:** I do not think that my hon. Friend accepted what the hon. Gentleman said. The hon. Gentleman obviously approves of rich socialists moving their children long distances so that they can be educated under better Conservative education authorities. However, as an egalitarian, does he think it would be right to provide transport facilities so that the poor, the

*[Mr. Marlow]*

unemployed and single-parent families could enjoy the same benefits as the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)?

**Mr. MacShane:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I came to hear a debate principally about nursery education. Is there any chance that we might discuss that issue?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman should perhaps listen to all the speeches before he raises that question.

**Mr. Blunkett:** Just in case there is any doubt, I am in favour of preference exercised by all parents and no block being placed on them. I think that an hon. Member who intervened previously said that he had been to a secondary modern school; that would certainly explain some of the difficulties that he has expressed in the House on several occasions.

On 29 March 1995, the Secretary of State was speaking about the issue of borrowing and the challenge of investment of capital in all schools. She said:

"Public borrowing must come down if we are to keep a rein on inflation and increase prosperity and jobs."—[*Official Report*, 29 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 1042.]

Perhaps the Secretary of State and her underlings could tell the House—

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan):** Her colleagues.

**Mr. Blunkett:** They may be colleagues to her, but they are underlings to me. My right hon. and hon. Friends are my colleagues.

Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell the House why the restrictions on borrowing and the need to prevent pressure on the public sector borrowing requirement by not spending money on repair and maintenance apply only to some schools and parts of the education service and not to others.

But the Bill is primarily about nursery vouchers. It is patently obvious that there was a time when the Conservative party was wholly committed to nursery education. A certain Secretary of State committed the party to providing a nursery place for all three and four-year-olds and to the investment to provide that service. That Secretary of State became Prime Minister and that promise was broken. In fact, the party turned away from a commitment to nursery vouchers and it condemned nursery education.

The current Secretary of State has said that there was no evidence that nursery education improved the future well-being of the children and was therefore not a useful investment. In fact, it is only a year ago almost to the week since the Secretary of State sent a letter out to her colleagues suggesting that they should mark, learn and report back on Labour authorities that were spending money on nursery education because it was not a statutory service and was therefore diverting money from the rest of the education system.

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice** (Lewisham, East): Will my hon. Friend confirm his commitment to setting a target that will ensure that all three-year-olds who will be excluded by the Government's nursery voucher system will, under a Labour Government, be assured of places in nursery schools?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I am delighted to give that commitment. Our commitment is clear; it is not a paper promise. We will set targets to achieve, for every three and four-year-old whose parents want it, a free, properly provided, highly qualified nursery education place.

**Ms Armstrong:** Does my hon. Friend share my concern at the fact that the current proposal puts in jeopardy the education of three and four-year-olds in certain local authority areas? I refer to those in which all four-year-olds are receiving a full school day and many three-year-olds—about 65 per cent. of them in my authority—are already receiving nursery education on a half-day basis.

**Mr. Blunkett:** Nationally, the proposal puts at risk at least 133,000 places for three-year-olds. It undermines the role of authorities already providing places. It would be impossible to dream up a worse scheme. It provides no capital investment for facilities, and no training for those who need it to be able to deliver high quality education. It provides no resources or support for special needs nursery provision.

**Dame Angela Rumbold** (Mitcham and Morden): A few moments ago we all heard the hon. Gentleman make a commitment to ensuring that every three-year-old has a place in nursery education, should there ever be a time when the Labour party forms an Administration. I should be most grateful if the hon. Gentleman told us how much it is going to cost.

**Mr. Blunkett:** The first tranche of money would come from removing the bureaucratic nightmare surrounding this voucher scheme. It has been described by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) as the "deadweight cost" of administration. The pilot scheme involves administrative and inspection costs of £5 million. Divided by the 17,000-odd places in the pilot authorities, it turns out that the administrative and inspection costs of each place will amount to a staggering £290. Under the full phase 2 scheme, such costs will amount to an equally staggering £187 million—more than the total amount provided in new cash by the Government for the first full year.

**Mr. Robin Squire:** I saw the hon. Gentleman's press release giving these figures this morning. I am afraid that he has misunderstood the position. A great chunk of that £5 million is for inspection and setting up the inspection scheme, including recruiting and training inspectors for phase 2. Dividing the sum solely over phase 1 is therefore either ignorant or misleading.

**Mr. Blunkett:** Let me get this clear: the money allocated in the pilot phase—during which the Government were going to test the applicability of the scheme—is not, according to the Minister, actually to be used on inspection or administrative costs for the pilot. It is instead to be used for the administrative and inspection costs of phase 2 of the scheme, which comes in the year after.

That being so, why are those applying to join the scheme as providers not being inspected before they come on stream as new providers? Why, instead, is light-touch inspection allowing them to self-assess their worthiness to take part in the nursery voucher scheme? The "next steps" document makes it absolutely clear that they can self-assess for what are described as "in-house purposes". They do not have to send in the validation form to qualify. Providers may have to be inspected in the first two years during the second phase—but not before they come on stream.

So are we being told that inspection costs are to be incurred for providers that are not going to be inspected, given that they can assess themselves before coming on stream? If so, I shall refer the whole matter to the National Audit Office as a scandal.

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is well aware that I share his aspiration to provide high-quality early-years education for every three and four-year-old whose parents want it. But is he aware that such provision would require 18,000 additional teachers, 22,000 additional ancillary assistants and—best estimates suggest—additional expenditure of £900 million? Is the hon. Gentleman's party about to commit itself to providing that much funding?

**Mr. Blunkett:** The hon. Gentleman's party seems to have spent its commitment about 10 times over already. He is right about one thing though: after four years of cutting provision for nursery and primary school teachers and reducing their number in the current year by 800, the Government are ill prepared to expand the nursery scheme in coming years with properly trained and professionally provided nursery teachers.

**Mr. Robin Squire:** I am trying to clarify this point for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman and, if necessary, the House. We cannot carry out inspections without inspectors. It will take time to recruit them; they cannot start inspecting until the Bill receives Royal Assent. Much of the cost of establishing the framework and the training inevitably falls during phase 1.

As for the hon. Gentleman's other point, there is a straight trade-off. He implied that no nursery providers should be able to take vouchers until they have been inspected. He must therefore tell thousands of parents of four-year-olds who are expecting a decent nursery education for their children with established providers that they will not be able to get one. That is a bad answer; what we have set out is a reasonable framework.

**Mr. Blunkett:** The problem with that is that if the Government really want to achieve their stated goals they will take up the offer made by my party and the local authority associations and allow the development of nursery education plans at local level. In that way all sectors—voluntary, private and statutory—could join to build on what is already in place. Instead of a piece of paper we should then have not just the £165 million that has already been committed but the £20 million earmarked for administration and bureaucracy, with which to provide the extra places to enable us to meet our goal.

**Mr. Squire:** What about inspections?

**Mr. Blunkett:** If the Minister is so concerned—we are, because he is way behind with primary inspections already—let us join together to find a way of developing the current system at local level and expanding it. The Government's problem has to do with bureaucracy, the difficulties of inspection, insisting on paying those already buying privately, and the possible entry into the system of fly-by-nights who want to gain the voucher income. These factors combine to make it less likely that the proposal will succeed.

If the Government are so concerned about the failure to develop the system and recruit inspectors, why not abandon this scheme until they are in a position to implement it in a way they think fit? Why rush ahead with a pilot project that turns out not to be a pilot? Instead, it is just phase 1 of a scheme that the Government are already engaged in implementing.

**Mr. Walden:** One small point: the hon. Gentleman inadvertently misquoted me earlier. I was complaining about the fact that the Government are going to hand out millions of pounds to people who can already afford to pay for private education. The hon. Gentleman said that I was complaining about the administrative costs of the system.

I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman—and with some sympathy. As he knows, I am something of a critic of Government education policy and of this policy in particular. I get the impression, however, that the hon. Gentleman does not realise the gravity of his party's situation or the impact of the action by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on the country. Does not he understand that it goes to the core of the whole discussion about education in Britain, namely, selection? His position, I am sorry to say, and that of his Front Bench is morally and intellectually contemptible.

**Mr. Blunkett:** I accept the hon. Gentleman's correction, while agreeing entirely with his point about the deadweight costs. In response to his second point, I refer him to the words of the Secretary of State, who said that she wanted uniformity of quality in nursery education. I believe her—but it is what I want for all children in all schools at whatever stage.

The Government could not have found a more convoluted way of trying to deliver nursery provision to four-year-olds. They are taking £548 million away from authorities that are already making provision, on the basis of that provision for four-year-olds, and are distributing it away from those authorities that have provision and are already making it and giving it to those authorities that do not have provision and are not making it. They are offering people not a place, but a piece of paper promising that they can have a place in an area that does not have a place. They then call it a choice when they do not even have a place for them, let alone a choice between providers. The slogan is simple—no place, no choice; no place, no nursery provision.

Of course, it is not a matter of choice. There is already choice in those authorities, like Solihull, that are already providing. The only people anywhere near being able to provide choice and diversity are those already providing places for three and four-year-olds. What will happen to them? Money will be taken away from them so that it can be recycled through an administrative nightmare—and that is what it is. Large sums of public money will be spent by a private company on recycling literally tens of millions of bits of paper.

*[Mr. Blunkett]*

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) rightly said that vouchers will be provided on a termly basis, to be redeemed on a weekly basis, with five different voucher segments, able to be delivered to different providers if necessary on a daily basis for a part-time place. Who invented that? Who could have dreamt up anything so bizarre as a system that results in spending public money on recycling bits of paper?

Children want nursery places; they want investment in facilities to provide nursery places; they want trained and qualified staff to support them in those places. Properly provided nursery education, integrated with care and available where and when parents need it, is the first and essential foundation for a decent education system for all our children and equality for all our children.

I repeat that the Labour party has offered to sit down with the Government and with all the providers that come forward to work out a system to provide such places for our three as well as our four-year-olds. We need to ensure that we invest in education rather than in a bureaucratic and administrative system which, frankly, will fall flat on its face at the expense of those tiny children who deserve a better start in life.

5.14 pm

**Mr. Kenneth Baker** (Mole Valley): This debate could not have come at a more difficult and embarrassing time for the Labour party. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who tried to fashion a sensible and coherent education policy for his party. Much of that policy has been based on the abandonment of previous opposition to the core reforms that I was privileged to introduce in 1987-88. At that time, the hon. Gentleman's predecessors opposed national curriculum tests, league tables, grant-maintained schools, delegated budgets and city technology colleges. Now, in effect, the Labour party has accepted most of those reforms, but with some significant changes in detail. I recognise that that acceptance is due to the hon. Gentleman's influence.

Today, the hon. Gentleman was forced to engage in linguistic distortions to try to reconcile his views and those of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). It did not work. His rhetoric was divorced from the reality of performance. If it is right for the son of the Leader of the Opposition to go to a grant-maintained school—I do not object to such choice: it is a good school, one of the best in London; indeed, I know its headmaster—it must also be right to make that choice available to the wide range of parents throughout the country. If it is right for the son of the hon. Member for Peckham to go to a grammar school—a very good grammar school indeed—it must also be right to make that choice available to all parents and that it should be exercised. That is the dilemma that faces the hon. Member for Brightside and his party.

I ask my hon. Friends not to be too hard on the hon. Member for Peckham—

**Mr. Michael Brown:** Absolutely not.

**Mr. Baker:** The hon. Member for Peckham has not been embarrassed by scruple, hindered by consistency or hampered by collective responsibility; she has done what every mother has always done and chosen what she believes to be the best school for her children. That is not new Labour, it is not old Labour—it is primeval. It goes back to basic instincts and the grain of human nature. We should not chastise her too much, but instead welcome a convert.

**Mr. Brown:** My right hon. Friend possibly got the wrong idea from my earlier intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). I want to make it absolutely clear that I make no criticism of the action of the hon. Member for Peckham. My hon. Friends should welcome what she has done. What concerns me is that she may well vote against the Bill tonight. If she votes against the Bill and opposes choice in education for everybody else, we must be concerned that her actions do not express her views.

**Mr. Baker:** It behoves everyone in public life to match personal behaviour with political commitment. If the hon. Member for Peckham fails to do that, she will have to answer to her constituents, to her conscience and, presumably, to her shadow Cabinet colleagues.

When I read about the hon. Lady in the newspapers over the weekend, I recalled something that George Orwell wrote in an essay in 1945—that the trouble with all socialists is their inability to tell the truth about the immediate future. I cannot help but feel that that is the dilemma facing the Labour Front Bench today. The Bill is about parental choice. The Labour party has accepted many of the reforms that I introduced seven or eight years ago, but—this is the sticking point—it does not believe in parental choice.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster): As the Leader of the Opposition has opted for a grant-maintained school for his son, and as his colleague the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has done the same for hers, why was there such a virulent and intimidatory campaign in the constituency of the Leader of the Opposition by Labour workers trying to stop Hurworth comprehensive school becoming grant maintained?

**Mr. Baker:** Again, that goes to the central dilemma facing the Labour party, which it cannot resolve. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) described the attitude of the hon. Member for Brightside as not being morally defensible. I agree. I do not believe that the stance taken by the Labour party on this matter is morally defensible. It must decide between giving choice to parents and not giving choice to parents. What we mean by choice is a choice between the local comprehensive school, the local grant-maintained school, the grammar school, the church school, the single-sex school and the city technology college.

That was the choice which, among other things, my reforms made available to a variety of parents. They did not deny parents choice. The Labour party will not really accept that. It wants conformity. We can see that from its opposition to the Bill. It does not want nursery education to be provided other than by the local education authority. That is what the hon. Member for Brightside committed himself to. He gave a commitment which, I dare say, someone in central office is already costing, for free nursery education for three and four-year-olds. When I asked my officials, back in 1987, what it would cost, the

answer then was £1 billion, allowing for capital as well. I have no idea what the latest figure is, but it must be more than that. It is a great deal of money. Indeed, it has absorbed the Liberal penny in one fell swoop. I assure the hon. Gentleman—

**Mr. Marlow:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Baker:** Perhaps I might pursue my arguments for a moment, because I am warming to the task.

If the hon. Member for Brightside ever has responsibility for this area of policy and goes to the Treasury, it will not say, "We are committed to nursery schools. What a wonderful idea. Here's a cheque for £1 billion." Would not my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State love to have such a cheque? She had to fight very hard for £937 million, let alone £1 billion.

I see some distinguished former leaders of local education authorities present on the Opposition Benches. They know that, if the money were given to local education authorities, there is no indication that it would be spent on nursery schools because of the demands of primary schools, secondary schools and colleges of further education, all of which would be knocking at their door.

When I heard the hon. Member for Brightside oppose the two principles of the Bill today, I could not help feeling that I was hearing the voice of his predecessors, who opposed me. Labour opposed a measure which, later, it accepted. I believe that it will accept both the principles—

**Mr. Spearing:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Baker:** I shall develop my argument for a moment.

I want to deal with grant-maintained schools borrowing. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on getting the Treasury to abandon a bit of Treasury doctrine, which is that state assets cannot be allowed to borrow in the public market. I fought endless battles with Chief Secretaries over that—because I thought that it was rubbish—and I lost in most, but not all, cases.

My right hon. Friend has won. I congratulate her on allowing that freedom to grant-maintained schools. It is the beginning of a chink, and the hon. Member for Brightside should not toss it away lightly. Grab it while it is going. It is a victory against the Treasury and that should bring us all together.

I want now to deal with nursery vouchers, because they go to the heart of the philosophy that divides our two parties. We have heard a great deal about stakeholders. What is a stakeholder in education? It is a parent who can choose between a variety of schools that are funded by the state. It is a student who can choose between a variety of courses at different institutions—that has been provided, and there has been significant expansion of the sector during the past 10 years. It is a trainee who has a training credit that enables him or her to choose the course that he or she wants. When it comes to nursery education, a voucher holder is a stakeholder. If words mean anything, that is the definition of a stakeholder.

I mentioned George Orwell earlier. The question is: is a voucher holder a stakeholder? The obvious answer is yes, but the Labour party cannot admit that. It does not want to admit it, yet this is a progressive step forward.

**Mr. Spearing** *rose—*

**Mr. Baker:** I shall give way shortly to the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have an affection, as he beat me once in a general election but lost the seat that I lent him for a time.

The first thing about a stake is that it is a sum of money. A voucher is a sum of money. Secondly, it belongs to the parents. Thirdly, it gives the parents power. That is what a stake is all about, is it not? It enhances the responsibility of parents for the education of their children under five. Fourthly, it achieves socially desirable aims. If the word stakeholder means anything, a nursery voucher holder is a stakeholder.

**Mr. Spearing:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way—it was indeed me who beat him and took a seat away from him.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the only parental choice worth having in education is that between equivalence of excellence? That, alas, we do not have. Does he agree that a nursery voucher is not for nursery education as we know it today, as provided by local education authorities such as Newham and Solihull, but a voucher for a form of pre-school activity provided by a number of different providers? Because of the withdrawal of the standards of accommodation, and probably the standards of training for qualified nursery teachers, the voucher will not be for nursery education as we know it today and it is a con if those words are used.

**Mr. Baker:** I do not agree. We have here a basic division between the perceptions of the two parties. I believe that choice and variety are some of the elements that improve standards—they do not do it on their own—which is why I introduced the national curriculum and testing. External standards were needed, as was an injection of greater involvement by parents and governors, which many—but not all—Opposition Members voted against. Wherever there is choice, standards rise.

We introduced the concept of grant-maintained schools, not to give the luckiest children the best break, but to establish levers whereby the quality of education for all our children would be improved by imitation of other schools in the area. That has happened in many cases, as hon. Members on both sides of the House will know.

I strongly support the voucher scheme. In fact, some of the preliminary work on it was done by my Minister of State in the 1980s. We could not introduce it then, however, because we were doing so many other good things. We could not crowd the legislative programme with such excellence, but now there is time to do it. I support the scheme strongly, but there are two deficiencies. First, in due course—not immediately—it must be extended to three-year-olds. I am sure that all hon. Members would like that. I do not object to the fact that three-year-olds are not included in the first year of the scheme—I congratulate my right hon. Friend on starting the scheme, as one has to start somewhere. Clearly, after it has been established—after due process

*[Mr. Baker]*

of time; in the foreseeable future, both of which are phrases that the Treasury loves to use—it will be extended to three-year-olds, as it should be. I hope that some undertaking will be given on that.

My second reservation relates to special education. I listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend said about children who are severely disabled, blind, visually impaired, deaf or seriously physically disabled. She wants greater monitoring and better recording of children below the age of five. I should, perhaps, declare an interest in that, for the past year, I have been raising money for a school for the blind in Kent. Collectively, we raised £500,000 to establish a nursery school. The school is a centre of excellence and is recognised throughout the land as very special.

**Ms Margaret Hodge** (Barking) *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Baker:** I believe that the hon. Lady, who is nodding, has visited it.

We raised the money from charitable sources so that we can build a building. It will take children in. There is plenty of evidence to show that if children who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, physically disabled or have other disabilities are taken in early enough, they are given a better start in life. I want the scheme to embrace such schools. There are few special nursery schools in the country. I believe that the voucher for such children should not be the standard £1,100, but should recognise the enormous extra costs involved in teaching children with disabilities.

In a nursery school, there is broadly one teacher to 10 children. A special school needs one teacher and two assistants for five children. The children need constant attention. They often need nursing. They have a short concentration span. They need love and devotion. I very much hope that my right hon. Friend will consider introducing an enhanced voucher—a value-added voucher, say three times the standard value—for the parents of children who are most seriously visually impaired or totally blind, or those with other difficulties. For the less visually impaired, and for those who are less severely disabled, I hope that my right hon. Friend will introduce a voucher of £2,200.

The cost would be minimal: I estimate that fewer than 3,000 children—certainly not much more than that—are involved. By such action, my right hon. Friend and the Government could bring real benefit to some of the most underprivileged children in the country, who face exceptional problems.

With those two provisos, I warmly support the Bill, and congratulate my right hon. Friend. I urge Labour Members to support both its proposals, once they have overcome this little linguistic trouble—over the next few days, perhaps, although we shall drag it out for weeks, months and possibly years, because the target is too good to miss.

5.30 pm

**Mr. David Jamieson** (Plymouth, Devonport): It is a pleasure to follow someone as distinguished as the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). Those of us who aspire to great things in public life may eventually have one day named after us, but five days are named after the right hon. Gentleman—the five "Baker days" that schools endure each year.

In the spirit of cross-party harmony, which I often try to introduce in the Chamber, and to help to dispel the idea that debate here always involves disagreement, I shall congratulate the Government and Conservative Back Benchers on their change of heart in regard to nursery education. At least there is now cross-party support for the principle. I recall that, back in 1994, the Prime Minister said at the Tory party conference:

"There are many views about nursery education"—

I think that he was talking about his own Back Benchers—

But my view is quite clear. I am in favour of it."

That, however, was not the view of his Minister of State earlier that year. I was in the Chamber when the Minister of State accused my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) of being "obsessed" with nursery education, which did not sound like someone who was in favour of it.

I also recall being told, in 1993 and early in 1994, by Ministers that there was no evidence of the benefits of nursery education. I hope that the claim that there is no evidence of a link between class sizes and the quality of education will suffer the same fate as the statement about nursery education. There is an absolute connection between the quality of education and nursery places.

**Dr. Hampson:** To prove the point, that was stressed in the first White Paper produced by Lady Thatcher when she was Secretary of State for Education. It remained a commitment until it was thrown off course by the oil price spiral crisis in 1972, then it was killed in 1976 by the Labour Government, through the International Monetary Fund.

**Mr. Jamieson:** Lady Thatcher did many things. At that time, she advocated nursery places to the Government. As so much has been said about the subject today, I shall point out that she closed more grammar schools than any Minister at any time. Ministers consistently denied that there was some value in nursery education, as she had said in the early 1970s, but it is interesting that, as Prime Minister, she was far less enthusiastic about nursery education, and her earlier comments never saw the light of day again.

I congratulate the Secretary of State on changing the minds of her fellow Ministers. On occasion—today, for instance—she has the stern eye of a headmistress. I sometimes think that, with one glance, she could quell an unruly class that was out of control; indeed, some say that she could control an unruly political party that was out of control, but I am sure that that view will be revised following her performance at the Dispatch Box today. Nevertheless, we welcome the inspired conversion of Tory Members—a flash of light on the road to the ballot box.

There is no doubt about the benefits of nursery education. Research carried out in the American High Scope programme suggests that it has many beneficial features. Later in life, children who have received such education are less likely to turn to crime and drugs, and more likely to have jobs, secure families and many other assets. Nursery education gives children a head start, especially in crowded inner cities where young children no longer enjoy the opportunity to play safely in the street,

as many hon. Members probably did. Nowadays, many parents will not allow their children to play outside because they fear what may happen to them. Sadly, such children—especially those who live in high-rise flats in some of the less stimulating parts of our cities—are fed a constant diet of television and computer games.

When the Education Committee visited Japan in 1994, we asked the Japanese what they considered valuable in education in the early years of childhood. They said, unequivocally, that education taught children to socialise and work together and, above all, enabled them to learn the discipline of an ordered environment. The Select Committee's report—first published in 1989, and revised in 1994—recognised the value of nursery education, and reinforced those points.

The benefits are enjoyed by mothers as well as children. Some mothers, through no fault of their own, may have limited parenting skills, and may be bringing up their children alone. The links between mother and school are closest at the nursery stage; strong bonds are often formed between teachers and parents. That relationship can have a very positive influence on mothers, and I commend the wider spread of nursery education on that ground as well.

Although the Bill contains the right medicine, the medicine is wrongly administered. A small amount of extra funds will go into the scheme, but, like my Front-Bench spokesman and Conservative Back Benchers, I fear that much of that small extra sum will be swallowed up in bureaucracy, and that much of the good provision that exists in many parts of the country will be threatened by a Government who, having cast off their prejudice against nursery education, cannot finally overcome their deep disdain for locally elected, democratically controlled local government.

The voucher scheme will, unfortunately, undermine what could have been a welcome advance. I note that just one of the authorities involved in the pilot scheme will receive funding directly from the vouchers—the authority of the Secretary of State. Opposition Members understand why she is not giving money directly to Wandsworth and Westminster.

**Mr. Graham Riddick** (Colne Valley): Bearing in mind the position of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in the shadow Cabinet, does the hon. Gentleman agree with the decision that she has made about her son?

**Mr. Jamieson:** That subject has been discussed enough in the Chamber today and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has given an excellent answer. I shall stick to what is in the Bill, rather than make petty, cheap attacks on other hon. Members who choose to send their children to various schools. I would not criticise any of my constituents on those grounds, and I would not expect any hon. Member to criticise his constituents or any other hon. Member.

**Mr. Robin Squire:** I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech and its tone. Lest there be any suspicion, may I explain that he has hit on one of what may be several ways in which phase 1 will be run differently in different authorities. There is nothing suspicious about it. It is simply that we are taking advantage of the pilot nature of phase 1.

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am interested to hear that the Government are taking advantage of the pilot scheme, but the intention in the Bill is that the scheme will be introduced before we know about the success or otherwise of the pilot scheme. Perhaps the Minister will tell us in his winding-up speech how he will learn from the pilot scheme before it has finished.

There is a cruel irony in the voucher scheme in that it will take most funds from those good authorities that currently have the highest provision, and give them to authorities that have the lowest provision. Funds will go from Labour local authorities that have high provision to the tiny handful of Tory authorities that have the lowest provision.

May I say, in case the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) falls asleep, that the Liberal Democrats can claim no particular supremacy in this matter. They often pay lip service to education but, as usual, there is no co-ordinated approach to Liberal Democrat policy—the general principle is that there is a different policy on every doorstep. The Liberal Democrat councils with the longest experience of running education—the Isle of Wight and Cornwall—have the lowest nursery education provision in Britain.

May I help the hon. Member for Bath to refute the scurrilous rumours put about by the Liberal Democrat researcher reported in *The Daily Telegraph* today, who said that, on education policy, the Liberal Democrats were "Interchangeable with Labour". Just to help the hon. Gentleman put some clear yellow water between us, Labour local education authorities do not just talk about improved provision—they provide it.

The Bill will take funds from three-year-olds who are being provided with nursery education. It will take some four-year-olds from the full-time nursery education that they are enjoying to part-time nursery education, as the £1,100 voucher does not cover the full cost of a full-time place. Even Government Back Benchers have made the point that the voucher scheme puts money into the pockets of the better-off who can afford private provision.

The Bill will increase bureaucracy and the scope for fraud. Will the Minister confirm that the voucher agency will issue a book of vouchers every half term and that there will be a separate piece of paper for each day? I know from previous debates that the Minister is somewhat arithmetically challenged, but that means that 1 billion pieces of paper will be floating around each year. We have only to imagine the amount of printing, collecting and counting of all that paper to know that the bureaucracy would be enormous. I see the Minister wants to make a statement.

**Mr. Squire:** I can give an answer.

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am willing to give way to the Minister if we can hear the answer.

**Mr. Squire:** May I reduce substantially the figures that the hon. Gentleman is talking about? First, there will be three vouchers, one per term—to be strictly correct, there will be three issues, one per term—and parents will have the option to use such issues in more than one setting. In practice, however, a high proportion of parents are likely to use just one provider and that will involve just one voucher at the beginning of term.

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am grateful to the Minister, but perhaps he will say in his winding-up speech whether he

*[Mr. Jamieson]*

agrees with the longest-serving Tory education committee chairman, Geoffrey Wright, of Solihull council, who said on "Newsnight" on 24 October 1995:

"In my area of Solihull, nursery education will be damaged by this voucher scheme".

Why does not one of the few Conservative education chairmen agree with this scheme?

Will the Minister clear up the matter of inspection? It is essential that we monitor to ensure that we achieve the highest standards. Sub-paragraph 6(1)(a) of schedule 1 provides for inspection of private providers. Paragraph 6(2) refers to section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992, which lists the eight types of school that should be inspected. Seven of them, including city technology colleges, are in the maintained sector. Independent schools, however, are also included in the list.

When the Government implemented their proposals with regulations, a four-yearly inspection system was placed on maintained schools. With independent schools, we heard that inspections would take place about every seven years. In reality, however, the Minister and I know that they take place far less frequently than that. Will independent providers in the non-maintained sector get a lightness of touch in terms of inspection or will inspection be the same across all the providers?

The Bill had the potential to receive widespread support in the House on the principle of nursery education, on setting out to improve existing arrangements and on funding high-quality nursery provision. As with so many Government Bills, it fails to mention standards, the quality of education and the needs of children. Instead, it dwells on adjustments to the funding system and spawns a new leaden bureaucracy. For that reason, I will vote against its Second Reading and Labour Members will seek to amend the Bill to deliver what parents really want: high-quality, well-funded nursery education.

5.47 pm

**Dame Angela Rumbold** (Mitcham and Morden): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on introducing the Bill. I shall certainly support her in the Division Lobby this evening. At the end of her speech, she asked what the Opposition would be doing. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) eloquently explained that the Opposition would oppose the Bill, not only this evening on its Second Reading, but root and branch in Committee, and when it returns to the Floor of the House.

The Opposition will oppose the Bill, aided by teacher unions, people on local education authorities and by those on local authorities who are of their mind, because, in their opinion, the scheme is not fair. In future, however, as more and more of their Front-Bench Members decide that what is better for their children conflicts with their political thinking, they will no doubt decide that they can, after all, turn their political thinking just a little and accommodate what is obviously a sensible and well-thought-out provision, introduced of course by the Conservative party and Conservative Government. We will watch that with great interest. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley explained, all the way through the period of this Government and previous Governments, we have watched that pattern develop and extend.

I should declare that I have an interest in grant-maintained schools. I am a vice-president of the Grant Maintained Schools Trust. It is what is known as a pro bono appointment. For those who do not understand that, it means that I do the job for the good of it and not for remuneration. I welcome the way that the Bill presents an opportunity for state schools to raise money in private markets to help them to extend and develop. As the Secretary of State said, that is a new but welcome move.

During my time in local government, but much more when I was in central Government, I found it illogical that we could not extend to state schools the opportunities that exist for independent schools. Of course independent schools can raise money on buildings and land, and that enables them to plan school developments well in advance. Three, seven or 10-year plans can be formulated for developing a school, and that can be done because the use of money can be planned. Unfortunately under the Government's system of funding—this is a criticism of the way in which the Treasury operates—that can be done with public funds only on a year-by-year basis, and that makes nonsense of any kind of long-term planning. The Bill is a step in the right direction because it will benefit state schools.

I congratulate the Secretary of State on the nursery voucher scheme, and I should like to speak about the timing of the initiatives. My right hon. and hon. Friends have often spoken about the introduction of some form of voucher system to ensure that parents are empowered to make genuine choices for their children. We have often been told that such a system would be fine if the money were there to implement it. It has been said that the children of those who move into the right neighbourhood might even be able to go to a good state school. Unfortunately, those who cannot do that have to save up to send their children to fee-paying schools. The voucher system is the one way in which parents can be empowered to make a genuine choice.

We have heard in the debate about how local authority schools somehow or other give enormous choice to parents. But every hon. Member and everybody outside, especially parents, knows perfectly well that there is no such choice in the state system. Choice depends on where people live, on the local authority and on the way in which it operates an admissions system. Local authorities may choose a variety of criteria for admissions, which may be decided on a geographical basis or may depend on whether there are siblings from the same family in the same school.

Local authorities will always say that they cannot guarantee a place to any family in a particular school, and that applies to nursery, primary, middle or secondary schools. The authorities say that that is because they have to keep some places for people who may move into the area and that such people may take priority on the waiting list. What kind of choice is that for parents?

**Dr. Hampson:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that as well as giving choice to parents we are trying to stimulate schools to design themselves so that they attract pupils? Labour's concept is that schools should somehow be driven towards meeting certain predetermined criteria that are established at the centre and should have a predetermined clientele feeding them.

**Dame Angela Rumbold:** My hon. Friend is most helpful because he raises the point that I was about to make. Parents look at schools in terms of what they think those schools can offer their children. Parents who can pay for education take enormous care in judging schools. They look at the facilities, academic standards, pastoral care, supplies and so on, but people who have to use the state system are not allowed to do that.

I am a passionate believer in state education. We pay enough for it in taxes and it should be the principal form of education on offer to parents. I have consistently disagreed with Labour because I refuse point blank to be told that the only schools for the majority of children are those designated by the local authorities. If schools are to rise to the challenge of meeting parents' expectations they must fight in the marketplace to attract students, and should not have to depend on local authorities directing parents and children to them.

**Mr. Dunn:** Does my right hon. Friend recall that in earlier debates Labour was always candid about where it stood on the issue of secondary provision? Now, of course, Labour realises that it is unfashionable and unpopular to say that it would close grammar schools. It has said, and repeated in the debate, that no selective school will be able to admit pupils by interview or examination. Will my right hon. Friend confirm my view that under Labour no current grammar school that can admit pupils in that way will remain a grammar school, but that Labour does not have the guts or the nous to say, "Yes, we want to close grammar schools in the way that we did 30 years ago."

**Dame Angela Rumbold:** My hon. Friend is right: that is precisely what is being said. But it is being said in code because no Opposition Member wants to tell the truth, which is that they have not changed their education policy for more than 30 years. That is where they stand today.

I am delighted to see the start of a process which, with nursery vouchers, will give parents a genuine choice. At long last parents will be able to say, "We have purchasing power and can choose where to send our children." They will be able to decide which school offers their children the best nursery education. Mothers who come to see me in my constituency will be able to say, "We have looked at all the nursery schools and genuinely believe that our children will do best at this one."

Although my local authority makes great play of its provision for nursery education, unfortunately it does not allow parents to choose a nursery school. Parents are told, "Your child can have a place in that school and if you do not like that—tough." That is not parental choice under any guise. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has presented an opportunity for parents to have a genuine choice. She will certainly get my whole-hearted support and, I trust, the whole-hearted support of every hon. Member who believes that the most important step to raise standards in our schools is not the structure or the mystique about parental choice with which local authorities surround themselves, but the genuine choice that they make for their own children because they want the best for them for the best of reasons. Such choice will be open to everyone, and if parents want examinations or interviews for their children, what is wrong with that? Freedom for parents should mean just that.

5.58 pm

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), whose commitment to state education is beyond peradventure. I share her belief in the importance of empowering parents, but I disagree with her belief that it is the most important and almost the sole key to raising achievement. While I do not accept that, I agree that it is an important element.

I also disagree with the right hon. Lady, and with the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), that the best way of empowering parents is through the voucher system proposed by the Government. Sadly, I also must agree with the right hon. Lady's prediction that there will be wide-scale opposition to the proposals. The right hon. Lady is right—there already is wide-scale opposition to the proposals.

The right hon. Lady was foolish to be proud that the proposals have been put together by the Conservative party, because the evidence suggests that the Bill will fare little better than other legislation proposed recently by the Government. The Bill has been hastily cobbled together, and its flaws will begin to show clearly in Committee. A similar situation occurred with the Education (Student Loans) Bill where, after a few days in Committee, the Minister had to point out some major problems with the Bill and announce a delay in the implementation of the proposals by one year.

This Bill is like the Education (Student Loans) Bill. It is a set of gimmicks put forward by the Government which fails to address the real issues and concerns in the education service. The first of those gimmicks relates to grant-maintained schools. There cannot be many people who do not accept that the grant-maintained schools policy has been a failure, despite all the inducements offered by the Government.

**Dr. Hampson** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Foster:** If the hon. Gentleman wishes to explain how a policy that has led to only one twenty-fourth of all schools choosing to opt out since it was introduced in 1988 can be described as a success, the House would be interested. The Government's flagship policy has sunk—it has failed. It is slightly bizarre that the Prime Minister, of all people, has spent so much time addressing the issue of grant-maintained status. I do not understand why he would wish to draw attention to the least succesful of all the Government's education policies. It was the Prime Minister, to be fair, and not the Secretary of State, who made clear that he intended to make yet another attempt to try to induce more schools to choose the opt-out route.

I suppose that we should be grateful that at least one of the two suggestions the Prime Minister put forward—the proposal for a fast track to grant-maintained status for church schools—has been dropped. The only success of that proposal was that it successfully united both Catholics and Protestants against it.

The Bill contains proposals that relate to the ability of grant-maintained schools to borrow money using the school's assets as collateral, and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) eloquently outlined some of the flaws in that proposal. It is interesting to note that the Bill contains measures about which many head teachers of grant-maintained schools have expressed

*[Mr. Foster]*

concern. They realise that borrowing money is very easy—it is paying it back that is difficult. They are very concerned—as are, I suspect, many Opposition Members—at the possibility of a mortgage company repossessing a state school for the first time in this country.

There is no doubt that the Bill confirms the advantage of grant-maintained schools over LEA schools. Perhaps equally of concern is the fact that the Bill alters the current position, whereby in certain circumstances where the assets of a grant-maintained school are considered to be surplus to requirements, some of the money gained from the sale of those assets can be returned to the LEA, or the premises themselves can be made available to the LEA. That is likely to change if those surplus assets are now to be tied up and used as collateral against any loan that has been made.

**Dr. Hampson:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point—if he is right. But as I understand it, schools cannot borrow or grant security on anything like the scale that the hon. Gentleman is talking about without the Secretary of State's approval—including a Labour or even a Liberal Democrat Secretary of State. There are safeguards in the Bill. If local authorities can borrow against assets such as parking metres and get away with it, surely a lot of money can be raised against a school's assets.

**Mr. Foster:** The hon. Gentleman fails to acknowledge my point. The premises or assets against which money can be borrowed are those deemed to be non-core assets. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are limits to the amount that can be borrowed, and the figure of 5 per cent. is included in the proposals. Nevertheless, schools will no longer be able to pass back those surplus assets to the LEA, or sell them to enable some of the benefits from such a sale to be passed back to the LEA as currently takes place.

**Mr. Robin Squire** *rose—*

**Mr. Foster:** I am sure that the House would like the Minister to state whether I am incorrect.

**Mr. Squire:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I do not want to spend too much time at the Dispatch Box intervening. I ask the hon. Gentleman to think in wider terms than merely the assets pledged. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the private finance initiative, and there are a whole range of other options available. We are saying that grant-maintained schools have demonstrated that they can run themselves, and this is simply another area in which they can do so.

**Mr. Foster:** I suspect that the House would not wish to be detained by a detailed debate between the Minister and me on this issue, and it is a matter that we can pick up in Committee. I hope that the Minister accepts that the package of proposals on grant-maintained schools in the Bill tilts the playing field in favour of such schools. Certainly no Opposition Member is comfortable with any set of proposals that advantage grant-maintained schools to the detriment of local education authority schools.

**Sir Jim Spicer:** I am in a rather difficult position at the moment, because I have had a passionate plea from the chairman of the policy and resources committee of Dorset county council, Councillor Jones, to do all that I can to get funding under the PFI for a school that he wants built. Letters have been pouring in to me from Liberal Democrats in West Dorset, asking me to put my weight behind the proposal. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not going back on that. Does he think that I am doing the right thing in supporting that proposal?

**Mr. Foster:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to recommend that he accepts that request to support the PFI scheme. I hope that the Government will make better use of the PFI than they have done in a number of projects. I wish, for example, that they had taken my advice and used the PFI with regard to a Ministry of Defence building in my constituency. If they had done so, they could have saved £40 million of taxpayers' money.

The hon. Gentleman reminds the House of the considerable difficulty that many LEAs are having with capital expenditure, and he may be interested to know that 22.4 per cent. of the bids for capital assistance made to the Government were accepted this year. Many schools are in very serious difficulty because of their buildings, not least in the hon. Gentleman's LEA area.

I wish to deal with the more substantial—but, I believe, equally deficient—part of the Bill in respect of nursery education.

The right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) is not in his place, but I supported at least one part of his contribution to the debate, which was his impassioned and well-placed plea for increased provision for those children who have been identified as having special educational needs. I hope that the Minister will deal with that in his reply.

A number of right hon. and hon. Members have already mentioned the importance of high-quality early-years education—I think that all hon. Members agree that it is crucial and accept that it brings social, educational and economic benefits not only for the individual but for the nation. We must ask ourselves whether the proposals in the Bill provide the most effective means for expanding provision of high-quality early-years education, and the subsidiary question: could the proposals in any way harm the expansion of such provision?

**Mr. Spearing:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the use of the words "early-years education" is correct in so far as it covers a range of options? Does he also agree that, desirable though it is to have an expansion in the number of good playgroups, it would be wrong if the expansion meant either the diminution or elimination of nursery education, as statutorily defined? We need the expansion of both.

**Mr. Foster:** I entirely accept the points made by the hon. Gentleman, which probably have unanimous support across the Chamber.

**Mr. Spearing:** Not from Conservative Members.

**Mr. Foster:** I think that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber want diverse provision to be expanded, taking into account statutory provision, as well as that from the voluntary and the private sectors.

The hon. Gentleman is right that there are a number of problems with the language that is being used, which is why I prefer to use phrase "high-quality"—quality is crucial—"early-years education".

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) may be as confused as I am in trying to understand why, for example, the Office for Standards in Education is redefining the title of inspectors who deal in the sphere previously termed "early-years education"—the designated title is redefined as "pre-school education". I am concerned about that.

I question whether that type of provision will help to expand the nature of provision. I do not believe that it will. That view is supported by many organisations with expertise in early-years education. The majority of people who work in that sphere are extremely concerned about the proposals—they oppose them, believing that they may even harm some of the existing provision.

It is interesting to note that, in an intervention, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), chided Opposition Members and said that Conservative Members "listen to consultation". On this issue, there is no evidence that that is what they do. They do not even listen to a number of their own Members. For example, the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, said:

"would it not perhaps be better to think of widening existing provision than to bring in a new scheme against the background of limited money?"—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 487.]

The Conservative Education Association said in a statement earlier this month:

"we did not feel that a voucher scheme was the most efficient way of expanding pre-school provision".

It then expressed a number of concerns about the scheme. There is therefore considerable concern even from Members of the Conservative party.

The majority of local education authorities—including some Conservative-controlled authorities—have made their position clear by refusing to participate in the trials of the proposals contained in the Bill. Only four have been willing to get involved, yet the Government are going to rush ahead and introduce the Bill before the trials are even under way, let alone give us time to evaluate the outcome of the trials. So much for consultation.

The scheme in the proposed legislation brings with it a cumbersome, unnecessary and expensive bureaucracy. It will do nothing to expand provision for three-year-olds and could harm the provision that already exists. The scheme could, without the expense of further bureaucracy, be amenable to fraud and abuse. It prevents, through the market-driven approach that underpins it, any notion of strategic planning, and it could prevent effective co-operation and partnership between the providers.

The scheme reduces the possibility of developing links between education provision and care provision, as envisaged in the Children Act 1989, and could indeed damage some of the co-operation that already exists. Further, given that the likely voucher redemption value is the figure that has been quoted, the proposals will not ensure that new provision is made where none exists. The funds will simply not be available to meet existing running costs and ensure that money is made available for the training of new teachers and the building and equipping of new classrooms and schools.

Too much stress has been placed on the issue of choice. As the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden said in her contribution, in the majority of circumstances parents have no choice about where to send their children to school and in many cases the nursery voucher scheme will mean that they will get a voucher but will have nowhere to redeem it. The scheme is, after all, a big con trick.

The House should beware any legislation with so many blanks left in it—blanks that are expected to be filled in at the whim of the Secretary of State. Many of us highly value the briefs that the staff in the Library prepare for us. It is instructive to look, for example, at page 22 of the brief on the Bill, which says:

"Clause 1 empowers the Secretary of State to make arrangements for the making of grants in respect of nursery education."

It continues:

"As the Bill stands it does not lay down the form in which the arrangements will be made. It does not state that the arrangements will be made by Order."

It says:

"Clause 2 authorises the arrangements under clause 1 to include the provision for grant-making and related functions to be delegated, wholly or partly, without prejudice to the Secretary of State's powers."

It goes on:

"The clause does not specify to whom delegated powers may be given."

It says:

"Clause 3 provides for the Secretary of State to impose requirements on an authority or other persons in receipt of grants in respect of nursery education. The requirements are not specified and may be imposed on, or at any time after, the making of any grant, and may at any time be varied, waived or removed".

There are far too many blanks in this legislation. We should not accept legislation that gives the Secretary of State so much unfettered power. The Bill fails even to get near to a set of proposals that would ensure the provision of high-quality early-years education for all three and four-year-olds whose parents want it for their children. As I said earlier, such provision would be expensive, but it is a price worth paying. It is an investment in the future of this country and my party is committed to it.

We are committed to the funding of early-years education. We have made it clear that, if necessary, we would increase the income tax rate to pay for it. This Bill goes nowhere near any of that and it simply does not deserve a Second Reading.

6.18 pm

**Sir Rhodes Boyson** (Brent, North): My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) referred to some of the Education Acts that were passed in this and the previous three Parliaments. I was an Education Minister from 1979 to 1983 and Labour party policy was to oppose everything that we put through and then, five years later, to say that it agreed with us. That was true of parental choice of school, which was also opposed and voted against by the Liberals. They must remember that they voted against parental choice.

Similarly, the Liberals and Labour voted against the introduction of tests. It appears that they, too, have now been accepted. Labour policy is to follow five years

*[Sir Rhodes Boyson]*

behind Conservative policy. In another five years, we shall find Labour advocating vouchers—I will not say for three-year-olds, but for four-year-olds as we do now.

**Mr. Waterson:** Before my hon. Friend leaves the Liberal Democrats, he may not yet have seen a copy of the document, "Towards 1996", which bears the subtitles, "Ideas for Research and Campaigning" and "Liberal Democrat Whips Office", and states:

"Of all parties we are probably going to go into the election most intent on dismantling Tory education policy."

**Sir Rhodes Boyson:** It appears that there is a gap between what happens in Parliament and what hon. Members' researchers write before we meet. We shall have to leave it to the two Opposition parties to discuss which of them is the more reactionary.

There is, however, a philosophical difference between the Conservative party and the Liberal and Labour parties. We Conservatives trust people and believe that the more powers we give them, the better and more adult society will be. Labour and the Liberals trust elected local authority bodies and believe that councillors have some wisdom that ordinary people in the street do not have. On that theory, Members of Parliament have an even greater perception of what will happen in the future. That is a big difference, which comes through especially on the question of vouchers.

If people can decide what car they want to drive, where they want to live and the job that they want to do, surely to goodness they should be able to choose where they want their children to go to school. With a voucher, they could go from nursery to nursery until they find the one that suits their child. They could exercise the choice exercised by a certain Labour Member. I welcome that Member's exercise of choice, so long as everybody else can have the same freedom. If they cannot, there is something wrong with the philosophy of the Labour party.

I have always backed vouchers. I wrote a pamphlet on the education voucher 25 years ago and thought that I had invented it. I thought that it was something that came to me in a dream. I wrote it up immediately and then found that the Institute of Economic Affairs had produced a pamphlet on the subject. Later, I met Milton Friedman, who had also done some work on vouchers. I then found that Cardinal Bourne, an Australian, had written about them in 1926.

I can disclose something new to the House tonight. I can go still further back: in 1790, Tom Paine advocated giving all parents in America £4 to have their children educated. It may be that the matter goes back still further, to the Old Testament, but I have gone as far as I can for now and I call in the shadow of Tom Paine and "The Rights of Man" on our side of the argument about choice, grant-maintained schools and vouchers.

I want to say something about giving borrowing powers to grant-maintained schools. The great national debt was not created by parents and schools, but by Governments. How can Governments refuse to give others the right to borrow, knowing how much has been borrowed by Governments of all parties over the years? People on the spot will be more careful with their own money than Governments will ever be, because they themselves are responsible: they may have to get the assent of the Secretary of State, but they are responsible. I would sooner trust my money with the local friendly society than with a Government of any colour.

The grant-maintained schools have been very successful. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said that they made up only 4 per cent. of schools, but most of those are secondary schools. More than 1,000 schools have taken the initiative and 1,000 sets of people have voted in favour. They, rather than Opposition Members, are the libertarians of our time.

**Mr. Dunn:** In contrast with local authorities.

**Sir Rhodes Boyson:** Yes, in contrast with local authorities, including some Conservative-controlled ones. I shall not mention Brent in detail, but all except one of our secondary schools are grant maintained—I took no part in that process, because there could have been a re-vote if it had gone wrong—and they have all improved.

I believe that I can win in the next general election in Brent, North on the issue of grant-maintained schools. The Labour party does not realise how important that issue is in some places. Parents who have voted for grant-maintained status are not going to vote to let the Labour party undo it. That policy is a liability for Labour Members. They might catch up on that over the next three months instead of waiting five years to bring their policy into accord with ours. There is no doubt that if the Labour party won the general election and we had foundation schools, or whatever they are to be called, it would be the end of the grant-maintained school.

**Mr. Pawsey:** And the grammar schools.

**Sir Rhodes Boyson:** My hon. Friend is right. He did not go to a grammar school, but to a technical school. He is a technical man and all my technical knowledge comes from him. I rarely pay such tributes, and I had better get on now as I do not want to get the House too excited on these matters.

**Mr. Dunn:** There has been a great deal of debate about the decision of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) to send her child out of the local authority area in which she lives. Why did she make that decision? It was because she could not find a school in her locality that was up to the standard that she wanted for her child. Is that not the end of the telescope through which we should be looking? She could not find a suitable school locally, so she went 15 miles down the road.

**Sir Rhodes Boyson:** I commend my hon. Friend for his imagery. As an ex-Navy man, I must say that the analogy of the telescope is one of the best that I have heard in the House and we shall remember it for many days. The episode will be known from now on as the Peckham telescope and my hon. Friend will be linked with it for ever more.

If the Labour party won the next general election and decided to abolish grant-maintained schools, all those schools would lose at least 10 per cent. of their money. Staff would have to be sacked. I shall make sure that my

constituents know that. Labour would then put two socialist aldermen of great vintage on to all the governing bodies to bring them back into order.

**Mr. Pawsey:** Opposition Members all look like aldermen.

**Sir Rhodes Boyson:** I have to be careful because my father was a socialist alderman for 40 years. It took me a long time to reach the free society. If they were put on governing bodies, they would be clever and instrumental in what they said and did. Grant-maintained schools would lose their freedom to recruit pupils, and that would be the end of the grant-maintained system. I shall put forward that scenario at the next general election, whenever it comes.

The philosophical difference between the Labour and Liberal parties and the Conservative party is the belief that people can run their own destinies. Some people cannot, and one must do all that one can to look after them, but the more mature we can make people, the better our society will be. Both grant-maintained schools and the voucher system, which enables parents to choose where their children go to school, are opposed by local authorities, but they are great steps forward towards a free society in Britain.

6.30 pm

**Mr. Alan Keen** (Feltham and Heston): The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) asked why the Opposition oppose the Bill. I came here especially this evening to say why I oppose it. My borough of Hounslow has a top-class nursery system and we are terrified that the voucher system will damage it.

My speech will concentrate on the nursery voucher scheme rather than the other proposal in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) outlined the advantages of nursery education, so I shall not repeat them. I represent the western half of the borough of Hounslow and live in the other half. My local authority provides a nursery school place for every three-year-old and four-year-old child whose parents wish to take it up. The system is co-ordinated between schools and the local education authority. Teachers and nursery nurses are fully trained, and their training and quality is monitored regularly, contrary to what will happen under the nursery voucher system.

Conservative Members may as well stamp "Vote Conservative" on nursery vouchers, as they seem to think that pieces of paper worth £1,100 will make people vote Conservative. That is the basis of the scheme. People in areas with a solid, high-class nursery education system are worried and do not want their local authority's nursery education provision to be damaged. I want this Government and the forthcoming Labour Government to ensure that every child throughout the nation has a chance of high-class nursery education.

I was not happy with the Secretary of State's answer to my questions at an Education Select Committee meeting shortly before Christmas, when she accused me of putting the Hounslow administrative system before children's education. That is ridiculous. She made that accusation despite the fact that I said, following earlier cricket metaphors, that I did not intend to bowl out the Secretary of State but wanted to express genuine concern about the proposed nursery voucher system. I did not take kindly to the accusation that I was simply worried about Hounslow's administrative system. I am, however, concerned that the administration of education in Hounslow will be damaged because the local education authority provides the co-ordination necessary for a high-class nursery education system.

The Government say that they intend to carry out an experiment in four local authorities. I hope that it is a genuine experiment, as it appears that the decision has already been taken to proceed with the full system in 1997-98. We heard tonight that inspection costs are already included in the first year's budget.

Hounslow's nursery education service has been funded and built up over the years partly by paring a certain amount of money from secondary and primary education budgets. Secondary and primary school head teachers in the borough are aware that Government cuts in revenue support grant have forced down real expenditure and the money that they need cannot be provided, but they are happy about maintaining the balance between nursery education and primary and secondary education costs because they realise that their job of educating children is made easier when children have been through nursery education and reception classes. The advantages of nursery education last not just for one or two years, but throughout young people's education and even result in a reduction in crime rates. Children in Hounslow do not just learn academically, but understand social exchanges. The fact that they learn give and take at the age of three is reflected in better behaviour throughout the secondary school system. That is why secondary school head teachers in Hounslow are happy to see that balance of expenditure maintained.

**Dr. Hampson:** If the local authority system is so brilliant, all parents will use it and the local authority will receive the £1,100. If, as the hon. Gentleman says, it costs more, his authority will still be able to invest that extra amount and maintain the system. But we do not know whether the local authority system is as brilliant as he claims. People used to think that the education systems in Islington and Lambeth were brilliant; we now discover that the Labour leader and his acolytes have seen something better outside. That will have an impact. If choice is offered in the hon. Gentleman's area, parents may find better nursery schools than those provided by his local council.

**Mr. Keen:** If the hon. Gentleman doubts the quality of nursery education in Hounslow, I should be delighted to show him around.

**Dr. Hampson:** Put it to the test.

**Mr. Keen:** I should be delighted if the hon. Gentleman would come to Hounslow. I wish that he could have come before voting in the Lobby today as he might have changed his mind. He says that parents might not spend all their vouchers in Hounslow. It is a pity that nursery teachers, and also parents whose children already benefit from nursery education in Hounslow, will not have a chance to talk to every parent who will suddenly receive a voucher and who may be attracted by child-minding

*[Mr. Keen]*

organisations operating from halls, libraries or committee rooms. If vouchers are sent out by the hundreds in Hounslow, a certain number of parents are bound to be tempted by organisations that offer no more than child minding, and they may not realise their mistake until it is much too late. Moreover, if people choose to spend their vouchers on organisations that do not offer a high standard of education, qualified nursery education teachers will be put out of work and replaced by people who, under these proposals, do not have to be trained.

I am sure that Conservative Members may already be going round the country signing agreements for cricket pavilions, sports halls and bus shelters in areas where there is no nursery education. People will be able to make a profit out of the system, but the premises will be unsatisfactory. No requirements are made about the quality of premises and, even if there were, the inspection system will not be in place soon enough.

**Mr. Pawsey:** There is a demand for quality of premises. The demand will come from parents—the point made by my hon. Friends. We want to emphasise the fact that we should trust parents, who want the best for their own children, in exactly the same way as the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) do.

**Mr. Keen:** I am concerned about those parents who do not have an opportunity to choose in Hounslow before they place their vouchers somewhere else. I am worried about parents who spend the vouchers for their children to receive child care in cricket pavilions and barns in areas of the country where there is nothing else to choose from. I am worried that their money may be spent on such premises.

I should love hon. Members to come and compare Hounslow's nursery education with that in other parts of the country. I should be delighted to come and look at nursery education in areas where there are virtually no facilities at present. There is an enormous difference in quality between Hounslow's nursery education and the nursery education in those other areas. The cost of monitoring private schemes around the country will be enormous. More importantly, time will be wasted during the vital years of children's education—when they are aged three, four and five—as they will attend schools that will not be of the same standard as their parents could have chosen.

I wish to explain the benefits of nursery education, but I shall keep my remarks to a minimum. It is vital that nursery schools are monitored and co-ordinated by a local education authority to ensure that we have the highest standards of education and training.

**Mr. David Congdon** (Croydon, North-East): I am intrigued to know why the hon. Gentleman has such faith in local education authorities to ensure high standards when we know that the standards of education in many inner-city areas such as Islington and Camden, to name but two, are so abysmal that Opposition Members send their children elsewhere. Why does the hon. Gentleman have such faith in the ability of local education authorities to maintain standards when they have clearly failed abysmally in so many parts of the country?

**Mr. Keen:** When I began my speech I said that I would concentrate on my borough and the fears that our first-class nursery education will be damaged. I invite any Conservative Member to come to Hounslow, where I will show him or her exactly what high-class nursery education is.

If anyone doubts the value of local education authority monitoring, I shall convince him or her by reading from a letter. It was not written in response to the nursery scheme, but was sent from one of the voluntary-aided schools in the borough. The school was concerned about the way in which the Government were almost forcing it to come out from under local education authority control. The letter states:

> "Finally, once again, the Government seek to finance the proposals by reducing the moneys made available to our local education authority and thus adversely affecting the funding of our governing body and the support mechanisms which are so important to our work for the children in our care."

Such support will not occur under the nursery voucher scheme.

I returned from Dublin at the new year with some great good-news-and-bad-news stories which are, unfortunately, unsuitable for the House of Commons, but I have a good-news-and-bad-news ending for my speech. The voucher scheme is bad news for Conservative Members who represent areas with a high-class nursery education system because that education system will be damaged and because if those Conservative Members vote with the Government today they, too, will suffer badly as a result. There is good news, however, for the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who has disappeared, and for others in Ealing, North because, despite many years of Conservative control, there is almost no nursery education to damage in that area. There is excellent news for hon. Members who represent the borough to the south of Hounslow—Richmond and Twickenham—where, despite 20-odd years of Liberal and Liberal Democrat control, there is almost no nursery education to damage. There is good news for those hon. Members, but bad news for hon. Members who represent areas that have been used to a high-class nursery education. I hope that high-class nursery education will not be replaced by some sort of child minding in barns, cricket pavilions and even bus shelters.

6.45 pm

**Mr. Graham Riddick** (Colne Valley) *rose*—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful to my hon. Friends.

Curiosity forced me to ask my hon. Friend the Minister what the headline was in tonight's *Evening Standard*. I discover that it is "Blair's Wall of Silence"—I cannot imagine what it is referring to. An article inside the newspaper quotes Southwark council as saying that what has happened

> "is obviously not an advertisement for our schools".

Indeed, it is not.

It was interesting and instructive to listen to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on the "World at One" this afternoon.

The first question that he was asked was, of course, about the decision of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) to send her son to a particular school. The right hon. Gentleman refused to enter into a debate on the subject and refused to answer the question. He said that he had agreed to appear on the programme only if he was not asked a question about that subject. It appears that no one wants to talk about the hon. Member for Peckham, but I intend to come to her defence—well, sort of.

I congratulate the hon. Lady on having done what she thinks is best for her son. I congratulate the Conservative Government on having given her the opportunity to exercise her choice. I find it appalling that Labour Members seek to deny that choice to other parents while taking advantage of it for themselves—that is the hypocrisy. Labour's stakeholding proposal is becoming clear: the idea is to get a stake in society now and exercise parental choice now while the Tories are in power. Our message to the British people is that they will have to keep the Tories in power if they wish to retain the opportunity to exercise choice in education, and in other sectors.

The Education Reform Act 1988 was a turning point. As we all know, that Act—along with other measures—has attempted to drive up standards and give more power and choice to parents. If the Leader of the Opposition had really believed in stakeholding, he would have supported taking away power from local authorities and giving it to individual schools; he would have supported giving parents the opportunity to take their schools completely out of the hands of local authorities. But he and his party have vehemently opposed those moves; they have opposed all our moves to give parents more choice.

The Conservative Government have attempted to drive up standards and give parents more information by introducing the national curriculum and formal testing and publishing exam results. The so-called stakeholder from Sedgefield opposed the lot. But while the self-confessed Sedgefield sloganiser comes out with his soundbites, the Conservative Government steadily provide more choice to parents. This Bill is part of that process. Giving parents of four-year-olds vouchers to redeem against their children's education—which the parents choose—is extending the concept of parental power in a real and radical way.

**Mr. Spearing:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the language that he has just used. As far as he is concerned, one of the advantages of the system is that some parents will be able to top up a voucher for approximately half of nursery education provision in order to provide full or three quarter nursery education. However, other parents will not be able to do that. Does he regard that as one of the advantages of parental choice that is allied to income?

**Mr. Riddick:** Of course parents will have that choice, but local authorities will be able to do that also. Local authorities currently spend beyond their standard spending assessments on full-time nursery places for four-year-olds. They will continue to be able to do that. Money has been taken from them by way of reduced grants in order to pay for two and a half days of nursery education, but local authorities will retain money to spend on nursery education if they so choose. That is the reality of the situation. Many people in the education world and on the Opposition Benches oppose nursery vouchers because they extend parental choice.

Vouchers will also lead to more diversity in pre-school provision. There will be more competition between providers. Sadly, many in the education world abhor competition, but it will drive up standards, not reduce them. Nursery vouchers will also result in more establishments from which to choose. Once parents have had a taste of exercising real choice under the voucher system, there will be no going back. They will not relinquish that choice and, who knows, they may demand that vouchers be introduced for primary and secondary schools also.

I do not wish to belittle in any way the genuine concerns expressed by many of those involved in providing nursery education. It is thoroughly understandable that they should be concerned about a new development which, to an extent, takes them into uncharted waters. Therefore, it is very important that we provide information about the new scheme to school heads and to teachers as soon as possible. It is even more crucial that we do not allow the scheme's administrators and the so-called "professional experts" within the Department for Education and Employment to overload the new scheme with unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation. That is exactly what happened with the national curriculum.

Genuine concerns are one thing; scare stories and downright lies are another. I am sure that Conservative Members will have experienced the latter from Labour politicians, from some in the education world and from Labour councils in our constituencies. My own council, Labour-controlled Kirklees, has used pupils to distribute disingenuous propaganda against the voucher scheme to parents. That is an absolute disgrace.

We have heard that local authorities will be deprived of millions of pounds in grants. However, we do not hear how all that money and more will be circulated to parents within the council areas. Opposition Members have said that nursery provision for three-year-olds will no longer be available. That is totally untrue because councils will be able to spend the same amount of money on nursery education for three-year-olds as they do currently. That money will not be deducted from local council grants or from SSAs. The same applies to full-time places for four-year-olds, as I made clear to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

This relatively short Bill contains no mention of vouchers, despite the fact that the Government clearly intend to provide vouchers to parents. I think that we should be more explicit about our intentions. If, by some appalling mishap, a Labour Government were elected, they would not have to pass any primary legislation in order to abolish the voucher system. That is a mistake, because I believe that Labour would seek to reduce parental power and choice, preferably by the back door. We should ensure that, if ever a Labour Government tried to do that, there will be an almighty row not only in our constituencies but in the House.

I shall refer briefly to the second part of the Bill. I am happy to support any measure that is intended to help grant-maintained schools and to encourage other schools to go grant maintained. Those schools that have assumed GM status have been very successful. Their exam results and discipline have improved and more subjects are being taught. GM schools have also proved popular with parents.

*[Mr. Riddick]*

But, in truth, GM status does not create a type of school: it merely gives schools greater independence and frees them from the control and diktat of local education authorities. GM schools are successful because they have taken advantage of their new-found freedom. They know that they will stand or fall according to their own efforts. Each GM school will develop its own ethos and individual approach according to the requirements of parents and local needs.

I believe that the time has come to extend that freedom from local eduation authority control to all secondary schools without their having to take the divisive step of holding a ballot. All secondary schools would then become autonomous establishments within the state sector. They would develop different approaches to delivering education and each school would develop its own ethos. Competition between schools would be intense and competition in education would have the same effect as competition everywhere else: it would keep schools on their toes and drive up standards.

I have gone a little beyond the scope of the Bill in my remarks, but I hope that my points about GM status will appear in the next education Bill. In the meantime, I am delighted to support the Second Reading of this Bill, which will result in greater diversity in nursery education provision for pre-fives and give parents more choice and more say.

6.56 pm

**Ms Margaret Hodge** (Barking): The Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill represents a tragic wasted opportunity, not only for our children's future but for the future well-being of our nation. However, the voucher scheme will give parents a chance to judge clearly the difference in purpose and in principle between the two main political parties.

The Government's proposals are driven by dogma and not by the needs of children and their families. That dogma says that private is good and public is bad, and it has led the Government to use the very limited resources available to subsidise places for the few in the private sector rather than focusing on providing new, quality places for many in other sectors. Even the private sector does not applaud that dogma because it fears that it will lead to cowboy operators catering for the very young in our community.

The Government's proposals are based on dogma which is founded in their obsessive and irrational hatred of local government. That has led the Government to waste millions of pounds creating a new bureaucracy to administer the scheme rather than working in partnership with local authorities, which could be responsible for its administration. The Government's proposals are based on dogma to the extent that they prefer to skimp on investing in the talents and potential of our young people and instead spend millions on the waste of talent and potential of young people on the dole.

The Government's plans are not just dogmatic; they are riddled with waste and inefficiencies. So much so that the Government admitted recently that they will fail in their lesser promise to provide places for all four-year-olds. Even they have now said that they cannot guarantee a place for all four-year-olds in the pilot authorities. I would welcome the intervention of the Minister, if he dares, to say that when Westminster starts the scheme in a few months, there will be a place for every four-year-old as a result of the voucher scheme in that borough.

**Mr. Robin Squire:** I am happy to intervene on the hon. Lady, although she asked a rather strange question. It is self-evidently the case in all the phase 1 areas—indeed, throughout the country—that there is scope for expansion of nursery education. The voucher will make it much more likely—

**Mr. Stephen Byers** (Wallsend): Come on, answer the question.

**Mr. Squire:** If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, I am answering the hon. Lady's question. Self-evidently, the voucher is the quickest way to cause different types of providers to create more nursery education. We are still waiting to hear how Labour would provide nursery education. Perhaps the hon. Lady will tell us how she would provide it.

**Ms Hodge:** I agree that expansion is needed—we have been telling the Government so for a very long time. The Government could fulfil their promise to the people of Westminster that there will be a place for every four-year-old in Westminster if they spent the money, not on an ill-thought-out, ill-conceived voucher scheme, but on creating more places, training more teachers and providing appropriate facilities for four-year-olds.

When the Minister—as Conservative Members do—speaks about choice in nursery education, it should be remembered that choice does not exist for the people of Westminster, because there are not enough places. It is impossible to choose if there is nowhere to go. No place—no choice.

Equally, in an earlier intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the Minister admitted that some of the money that has been set aside in what is now called the first phase rather than the pilot for the voucher scheme, will be used to train inspectors. Let us get that position clear; let us be aware of how ill thought out the voucher scheme is.

In order seriously to inspect all the settings that will provide nursery places for four-year-olds, on their own admission the Government require 4,000 inspectors. At present, three inspectors in the Department for Education and Employment are appropriately qualified for such inspections. In addition, 200 inspectors in the country at large have been registered as qualified to undertake the required inspection. No way—even with all the money that has been set aside—will the Government be able to find and train the 4,000 people that they, on their own admission, require if they are properly to inspect the nursery settings in which the voucher scheme will operate.

There will not be a proper inspection; it will be a "light-touch inspection". It will not be the Office for Standards in Education inspection to which we are used, in which at least three or four days are spent in each nursery school. It will be a one-day inspection, which will be superficial and "light-touch" and will not ensure the quality and standards to which our young people are entitled.

We all know that investing in the early years of a child's life makes sense. On that, I believe that there is broad consensus in the House. Not only does it make sense; it is essential if we are serious about raising standards, and if we are serious about providing equality of opportunity for all our children.

Sixty per cent. of a child's intellectual growth occurs before the age of six—a staggering figure. The early years are obviously crucial to the child's potential and later performance. Yet what do the Government suggest in the Bill? They suggest two and a half hours a day, if the child is lucky, in a place that will be registered, not by professional educationists from the Department for Education and Employment, but by a management consultancy. That is the organisation that does the job in the pilot authorities, a management consultancy—Capita, for Conservative Members' information—which acts as the Government's agency and which, on its own admission, knows very little about education.

Children would spend two and a half hours a day in a place where, we learn from other Government proposals, space standards will be cut. Space standards are crucial to facilitate the child's development at that early age. Two and a half hours a day, when rigorous Ofsted inspection of nursery education is to be replaced by that light-touch inspection; two and a half hours a day, when the outcomes expected from the children make every self-respecting nursery teacher laugh because they are so limited.

**Mr. Spearing:** The phrase "light touch" will be greeted with amusement by teachers in schools of pupils older than nursery age.

Has my hon. Friend also heard that it is possible that Ofsted, in the form of the chief inspector, who plays an important role in that matter, may sub-contract that inspecting role to organisations that at the moment are nothing to do with Ofsted. I do not know whether the Minister can confirm that when he replies; perhaps my hon. Friend can. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is not merely a light touch, but a palsied touch?

**Ms Hodge:** I agree entirely with the sentiments underlying that question. My guess is that, were the present Government to continue to be in office when that expansion—so-called introduction—of nursery vouchers takes place, the settings would not be inspected, in the way that many primary schools are currently not inspected because there is a huge shortage of appropriately qualified and appropriately registered inspectors to carry out the task.

I am scandalised that the proposals before the House are all that the Government are prepared to do for the young children of today, who will become the adults of tomorrow. I cannot believe that anyone would consider that to be the best way to invest in our future and our children's future.

If children develop as much and as quickly in their early years as research suggests, we cannot treat those years in the dilettante fashion that these proposals do. We need to fulfil the promise given by both political parties, far too many decades ago, that every child whose parents so wish should be entitled to free, high quality nursery education. That should be the case, not only for four-year-olds, but for three-year-olds. I welcome the statement by my hon. Friend the Member for Brightside that Labour will set targets so that we achieve that aim.

We must go further. Two and a half hours a day for four-year-olds represents only about 1 per cent. of a child's early life. If so much development occurs so early, we cannot continue to ignore what happens to young children during the rest of their day. We cannot presume, as the Government do, that the early years of a child's life are solely a private concern of parents, with the community intervening only at points of crisis when, for example, children are at risk of abuse.

Things have changed since people first had the idea of nursery education. Any Government who are committed to the future, as Labour is, would adapt their programmes to meet the circumstances of the future. I am afraid that the proposals in the Bill—the proposals of a tired Tory Government, bereft of ideas and devoid of a clear vision—cannot do it.

In the world of today and the world of tomorrow, life for the young child has changed. Mothers work because they want and need to do so. They work when their children are younger. Nearly half the mothers with children under the age of five work, and that figure is set to rise to seven out of 10 mothers by the turn of the century. Matters are made more difficult because more and more parents can no longer rely on their families to help with child care. About one in two families seek formal child care arrangements when the parents work. They must find childminders or go for more flexible nursery provision.

With growing insecurity on the streets, fewer and fewer children can go to school alone. When we were young, probably about 80 per cent. of us in the Chamber went to school alone. Today, only 9 per cent. of children are allowed to do so. In that context, two and a half hours' nursery education a day is no longer appropriate for many families. For children who would most benefit from a good quality nursery experience, it is probably the least appropriate. All too often, a mother on shift work cannot choose her hours of employment to fit in with traditional nursery hours. If Conservative Members really have the interests of children and their parents at heart, they would think afresh, as we are doing. We must build on understanding of the importance of quality nursery education and integrate it in a real and practical way with child care and play, so that young children get the best start in life.

A child's learning does not miraculously start at three or four years of age but at birth. A family's needs do not suddenly change when a child is three or four but when a child is born. A responsible Government would respond to real needs by building services that are education-focused and child-centred, but which recognise the changed world in which we live. That is the vision and strategy for the future. An ill-conceived, ill-thought-out voucher scheme is not even a strategy for today, let alone one for the future. Thank goodness that the scheme is never likely to be implemented before the country rids itself of this failed Government, and that we shall have £185 million to spend more sensibly on expanding nursery education.

In the last couple of weeks, we have heard much about the stakeholder society—to which Conservative Members in particular have made several references. In that policy area, the importance of the concept is clear and the difference between Labour and the Government is distinct. We all have a stake in our children in their early years—3.8 million children are under five, and what

*[Ms Hodge]*

happens to them matters to us all. We all have a stake in their future. Children obviously need the best possible start if they are to develop their potential. Their stake in nursery education is their future. Their parents obviously want the best for their children and clearly have responsibilities to them. Ensuring that we build the skills needed for the future gives employers a stake in pre-school education. People who work in pre-school education have a stake, with rights to proper training and conditions, and an obligation to provide a quality experience for the children. Local authorities also have a stake, with a right to plan for their localities and an obligation to ensure quality education.

The stakeholder society requires high-quality nursery education and care, which is why Labour's approach and policies would be fundamentally different from those incorporated in the Bill. Labour would go for quality and standards—no light-touch inspections for us and no uniform £1,100 per child, which ignores the real cost of quality education and the extra expense of children with special needs—as the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) pointed out. Labour would go for value for money. We would not waste investment on yet another unaccountable quango and yet more pieces of paper and bureaucracy. Labour would go for equity as between individuals and areas. Under Labour, there would be no absurd punishing of authorities such as Solihull for investing a lot of money in nursery education, nor the rewarding of authorities such as Bromley that have an abysmal record of failing to spend their allocated budgets on nursery provision. There would be no subsidies for the well-to-do mum who is already paying for a full-time nursery place, while the needs of lone parents for two and a half hours' provision a day are not met.

Labour would go for common sense, not dogma built on irrational hostility to local government. Under Labour, there would be no prejudices that favour the private at the expense of the public. Labour would go for vision and the future. It is in young children that all our futures lie. If we are to build a future that brings hope and prosperity to all, we cannot afford nursery education on the cheap—which is the essence of the Bill and why it will never come to pass. The Bill is just one of many policies that form the dreadful record on which the Government will be tried, judged and swiftly evicted.

7.16 pm

**Mr. Michael Stern** (Bristol, North-West): I shall confine my comments to the parts of the Bill, principally clause 6, that concern grant-maintained schools, and I shall explain the circumstances surrounding particular effects in my constituency.

I start by referring briefly to some background items. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Islamia primary school in the London borough of Brent made two applications to form part of the state education system, but both were rejected. In deciding to reject the second application, the Department for Education made it clear in a letter to the school's governors dated 18 August 1993 that the Secretary of State accepted

"that there was clear evidence of denominational need . . . that only qualified teachers would be employed . . . the National Curriculum would be followed; and that the governors would seek to ensure equal opportunities for boys and girls"

in the new state school. The application was rejected on the ground of surplus places in existing schools within a two-mile radius which parents did not particularly want. To sugar the pill, the letter concluded that the Secretary of State's

"drive to reduce surplus school capacity, including through the new statutory provision in the Education Act 1993, should open up opportunities for new schools to enter the system, whether as voluntary aided schools maintained by LEAs or as new self-governing (grant-maintained) schools".

In the light of subsequent events, one must ask whether the Government were serious in making that pledge at the time.

On 9 August 1994, the Government issued a weighty document entitled "Guidance to promoters on establishing new self-governing (grant-maintained) schools under Section 49 of the Education Act 1993". It gave detailed guidance to people who proposed to promote new, self-governing grant-maintained schools. Despite the issue of that document, it is interesting to note how many of the applications made as a result of it have been successful.

So far, a number of applications have not stayed the course. A Jewish school in Leeds withdrew its application. Two schools in the Wirral, which were quite close to the state system as ex-direct-grant Catholic schools, made applications that may have been approved. A school in Borehamwood is still under consideration, and a school in my constituency, called Oak Hill, made an application, about which I shall talk in slightly more detail later. That is the second piece of background information. The system was designed to encourage applications, but so far it has been remarkably unsuccessful.

In an Adjournment debate on 19 December 1994, which I felt obliged to introduce to discuss what was going wrong in state secondary education in schools in Bristol, North-West and what could be done about it, I referred to what was generally then perceived as a failure on the part of the state education system—at secondary level in my constituency—to provide what the rest of the county of Avon, which is now mercifully coming to the end of its days, would regard as an acceptable level of attainment at GCSE and A-level. I pointed out that what the county would regard as an acceptable level of attainment would not be acceptable in most of the rest of the country. I also pointed out that what distinguished the county's approach to education was a rabid opposition to grant-maintained status. I believe that that is still true today.

I then discussed the achievements of the state secondary schools in my constituency during the previous years. I pointed out that, with the honourable exception of one voluntary-aided, broadly Catholic school, every single school in my constituency had not managed to achieve results that reached even the low average attained by the county as a whole, let alone the average attained in the country.

I am pleased to say that, since that Adjournment debate, there have been a number of improvements. Henbury school has now succeeded in meeting the county average for GCSE results. To do so, it had to make such a major leap that, one year, it reached *The Times* top 20 of most improved schools. Improvements have also been made in other schools in my constituency. Nevertheless, it is still true that, in the near-monolithic system of local authority maintained secondary schools in Bristol North-West, only

one—a voluntary-aided school—has consistently performed better than the national and county averages, and another has at last reached those averages. Several others are showing improvements.

In that Adjournment debate, I pointed out—and it is just as true today—that the Government have been in power for 15 years and, in that time, their policies have made no significant impact on educational attainment in the schools in my constituency.

**Mr. Spearing:** Despite the hon. Gentleman's rather tangential approach to the Bill, which he is entitled to take, does he agree that policies also need resources, the motivation of teachers and sensitive support for their difficult tasks? Does he think that the Government over the past 15 years have provided the encouragement, understanding and resources for his schools, administered locally, to perform a proper task?

**Mr. Stern:** The hon. Gentleman is seeking to draw me even further from the Bill. If he does not mind, I will continue with the trend of my remarks, during which the answers to his questions may become apparent.

I was heartened when I read an interview with the Prime Minister in *The Times* on 24 August 1995. In that interview, he said:

"We should also make it easier to open new schools and to allow new independent schools to opt into the state-funded system and become grant maintained."

I was heartened by the Prime Minister's comments because I knew that an application for just such a school, in an area where it was deeply needed, had been before the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for almost a year. That application was to be before the Secretary of State for almost two years.

Oak Hill school, which was started in my constituency as a Christian-based independent primary school with strong ambitions and qualities that would enable it to provide secondary education, put forward in 1994—it may even have been slightly earlier—a proposal for a 675-place, five-to-16 school to be established in an area of undoubted educational need. There was a lack of places near the proposed school, which was to have been built in a new town in my constituency called Bradley Stoke. Inevitably, the school needed to acquire land on which to build, but that did not matter because land was available, which already had planning permission for educational purposes. The school needed to demonstrate, which would not have been difficult, that there was a lack of surplus places in the immediate vicinity, and to prove that a new school would fit comfortably into the state education system. It would have been, as I have made clear already, the only grant-maintained school in my constituency, and—with the exception of the voluntary-aided school that I mentioned—it would have been the only school in my constituency that was other than local authority maintained.

Eventually, after almost two years under consideration—a period that any business organisation would find drove it close to bankruptcy—the application was rejected by the Secretary of State on 15 December 1995. It is worth considering, in the context of the Bill, the reasons why the Secretary of State rejected that application. First, it was rejected because the Secretary of State found unwillingness on the part of the local education authority to release the land on which the school would be built, so that a compulsory purchase order would be necessary. I fail to understand why, if that was a reason for rejection, it was not pointed out to the school two years earlier. The local education authority, as I said, was rabidly opposed to grant-maintained status, so it was not surprising that it would not release the land. However, the local education authority has made it clear that it is unlikely to want to build its own school on the land for at least 10 years. Nevertheless, that was one of the reasons given for rejection.

The second, and in my view more worrying, reason for rejection of the application for a grant-maintained school in my constituency was, to quote the Secretary of State, "insufficient evidence of demand". I have a couple of points to make in that regard. First, evidence of demand comes—it was made clear in the Secretary of State's letter of rejection—from the local authority. Would anyone ask a local education authority such as Avon for evidence of demand for a grant-maintained school within its boundaries? The answer, of course, is to look for other evidence—and other evidence was forthcoming.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. I have been very tolerant, but I am beginning to wonder how much of the hon. Gentleman's speech has anything to do with the Bill.

**Mr. Stern:** I am happy to explain, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill is about expanding powers for grant maintenance. I am trying to show that it is pointless trying to pass a Bill for that purpose if the Government are rejecting applications for GM status in the first place. I hope, however, to come to a conclusion shortly.

A local university survey has made it clear that the number of secondary school-aged children in Bradley Stoke will rise from 550 in 1994 to more than 1,500 by 1999. More than 550 new dwellings a year are going up there, and local employment is growing even faster.

**Ms Jean Corston** (Bristol, East) *rose—*

**Mr. Stern:** I am sorry, but I have promised to finish soon. Yet it was deemed more relevant, when rejecting the application, that there were surplus places that parents did not want in schools in what has now become another LEA than that there was a demand for places in the neighbourhood in question.

Next, I want to examine the contrast between the results of those events and the aspirations of the Government, as expressed in the Bill. The Government would seem to aspire to expand the powers and the provenance of grant maintenance in education. Yet in my constituency not only has the only likely opportunity for grant maintenance in the state education system for the next few years been rejected, but there will be a record number of appeals against secondary school placements this year.

The Government claim as justification for their policy in the Bill the fact that they favour choice, diversity and quality in state education. So do I. Those are the education features on which I believe I was elected to the House on three separate occasions. Is it any wonder, viewing the Bill, that I intend to judge the Government more by their performance than by their policies? Is it any wonder that I should ask, on behalf of my constituents, whether—to

*[Mr. Stern]*

show my concern at a Government who promise one thing and then do the opposite—I should find myself in the uncomfortable position of joining the Opposition in the Lobby tonight?

7.32 pm

**Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): Is it always a pleasure to participate in education debates, because they give us the opportunity to listen to the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), who has unfortunately left the Chamber. He said that the vouchers idea had come to him in a dream. I think so too. In fact, I think the whole Bill must have come to someone in a dream, probably induced by illegal substances.

The right hon. Gentleman also called in aid Tom Paine who, he said, advocated spending £4 a year on educating the children of America. That is probably about the same amount of money in real terms as is spent now. One wonders whether it was a spending commitment—no wonder the French revolutionaries tried to bump Paine off. I can just imagine him wandering around the forests of 18th century America denouncing local authorities for the lack of choice in their nursery schools and inveighing on the subject of the capital programme needed to restore run-down log cabins and teepees.

To be fair, the right hon. Member for Brent, North also made a more serious point. He envisaged parents—following the passage of the Bill—taking their children and their vouchers from one nursery institution to another to find the best one. That sounds like the sort of choice that Conservative Members have been talking about all day. Is the right hon. Gentleman really suggesting that parents of four-year-olds are going to wander around putting them into one school after another—put them in, become dissatisfied, take them out again, and put them somewhere else? Under the Government's plans—even at the moment—most of them will be there for only a year anyway. The idea is preposterous and represents one of the major flaws in a proposal that has not been thought through.

Any legislation on early-years education provision, especially nursery schools, must be judged by one clear criterion: by how much will it extend and improve nursery provision? The pattern of provision across Britain has, for historical reasons, been extremely patchy—not just differing from one LEA to another, because some of them have placed more or less emphasis on nursery education, but differing within LEAs. I think particularly of the shire counties after they were reformed in the early 1970s.

My county, Lancashire, inherited extensive provision in boroughs such as Burnley and Blackburn, but virtually nothing in more rural districts and small towns. Since then, Lancashire has engaged in a long struggle to improve, and even to introduce, provision in many of its districts, especially rural districts.

To do that, Lancashire has made use of rising-five provision. Pupils are admitted full time to school from the beginning of the year in which their fifth birthday falls, as happens in many other authorities. Summer-born children are therefore already covered by the period that the vouchers purport to cover. Moreover, a large proportion of spring and autumn-born children receive one or two terms of nursery schooling under Lancashire's current scheme. The county has also used spare space in some primary schools and converted it to nursery classes; and there has been a slow but steady programme of new build of specially designed and planned nursery schools.

In recent years, Lancashire has also used a sparsity criterion to locate some nursery classes in rural areas and scattered parts such as Burscough. By these means, since 1981 Lancashire has increased proper nursery places from about 1,000 to about 4,000. In no case has this increased provision been less than enthusiastically received or less than fully taken up, yet there is still enormous unsatisfied demand, leading to a proliferation of private play schools, daycare centres and nurseries of all kinds.

Despite all this, the demand is still far from being met. Parents are not daft: they know that full-blown nursery education is the best thing for their children and, in my area at least, they know that it is best provided by LEA nursery schools and parents clamour to get their children into them.

Formerly, as a county councillor, and now as a Member of Parliament, have had irate parents queueing up at my surgeries to complain that they cannot get their children into an LEA nursery school. I tell them that the schools are oversubscribed and suggest that they try a private nursery, but they do not want to do that because they know that nursery education is best provided by LEA schools and they want their children to go to them.

Local education authorities have been forced to target their provision, often giving preference to disadvantaged families. Recent research shows clearly the considerable long-term social and cultural advantages of nursery education, so the policy pursued by authorities such as Lancashire shows a great deal of long-sighted common sense. We only wish that it had been shared by Governments over the past few decades.

The extension of nursery education by willing local authorities has been shackled, first, by the Government's tight spending restrictions; secondly, by what was formerly the Conservatives' belief—as expressed by a previous Secretary of State—that nursery education was at worst irrelevant and at best not proven to be useful; and, thirdly, by the method of calculating standard spending assessment for under-fives education.

A long-standing gripe of many local authorities is that they receive SSA for the number of under-fives in the population, but no account is taken of their spending on nursery education. For years, many authorities have collected SSA for the number of under-fives in their population and then spent it on whatever else they wished, whereas local authorities making good and decent provision have received similar amounts of money but been committed to spending it on nursery education only. That has caused some anger among the good providers. Ministers have often said that they do not want to circumscribe how local authorities use their money on under-fives provision. I understand that argument, but I disagree with it.

Recent changes in the political make-up of local authorities have meant that more and more authorities, no longer controlled by Conservatives, can spend their due resources on nursery education. That is good. The steady increase in resources directed to the ends that most local authorities aspire to achieve will eventually enable them to fill more and more of the gaps in provision in a way that parents will enthusiastically approve of, using

existing criteria and expertise and broadening and targeting until the supply encompasses every three and four-year-old—therefore effectively ending the need for targeting.

The Government, however, have introduced a wheeze that will take resources away from local education authorities—a major motive behind the Bill—for a job that even this Government do not usually complain about. The wheeze is intended to finance what might well prove to be a spatchcock provision that is so uncertain that it needs a vast new bureaucracy to organise and watch over it.

The voucher scheme will secure little or no additional provision, but it will certainly dislocate existing LEA provision. It will focus on four-year-olds, despite the fact that the Department's figures show that only 4 per cent. of four-year-olds are not provided for at the moment. Not only will the voucher scheme do nothing for three-year-olds, it might hold back any extension of nursery education to them. Many nursery places in Lancashire are occupied by three-year-olds who would not be eligible for vouchers. There is a distinct possibility—indeed, a probability—that nursery schools will not replace those three-year-olds with new three-year-olds, but will choose instead voucher holders—four-year-olds.

The voucher scheme will assist those who can already afford to pay for their children's nursery education—a point made powerfully by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden)—but it will do nothing to create places for poorer families who cannot cover the shortfall between the value of the voucher and the actual cost of a place. The poorer the family, the less choice there is in everything from transport to access to information. It is facile for Conservative Members to keep saying that it is easy for everybody to shop around. It is not. In scattered areas in my part of Lancashire it is difficult to get a child to the nearest school—never mind shopping around a number of schools. It is difficult to organise transport to get the children to school, especially in the half of my constituency that has one of the lowest car ownership rates in the country.

If the Government's shaky estimate of the number involved in the scheme proves to be an underestimate, the value of the voucher will probably be reduced, further skewing provision away from the less-well-off family. My LEA estimates that vouchers to the value of £21 million might be issued to Lancashire parents of four-year-olds. That means that Lancashire's revenue support grant will be reduced by more than £17 million—65 per cent. of its SSA relating to under-fives. Of course, LEAs that have small provision will suffer correspondingly less grant reduction.

**Mr. Robin Squire:** As this matter has been raised outside the House several times, I want to make the purely arithmetical point that, to the extent that any LEA caters for precisely the same number of four-year-olds as it did in the previous year, whatever its level of provision, the scheme will be neutral.

**Mr. Pickthall:** It will not be neutral between one LEA and another. If an LEA is a large provider, it will have a large amount of its revenue support grant taken away and dissipated among good, bad or indifferent providers. If an LEA is a small provider, it has little to lose.

**Mr. Squire:** Perhaps I was not clear enough. A large provider, by definition, currently has a large number of places for four-year-olds, and that is the basis of the calculation. To that extent, it is in exactly the same position as a small provider—if it gets one more four-year-old in year two than it had in year one, it will be in pocket.

**Mr. Pickthall:** I take that point, but we are, in this case, talking about economies of scale.

**Mr. Spearing:** I am not convinced by what the Minister just said. If a large provider such as the London borough of Newham or, indeed, Solihull has a large number of nursery places in the voucher system and has competition from other providers, who may provide more time in school per voucher or unit of cash, would it not be undercut in terms of apparent value to parents, and would not the quality of what the local authority is doing therefore be imperilled?

**Mr. Pickthall:** My hon. Friend is right and he brings us to the quality of local authority provision, which one or two hon. Members have criticised. In this area of education, I have never heard a serious attack, even from the Government, on the quality that is provided throughout the country by a variety of LEAs, which, for the most part, have managed to put together a first-class service against a background of dwindling resources and a non-statutory basis for provision. They have done an extremely good job. Many of us—we might be accused of being supporters of local authorities—value what is provided in our towns and do not want it to be dissipated as a result of the poorer quality, cheaper provision that we have heard about this evening.

As has been said, a horrendous increase in bureaucracy would be involved in the voucher scheme. At present, using as an example the system that I support, the local education authority receives its revenue support grant and allocates resources to nursery schools. It is a fairly simple operation. In the voucher system, the Department for Education and Employment will withdraw a proportion of RSG, the LEA will withhold from school budgets a calculated sum per pupil equivalent to the voucher for each child, taking into account termly attendance, a private company will issue vouchers to parents, the parents will exchange the vouchers at the schools or institutions, and the schools or institutions will exchange the vouchers for cash from a private company.

It all equals more frequent and more detailed monitoring and auditing of pupils, cash and numbers, and it involves an additional burden for the schools concerned. The Minister will probably make the point that some of that will change after the pilot scheme if it proves to be as burdensome as it sounds. On the surface, one is bound to say, "So much for the Government's drive against bureaucracy." It is strange how that drive always seems to create more bureaucracy than it gets rid of.

I shall mention briefly the policies on priorities. Where places are short—in most places—local education authorities have somehow to target their resources in the

*[Mr. Pickthall]*

nursery sector. Many of them, especially Lancashire, have put in place a system to ensure that the most disadvantaged children—the disabled, those from single-parent families or from homes where English is not the first language, for example—have some priority in gaining a place in nursery school

Lancashire has, in the fairly recent past, been assured by the Minister that its social priority criteria are right. The Minister approved of them yet, in the latter part of 1995, the attempts of Church schools in Longridge, Lancashire and Lytham St. Anne's, supported by the LEA, to create nursery classes, were turned down by the Secretary of State specifically because

"the social needs of the area did not warrant it."

At least that was a credible response, but how does the reliance on social and family needs criteria square with a voucher system that has no such criteria in an area of education where there will continue to be a shortage for some time? That leads me to the conclusion that the criterion for judging the Bill—how it will increase and improve provision for nursery education—is not being met, nor will it be.

There is further evidence to support that view. Where is the planning for the provision of the extra teachers who would be needed if a substantial number of extra nursery places were anticipated? As far as I know, there is no such planning, but I stand to be corrected.

7.54 pm

**Mr. James Pawsey** (Rugby and Kenilworth): Just about the only thing with which I agreed in the speech of the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) was his comment that parents are not daft. He is right. I and my hon. Friends believe that we should trust parents to use the voucher. It gives them a real stake in education and certainly makes them, as the Leader of the Opposition says, stakeholders.

I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) would not—or could not—answer the question that was posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). Hon. Members will recall that my hon. Friend reminded the hon. Member for Brightside that he once said that he would have no truck with middle-class, left-wing parents who preach one thing and send their children to another school outside the area. I was disappointed that the hon. Gentleman could not respond to that question. I understand the difficulty that he had, but I should have thought that at least he might have tried. I was also disappointed that he did not respond to the question that was put to him by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who asked a question relating to costs. The hon. Gentleman failed to respond, in the same way as he failed to respond to the question that was put to him by my hon. Friend. The hon. Gentleman's technique is simply to brush aside any difficult questions.

I have to tell Opposition Members that those questions will not go away. They will stay to haunt the hon. Gentleman and Opposition Members in the House and outside. They will haunt them today, tomorrow and throughout the years.

The hon. Member for Bath asked a question about fraud. My mind was working on the same lines as his, so I contacted my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who will respond to the debate. My hon. Friend was kind enough to write to me on 18 January. I shall paraphrase his letter. He said that there would be three checks. First, all applications will be checked against the child benefit centre database. Secondly, each voucher will carry the child's name and a unique serial number. The third control will be the requirement that all private and voluntary providers be registered under the Children Act 1989, which would prevent bogus providers from joining the scheme.

I have to tell Opposition Members that I would have been a great deal more impressed by the strength and sincerity of their opposition to the Bill if I believed it to be genuine. Sadly, I doubt that it is. I believe that it is synthetic. I say that because Opposition Members have opposed all the Government's education reforms without exception. They opposed them, not for good educational reasons but for cheap political expediency. They opposed, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) said, the national curriculum and testing, local management of schools, the introduction of grant-maintained status, the introduction of Ofsted, improved teacher training and league tables. To that catalogue we can now add another—nursery provision.

**Mr. Don Foster:** The hon. Gentleman is always extremely courteous, but it would be wholly wrong of him to mislead the House into believing that Opposition Members have in any way opposed the expansion of high-quality early-years or nursery education. The opposition has been to the methodology proposed by the Government—a methodology that we believe will hinder the expansion of high-quality early-years education.

**Mr. Pawsey:** The hon. Gentleman is logic-chopping. His Liberal character has been entirely exposed. I believe that the main reason for Opposition Members' objection to the Bill is the fact that its proposals do not focus on local education authorities. I suspect that had they done so, Labour and Liberal spokesmen might have discovered some virtue in them. Opposition Members appear to believe that the only good education is local authority education, but they are wrong about that, as they are about so many other things.

Conservative Members believe in maximum diversity and choice. That choice is best provided by grant-maintained schools, which are opposed by both Labour and Liberals—although the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) send their children to grant-maintained schools, exercising the very choice that Opposition Members would deny other parents.

I do not criticise either the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) or his hon. Friend the Member for Peckham for doing what I would do: sending their children to the best schools, and giving them the best education that can be found. That is entirely laudable. What I do not find laudable is the way in which Opposition Members criticise grant-maintained schools and selection, while taking advantage of grant-maintained schools and selection to ensure that their children do well. I consider that disgraceful, and I hope that we shall hear a reasoned explanation of that dichotomy.

The principle of choice and diversity runs like a golden thread through all the Government's education policies, and can be seen again in the Bill. When my right

hon. Friend the Secretary of State introduced the Bill, she referred to funding. The legislation will cost taxpayers some £730 million, of which about £165 million is new money. It places in the hands of parents a voucher worth £1,100, which may be spent at a private or voluntary institution or, indeed, at a state school; it can also be exchanged for a nursery school place.

The legislation builds on the concept of pilot schemes, and I welcome that. The vouchers represent a major new initiative in education. I have no doubt that, as with any new initiative, there will be teething troubles—that, after all, is what pilot schemes are for—but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to assure me that the lessons that are learnt will be incorporated in the main scheme when it starts in April 1997. Some of those lessons may prove unpalatable and expensive, and they will undoubtedly require careful implementation.

The new scheme will provide a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents want one. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley that it should be extended to three-year-olds, but—here I return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire—I want parents to visit schools and compare schemes. I want them to talk to providers, and ask the questions that they consider important to them.

I do not accept the deeply patronising view, peddled so often by Opposition Members, that parents must be guided and directed; my view—shared, I think, by my hon. Friends—is that the overwhelming majority of parents know best what is right for their children. I believe that they can be trusted to judge the effectiveness of one scheme against that of another. I accept that geographical constraints will play a part, but parents should not accept the nearest place available simply because it is nearest. I want parents to look for the scheme that is best for their children.

I was not surprised to discover that a Labour party policy document entitled "Excellence for Everyone"—

**Ms Estelle Morris** (Birmingham, Yardley): Hear, hear.

**Mr. Pawsey:** The hon. Lady says, "Hear, hear", but I fear that she may have said it a little too soon. The document dismisses nursery education in just four lines. That tells us how much importance Opposition Members truly attach to this genuinely important issue.

**Ms Morris:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Pawsey:** I shall be delighted to give way to the hon. Lady.

**Ms Morris:** I am pleased to learn that the hon. Gentleman reads Labour party documents so carefully, but the document that he mentions was not about pre-school learning; that will come in the summer, so the hon. Gentleman has something to look forward to. In that document, he will find a properly worked-out policy to provide high-quality early-school education for all four-year-olds without money being wasted on bureaucracy.

**Mr. Pawsey:** I am glad that I gave way to the hon. Lady. First, I read Labour party documents for the laughs that they give me. Secondly, the hon. Lady has made promises, but we all know what Labour party promises are worth. We shall see what the new document says, and, in particular, we shall look out for the costs incorporated in it. Let the Labour party put its money where its documents are.

**Mr. Dunn:** The intervention of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) demonstrates that Labour Members have come to the debate without having worked out a policy. That is something for the future. After 15 or 16 years in opposition, they still have not worked out a policy. What does that tell my hon. Friend?

**Mr. Pawsey:** I am delighted that I gave way to my hon. Friend, who has exposed—yet again—the hollowness of Labour party policies.

Let me give the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) a policy. I hope that she will listen carefully. *The Independent* of 5 December claims that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield

"has decided to accept the Conservative scheme for nursery education vouchers if its nationwide launch goes ahead, and his education spokesman, David Blunkett, is considering a plan to trump it by offering higher value vouchers."

*The Independent* returned to the subject yet again on 26 December, saying:

"Labour will offer state money to private nurseries and rewrite the curriculum for the under-fives in plans to be announced next month."

Watch this space, but do not hold your breath.

I cannot say that I am surprised that the Labour party has recently discovered toddlers. We all know—the point was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson)—that what the Government suggest today will be reinvented by Opposition Members tomorrow: it will be packaged in a series of soundbites as their own freshly minted scheme. The Government's pre-school policy will bring substantial benefits to children and their parents, and will help to improve the quality and standard of state education. It will also benefit parents: as unemployment continues to fall in the United Kingdom—in marked contrast to the position in the rest of Europe, where the social chapter holds sway—more mothers will be working, and will naturally require their children to be cared for properly in pre-school education.

I was delighted to read that the Pre-School Learning Alliance had said:

"We welcome this plan to bring pre-schools (formerly playgroups) within a common inspection framework which will be regulated by OFSTED. This will provide confirmation to parents of what they already know—that pre-schools provide children with high quality early education and preparation for school. Vouchers will also provide much needed financial assistance to the parents of four-year-olds using our member pre-schools."

I quoted that because the alliance has substantial expertise in and knowledge of this sector. I am delighted to accept and build on that expertise.

**Mr. Don Foster:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Pawsey:** I give way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I increasingly welcome as a brother.

**Mr. Foster:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time and for being so generous. Will

*[Mr. Foster]*

he remind the House how the press release from that organisation continues and whether it follows with a number of key concerns about the Bill's proposals?

**Mr. Pawsey:** I said that I increasingly welcome the hon. Gentleman as a brother. Had he contained himself a little longer, he would have heard me quote more from that press release.

I do not doubt that the alliance and my hon. Friends will find that the new system is challenging. There will be problems—I made that point earlier. After all, there are always problems with any new system, but they will be overcome.

The Pre-School Learning Alliance goes on to say, and I quote for the benefit of the hon. Member for Bath:

"We have said to the Government that we will do all that we can to create the new places which are required for four-year-olds but more funds are needed to train additional staff and for new premises."

I believe—and here perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I are at one—that the alliance raises a good point, which I hope my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider. Clearly, funding for training is important. I do not subscribe to the view that any well-intentioned lady is automatically a good teacher. Teaching is central to this legislation.

In the state sector, the voucher will cover the cost of a part-time place in a nursery school or nursery class, or a full-time place in a primary school reception class, provided that that fits in with the admission arrangements of the local education authority. In the private and voluntary sectors, the voucher will contribute £1,100 a year towards fees. That should provide at least a part-time place and up to a full-time place in a playgroup. The voucher will be exchangeable for a pre-school place for children beginning in the term after their fourth birthday.

Parents will understandably be concerned about the quality of education. Providers of nursery education must be an institution either registered or exempt from registration under the Children Act 1989, or registered as an independent school. Alternatively, they must be a locally maintained school or day nursery. Grant-maintained schools can, of course, also provide nursery education. Those are important safeguards that will do much to reassure parents.

The aim of pre-school education must be to prepare children for the world of school. Regular inspections will be undertaken to ensure that the appropriate standards are provided. Providers of nursery education must provide a prospectus for parents that gives details of staffing, admissions, schedules and so on. The Government are anxious that children should develop skills in personal and social development and language literacy and numeracy, and have some modest knowledge of the world and its environment. Hon. Members will agree that all those are laudable objectives.

Earlier, I mentioned quality. That will be guaranteed by the Office for Standards in Education as it will undertake the inspections. When the first inspection is complete, it is up to the inspector to decide whether the educational provision is of a sufficiently high standard. The inspector may grant a full validation and recommend that initial validation be extended.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South-East): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments. I have noted that, so far in his speech, he has failed to mention pre-school playgroups that have fewer than five pupils, especially in relation to their safety. Will he tell us something about that?

**Mr. Pawsey:** The question of safety is important and I am not surprised, but delighted that the hon. Gentleman has raised it. Clearly, that is one of the aspects that inspectors will take into account when they visit those schools, but he speaks as a parent and as a man with long experience, especially in local authority administration. I believe that I am right in saying that he was formerly leader of Coventry city council.

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Purely as a point of information for my hon. Friend, I assure him that the settings to which the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) briefly referred are covered by registration under the Children Act, which considers specifically health and safety aspects. That registration continues.

**Mr. Pawsey:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that additional clarification.

The inspector may grant a full validation, recommend that the initial validation be extended where weaknesses have been identified, or recommend that the initial validation be withdrawn. Those are important sanctions. I am convinced that inspection will be one of the keys to the project's success.

I welcome the Bill and commend it to the House. I hope that it will receive the substantial majority that it deserves.

8.15 pm

**Mr. Cynog Dafis** (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): It is a great pleasure to be on my feet as the only Member, it seems, speaking for Wales tonight. I am glad that there are representatives of the Welsh Office in the Chamber, although none of them is sitting on the Government Front Bench. I am glad therefore that some note will be taken of my comments.

The Bill provides a perfect example of the need for power in Wales, to enable us to pursue our priorities according to our values and in our way—a way based on pragmatism and common sense, not on an ideologically driven agenda coming from English Toryism. The issue of the need for democratic power in Wales, so that we can take our own decisions, is rising on the political agenda there. Interest in that issue will be intensified by the Bill. One of the ironic things about the Government is that they are good at devising measures that strengthen the demand for democratic power in Wales, so that we can follow our priorities.

We need to recognise, first, that the position in Wales in relation to pre-school provision and early-years education is vastly different from that in England. Nursery education is greatly important for the Welsh language. It has already been a crucial factor in increasing knowledge of the Welsh language. It is one of the main factors that has led to the spectacular growth of Welsh language education and of Welsh-medium education at primary and secondary level. That is one factor that is different.

In Wales, 90 per cent. of four-year-olds have a place in local education authority or grant-maintained nursery or primary schools. Seventy per cent. of Welsh

four-year-olds are in full-time primary school education. That makes it different from England, where only 77 per cent. of such children have either part-time or full-time places in maintained-sector schools. The position is therefore radically different. That does not mean that we should be complacent in Wales—not by any manner of means. There is need for change, for improvement and for development, but we are starting from a significantly different position. That is why it is infuriating that we have this damaging irrelevance of a Bill foisted on us by a political agenda being written somewhere else.

Plaid Cymru places particular emphasis on the enormous importance and value of high-quality provision of early-years education. I do not need now to rehearse the accumulation of evidence in recent years about the educational, social and economic benefits of investing resources in early-years education. That is now well established, as is the importance of smaller classes during those early years.

The scientific and statistical evidence corresponds to one's own observations. We have all noticed the immense capacity for learning and the intense fascination of very young children for all kinds of phenomena. Adults have always had a responsibility to respond to young children's voracious appetite for learning by providing the context and opportunities to enable that appetite to be satisfied. In a modern, industrialised culture, that environment for stimulation has to be organised, and that is the case for making formal provision for educational experience in those early years.

We must also think of the importance of the opportunities that are presented by early-years education for extending the learning process to the community. That can be done by bringing parents into active partnerships with educators in the nursery schools, so that the learning process at home is enhanced. Parents' awareness of the need for an interactive relationship with children can be enhanced and constantly stimulated. We have already seen such parental experience in the voluntary sector nursery schools.

It is worth emphasising the capacity of early-years education to strengthen social solidarity—the community bonds in a society that is becoming increasingly atomised. That is why it is important to avoid selectiveness—separate provision for people from different economic and social backgrounds that the voucher system is partly designed to achieve. That system is calculated to intensify and confirm social division.

The opportunity in early-years education for the identification of special educational needs has been insufficiently emphasised in the debate. I think particularly of dyslexia and of strategies for early intervention that have been shown to be effective—and that means cost-effective as well as educationally effective. That is an important approach to dealing with special educational needs.

It is worth re-emphasising the enormous importance to the Welsh language of early-years education. That is already evident in the work of LEA nursery schools and of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the Welsh nursery schools movement. A recent survey by the Welsh Language Board showed that, if they had the opportunity, 50 per cent. of Welsh parents would send their children to Welsh-medium nursery schools. That is of enormous significance and has far-reaching implications for Welsh language strategies in Wales. It certainly has a bearing on the importance of nursery education. The additional cost of providing properly resourced, high-quality early-years education would be substantial. But the question is not whether society can afford it, but whether it can afford not to make the provision.

In recognition of the importance of this subject, Plaid Cymru has, unlike the Labour party, already prepared a policy document setting out our views and policy proposals. It is a consultation document and it is being widely distributed to interested organisations and individuals in Wales. I shall make a copy available to the Department for Education and Employment and to the Welsh Office. I hope that they find it interesting. It shows a radically different approach from the one proposed by the Government.

The document's fundamental, guiding principle is the need to integrate the various types of early-years services in the fields of education and care into what is now fashionably called "educare". Those two strands must be brought much more closely together. Because there is no overall policy structure at the moment for the early years, the current scene is fragmented. There is a range of providers, a range of responsible authorities, and different standards and concerns. Social services departments, education departments in county councils and health authorities are all responsible for children in their early years and for special needs, which border on educational concerns. The providers range from schools to voluntary organisations and there is a plethora of private sector carers and educators.

Our document makes a specific recommendation that is capable of immediate implementation. It suggests that the new unitary authorities in Wales, which will soon become county councils, should establish early-years services departments to co-ordinate and enhance nursery education and child care. Those departments would work in close partnership with education and social service departments, but would be distinct from them. They would co-ordinate the work of those departments and that of other interested bodies such as health authorities, health providers, the voluntary sector, parent groups and so on. The departments would organise joint training and would establish for each county an early-years forum. They would identify development needs, inspect and register services, or at least arrange for their inspection and registration, and they would monitor quality.

Our document calls for a national strategy with targets set over a period of time to increase the provision of nursery education, with special emphasis on supporting underprivileged communities. They are certainly a priority for the targeting of public funding as long as such funding is limited in that area. It argues for increased support for current voluntary sector providers by way of grants and resources, including accommodation and the provision of administrative support. All those things can be done and are already done in part.

The Plaid Cymru document emphasises and recognises the fact that the large number of three to five-year-olds currently in reception and infant classes of primary schools contribute significantly to the 90 per cent. figure in Wales. But that does not altogether constitute a satisfactory situation and we should not be complacent. The educational experiences that three to five-year-olds

*[Mr. Cynog Dafis]*

may receive in such reception and infant classes may not always be appropriate in terms of curriculum or of the time that is available to meet the needs of those children.

Our document deals particularly with the need for qualified staff because, after all, the curricular and pedagogical skills that are needed for teaching children of that age are just as great as those that are required for teaching older children, or perhaps even greater. It may be that the skills are more subtle and more particular. The document calls for concentration on the training of existing staff through specific grants. Perhaps the grant for education support and training mechanism should be used for that purpose. It also calls for a curriculum that is appropriate to the developmental stage of the children. Finally, it sets as a longer-term aim the provision of full-time nursery education for all children from the age of three whose parents wish them to receive it.

Plaid Cymru accepts the public investment implications of such a commitment. Our document is an attempt to set the agenda for a self-governing Wales—something that is coming—while addressing the immediate practical priorities. Needless to say, our document rejects vouchers out of hand, as does Welsh opinion unanimously. I am talking not just about the LEAs, the Welsh education establishment and the Welsh Joint Education Committee. I am talking also about parents organisations, the Confederation of School Governors Associations in Wales, Parents for Welsh-Medium Education and parent-teacher associations in Wales, all of which are united in rejecting the voucher scheme.

According to the relevant Minister at the Welsh Office, there is

"no declared support amongst the representations for the proposed voucher scheme".

The Minister has admitted that there is no support throughout Wales from any direction whatever. That makes one think about the Government's stated willingness to respond to the consultation process. If any attention was paid to such a process in Wales, the scheme would not go ahead. The other interesting element of the Minister's reply was his explanation of why there is no support for the proposal. He insisted that that opposition is

"generated by a misunderstanding of some basic elements of the scheme . . . and by an unsubstantiated concern".—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 379.]

In other words, the Minister believes that educators and parents in Wales are all suffering from some kind of collective stupidity that makes it impossible for them to understand the Government's proposals. Some people might say that such ignorant condescension is offensive. But I am glad to say that it is the Minister who does not understand—it is his problem. First, he fails to understand that the notion of choice is irrelevant to the vast majority of Wales because of the scattered nature of our community. Secondly, if private or other providers enter the field in competition and have some success in attracting customers—that is what we must say now—it will destabilise the provision of LEAs and the existing useful partnerships between LEAs and the voluntary sector.

The Minister has failed to understand that there is a danger that the education experience of children whose parents might be tempted—understandably—to take up full-time playgroup provision using a voucher, rather than keeping to the part-time LEA nursery school provision, would be inferior. Evidence for that can be found in an important recent report by Her Majesty's inspectorate in Wales, the significance of which goes broader than the situation in Wales.

That report showed clearly that, generally speaking, the best provision for early-years education is in LEA nursery schools and classes. That is an uncomfortable finding for a Government who regard local authorities in the public sector as inherently inefficient, but it is good news for the public at large and it is good news for parents.

The report also stated that the cost of administering the system—and the money taken as profits for shareholders of the company that does so—would be better spent on providing resources for staff and training in schools. It also made it clear that nursery schools and classes providing for three-year-olds might be imperilled by the emphasis in the Bill on four-year-olds only.

Vouchers provide a subsidy for the well-off who are already able to afford early-years education, and they will do very little to create provision where there is none at present. The view of the Special Education Consortium—the members of which are likely to know what they are talking about—was that

"significant harm might be done to the provision for young children with special educational needs."

All those views clearly justify the plea made to the Secretary of State for Wales from various directions not to proceed with the proposals in Wales. The plea has been made, and it will almost inevitably fall on deaf ears. I was going to say that I had good reason to hope that none of this would happen, because the election of a new Government was likely to intervene. I now have cause to hesitate, having heard suggestions that the Labour party is ready to accept such provision as a fait accompli. I trust that that will not be the case, and that the system will never be implemented in Wales.

Our current predicament emphasises once more the need for a Parliament in Wales with primary legislative powers. Labour proposes to give Wales an assembly with secondary legislative powers only, unlike Scotland, whose Parliament will have primary legislative powers. Secondary legislative powers are inadequate, for two reasons.

First, whereas primary legislation can be drafted to allow a great deal of variation and discretion in relation to the orders, it can also be drafted to allow no variation at all. Any United Kingdom Government not wishing to allow Wales to pursue its own course of action would pursue the latter course. Secondly, secondary legislative powers would at best allow a variation only within the framework established by an Act coming from the United Kingdom Parliament. Secondary legislative powers within the framework of the Bill would be totally irrelevant.

We need a Welsh Parliament to determine the priorities of education in Wales and to place nursery education within that framework. It would, of course, have a high priority. A Welsh Parliament would need to devise a plan for the appropriate promotion of nursery education in co-operation with local authorities and others. For that, the Parliament would need the power to legislate as necessary, to give the different levels of government the powers and responsibilities to design a system of education that would provide high standards, while being

equitable and cost-effective. We can be confident that following such principles would mean that we would not be fiddling around with vouchers for nursery education.

We need a Welsh Parliament with the power to act, and that means the power to enact legislation. We need it now, and not as a consequence of some slow process of evolution. We are looking to the Labour Government, following the next election, to give the people of Wales that kind of power—the same power that Labour proposes to give to the people of Scotland.

8.38 pm

**Mr. Iain Mills** (Meriden): I am in a somewhat difficult position as I represent an area in rural Solihull which has a scheme far beyond that proposed by the Government. The voucher scheme would disadvantage my constituents as they already have the advantage per pupil of £1,800 worth of high quality, successful and established education. The local scheme is the choice of parents and once I have cleared the matter with the Journal Office and the Vote Office I shall be presenting a petition from 12,000 parents establishing that very point. We do not want a national scheme. It is wrong to have a bureaucratic, complex and centralised system that offers every child £1,100—a system that is going to be extremely difficult to organise.

We have achieved quite a lot in Solihull and we cannot be the only ones to have done so. According to my calculations, 42 local education authorities or local councils will be disadvantaged by the scheme. We should consider what has been achieved by children aged three and three and a half.

The Government's scheme is calling into question reception classes. I shall not be voting for the Government tonight and I have made that clear to Ministers. I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), for the time that he has spent discussing the scheme with me. I appreciated his comments, but I do not agree with them and I am not going to vote for the Government. As a loyal Conservative, that is a rare event for me, but my constituents will be disadvantaged by the scheme that he is introducing. Why cannot the Minister—I spoke to him about this—provide an exemption for councils with good records and find a way to resolve the situation? I appreciate his concerns about exempting Solihull and not other councils which need to be forced into a better nursery system.

In the few minutes that I have to speak in the debate, I must tell the Minister that I not only have 12,000 signatures to a petition—I did not ask for them: it was the parents' idea—but during the past two months my advice bureaux have been dominated by the issue. In Balsall Common, for example, I normally see about 12 people with personal problems, but I found the church hall jam-packed with about 70 parents. I do not accept the Minister's argument that the local education authority triggered that response. It was the parents' legitimate desire for high quality pre-school education for their young people.

The results in Solihull for three-and-a-half-year-olds are exemplary. I cannot accept that a national scheme such as the Minister is proposing is either good for my constituents in Meriden or—I hesitate to say it—good for the country. Why cannot we give local authorities greater choice? Why cannot we give parents real choice?

In my constituency of Meriden, parents will have no choice. If they are given a voucher that is worth £1,100, but the LEA already provides nursery education that is worth £1,800—with high quality education, proper teaching staff and outstanding literacy and numeracy achievements—why on earth should we go along with the scheme that the Minister is proposing? That is why I do not intend to vote for it.

I shall not go into the issue of grant-maintained schools because I do not have enough time to do so and I must avoid cutting into my colleagues' time. In my constituency, the voucher scheme is a key issue, as indicated by the 12,000-name petition. The petition is not like those that we all receive—the usual ones that people sign and send to their Member of Parliament. Those people came to see me and presented it to me with heartfelt concern.

The parents have three concerns, which I shall finish with—unlike some Opposition Members, I will not say "Finally . . . finally . . . finally". The distillation of what they are feeling is, first, that they are happy with the existing scheme, which is worth £1,800 per pupil and is working. Solihull council is hoping to expand the number of places. Secondly, they are happy with the quality of education. Finally, parents are happy with the achievements. Some of the achievements of the three-and-a-half-year-olds rising-fours in my constituency are quite extraordinary. Their start in life will be far better than it would be under a scheme which produces a playgroup situation, which would be the result of a £1,100 voucher scheme. I say to the Minister, "Please take my constituency of Meriden out of the voucher scheme." Give us the freedom to do what we and the parents want to do.

8.44 pm

**Mr. Nigel Spearing** (Newham, South): I am pleased to be able to follow the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) because his speech has been perhaps the most important of the debate. I share the sentiment which I believe lay behind his presentation—that nursery education should not be a party-political issue. I join him in that sentiment because in Newham, where 60 per cent. of the age group are in nursery education, we have a similar appreciation of such education, albeit in different surroundings. The contrast between our constituencies, which is well known, and the feelings of parents about the existing scheme and the proposals, illustrate the non-party basis for the concern, at least among many parents who are beginning to understand what the scheme is about.

The hon. Member for Meriden mentioned a petition. Parents from Newham came to me two years ago and as a result I got in touch with the National Campaign for Nursery Education. With other organisations, it organised a petition of more than 100,000 signatures, asking for wider opportunities in nursery education. Two years later, despite not discouraging the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) from talking out my Nursery Education (Assessment of Need) Bill, the Government have come up with a scheme. They did not do so following the articles in the press, written by the Prime Minister two years ago, saying that it was coming, but now it has come.

The scheme is not a scheme for nursery education. It is not nursery education as it is practised in Solihull and Newham. I charge the Minister to tell us why the title is

*[Mr. Nigel Spearing]*

not misleading. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) referred to early-years education. The hon. Member for Meriden referred to playgroups, and so forth. The provisions might be for early-years education, but it is not nursery education. The latter was lauded by the Minister responsible for education in a previous Conservative Administration in 1973. Circular No. 2/73, from the right hon. Lady, now Baroness Thatcher, said that we would have full-time education for 15 per cent. of three and four-year-olds, and part-time education for 35 per cent. of three-year-olds and 75 per cent. of four-year-olds, which

"will require 250,000 additional full-time equivalent places in 1982."

That plan was scrapped, but that was nursery education.

Most people in the business—although I should not describe it as such, as that is what the Government are making it—know that the quality of nursery education is defined: there are space standards and standards for the teachers, who have had two years full-time training, and there is a ratio of nursery assistants, who have also had some training.

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Following the logic of the hon. Gentleman's comments, can he clarify whether he would say that reception classes are nursery education and good, and that pre-school classes—erstwhile pre-school playgroups—are, by definition, not nursery and bad? I am not trying to trap him, but to draw him out.

**Mr. Spearing:** The term "early-years" covers the lot, but we know what nursery education is in terms of the curriculum, which is known and understood throughout the country, the training and the premises. It is different from playgroups, some of which are very good and some not so good. It is also different, by definition, from reception classes in infants schools, because they are part of the statutory system for the over-fives.

The Minister knows of the terrible administrative problems. Because of the administrative mess-up, parents will have to give up these coloured bits of paper for children who are going to be in the reception classes of infant schools. We do not have a plan for nursery education, although all the reports of the debate will use that term. I therefore charge the Government with being misleading and I cannot absolve them from attempting to do that deliberately.

There is also the question of space regulations. On 10 January 1996, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who is not here, replied to a question on the abandonment of the school space regulations, which are not good enough as it is. In a written answer, she stated:

"The final version of the regulations and the circular will take account of a number of detailed points raised. The requirements in the current regulations that bear on the health, safety and welfare of pupils will be retained."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 274.]

But they will not. Why are they being changed? The standards laid down by statute for nursery schools proper are to be abandoned.

What about the providers? "Providers" is a word that we have come to use in the health service, but some of the providers of the new-style pre-school education, whatever form it may take, will be proprietorial. They will not be, as they are in Solihull and Newham, local authorities. They will not form a pattern of local nursery schools attempting to meet the needs of local communities. There will be difficulties over the standards that they will have to maintain.

The documents to which I referred in a point of order earlier were in the Vote Office. There was some misunderstanding about that and I am glad to make that clear to the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). However, his document, "Nursery Education Scheme: The Next Steps"—a misleading title, if ever there was one—says that vouchers will give

"parents purchasing power to choose a place that suits their child's needs and to insist on high standards . . . There is a wide consensus about the importance of nursery education".

It goes on and on, but the Government are not talking about real nursery education.

In *The Sunday Telegraph* yesterday there was an article headed:

"School that's a home from home",

with a subsection entitled,

"How to set up a nursery school".

The article states:

"The Diploma in Playgroup Practice from the Pre-School Learning Alliance is the minimum legal requirement. Fifty per cent of your staff must be qualified. A child-to-staff ratio of 8-1 is the maximum allowed; 6-1 is more workable."

The Pre-school Learning Alliance is doing good work. I think that it was originally known as the Pre-school Playgroups Association. There is a big distinction between playgroup provision and the present statutory arrangements for nursery education. The Government should use a different term because there is a danger that they will devalue and ultimately destroy the standards of nursery education as commonly understood at present. There is much evidence for that.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance, which was mentioned earlier, says in its brief:

"Vouchers will provide help with revenue costs but are unlikely to provide sufficient income to meet the costs of new premises and other capital expenditure associated with the expansion of provision."

So even the alliance has some reservations.

What about inspection? If it is to be done by Ofsted, why can it not be linked with the present system of primary school inspection? Primary and nursery schools overlap in reception classes. Instead, the Bill contains four and a half closely typed pages dealing with

"Nursery education grants: inspections etc."

Talk about bureaucracy—surely that is what is created by not using the existing schools inspection system to deal with the pre-school scene.

What does the National Association of Head Teachers—which, with the except of heads of nursery schools, has no vested interest in the age group apart from a general one in education—have to say about the inspection system? In its brief, it says:

"The system of self assessment that is proposed will mean that providers could function and receive public money for a year before they are inspected or validated. The voucher system is wide open to

fraud and abuse. Even expensive auditing and inspection arrangements could not ensure that the proper use of public funds was safeguarded."

That is the view of highly qualified professional teachers in a well known and respected association. It continues:

"The Government envisages the possibility of umbrella organisations, already active in nursery education"—

I question that, but we shall see what the Minister has to say; I would say "already active in early-years education". The document continues:

"acting as OFSTED's agents in organising the inspection programme and awarding contracts to inspectors. The NAHT strongly believes that, if the proposals are to be implemented, independence in awarding contracts must be safeguarded. The NAHT could not support a situation where, for example, an organisation was awarding contracts to inspect its own members."

I do not suppose that the Government would go as far as that, but the system of inspection is shown to be extremely controversial. There will be what the newspapers would call a huge shake-up in the system.

Conservative Members have been talking about parental choice. We all know what parents want. It was well expressed to me by a Conservative Member who is not here now in respect of another education matter some time ago. Those of us who are parents would agree that most parents want a system of local education that meets the needs of all the children of the area. The morality of parents and teachers means that they cannot ignore the effects of education for their children in their schools on that of children in other schools. Education must meet the total need of the community and especially the needs of any particular child at the time of its education.

A coherent framework is needed. Parents have to put themselves into the hands of professional teachers. Of course there must be consultation, co-operation between home and school through parents associations, and a degree of choice, so long as the standards are equivalently high. That is the point. That would lead to an education system worthy of name. If such a system was available to 100 per cent. of children in Solihull and Newham, it would be a worthy system.

Concern has been expressed by organisations such as Save the Children, Barnardo's, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and the Children's Society. Those organisations state:

"The coalition organisations recommend that one common standard of inspection, regulation, monitoring, staffing ratios, premises and equipment should apply to all voucher-redeeming services for four year old children, based on the requirements of the Children Act 1989."

That Act has been mentioned several times already.

Finally, there is the question of who will be the providers. I suggest that there will be a huge new range of providers. I hope that the Minister will tell me in the next hour if my scenario is wrong. It may be that it is, but we will not know the detailed small print. We will know neither in the House nor in Committee because, instead of saying that the Minister must provide those facilities for early-years education by issuing vouchers, clause 1(1) says:

"The Secretary of State may make arrangements for the making of grants in respect of nursery education."

All the details about inspection, standards, liaison, administration and contracts are considered "arrangements" and need not come before the House. Negative instruments, such as the two that we sent away at 3.30 today, often come before the House. They deal with all sorts of matters, such as animals, roads, speed limits and destination signs, which are for scrutiny rather than debate. Civil servants issue them and hon. Members know that they will be debated upstairs in Committee or appear on some sort of list against which we can pray. They are public matters.

The arrangements at issue here, however, will not come through such a democratic sieve and they include anything that a Secretary of State for Education and Employment may wish to do. Although matters such as curricula will be discussed, the nature of providers will fall entirely within the "arrangements" to be decided by the Secretary of State in charge. What is to prevent supermarkets from assisting or funding satellite providers at their sites? What is to prevent pre-school education providers in the United States or Canada, where pre-school education is already a business opportunity, from setting up branches in this country? What is to prevent the whole pre-school scene from devolving into a business venture? Finally, what is to stop the vouchers to be given for reception classes being extended into primary education so that, for the first time, we would have a voucher system within our statutory education system?

Unfortunately, the Bill is not really a nursery education Bill at all. The Minister must prove tonight that parents and some good Conservative Members are not being conned.

9 pm

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): I am delighted to be able to make a shorter than planned contribution to this debate.

Contrary to popular belief, although 30 or 40 per cent. of my constituents are of retirement age, depending on which statistics one believes, there has been a great growth in the number of young people in Eastbourne, including people with young families. It has resulted in a great interest in and demand for nursery education and a wide appreciation that children who have benefited from pre-school education do better later. That view has been common ground on both sides of the House this evening.

In the past year or so, I have made a number of visits to local playgroups, such as the Eldon Road playgroup and the playgroup attached to Willingdon school. I have also had meetings with the Independent Pre-School Nursery Association and its dynamic chairman, Barbara Davies, who also runs the Tots nursery in my constituency. We also have some excellent LEA provision. Only last Friday, I visited Pashley Down infant school. I am indebted to Veronica Clark and her staff for the opportunity not only to attend their assembly but to view their three reception classes for four and five-year-old children. The staff there do a good job in sometimes difficult circumstances. I hope that I can reassure them that, with the pilot scheme taking place this year, it should be possible to identify and resolve some of the practical problems to which hon. Members have referred.

Above all, the Bill will allow parents to make a choice. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, they will be "in charge". What can be wrong with that? If they are happy with their existing provision, such as the reception classes at Pashley Down infant school, they will stick with it. But education policy has recently become a

*[Mr. Nigel Waterson]*

problem in East Sussex, where politics often clouds important issues. It will not surprise you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to know that that unhealthy development has arisen since the county council has been run by a Lib-Lab pact. It has become a Christmas tradition for me to have to write to 400 heads and governors to tell them the true position on education funding, because they certainly do not get it from the LEA.

Last year, the so-called Strategic Forum predicted, with no particular evidence, massive cuts, including the option of cutting spending on nursery education. It was accompanied by a campaign called the East Sussex schools campaign, under the heading "Excellence at Risk". The campaign issued a document stating that there was

"real doubt about the survival of nursery education".

That quite disgraceful series of propaganda stunts, often orchestrated by the controlling groups on the LEA, raised fears among parents, teachers and governors about the future of children and their education. At the time the campaign seemed to be purely churlishly motivated, particularly in relation to nursery education. The LEA wants a total stranglehold over all pre-school provision.

Of course, as it turns out, the overall position on spending for next year is very good. The education standard spending assessment for East Sussex has been increased by £7.264 million or 3.4 per cent. Just as important, the Government have ensured that East Sussex can increase its spending in line with the increased SSA for education. The capping criteria will enable the county council, if it chooses, to increase its budget by no less than 3 per cent. There is no good reason for schools' budgets in East Sussex to be cut in the coming year.

On the specific issue of nursery schools, we have heard today how parents will have a choice between state, private or voluntary providers. The vouchers will buy a part-time place in a nursery class or up to a full-time place in a playgroup or reception class. State school places will remain free and parents will be able to top up the voucher in the private and the voluntary sectors. We have heard about the £165 million of new money providing vouchers for 150,000 places. We have heard a lot about the effect on LEAs—provided that they continue to attract the same number of four-year-olds as they currently do, they will not lose resources. If they spend more than £1,100 per pupil, they will still be able to do so under the new system. We have heard a great deal, particularly from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, about the alleged bureaucracy in the system. Of the £750 million available for the scheme, only £20 million, or 2.7 per cent., has been allocated to inspection and administration—and most of that money will be spent on inspection.

Almost as soon as the scheme was announced, it was dismissed out of hand by Councillor Norcross, the chairman of the education committee in East Sussex. He refused even to consider participation by East Sussex in the pilot scheme and said, I think, that it was "a political con", with no reference even to the education committee, let alone the full council. It is hardly surprising that that action has caused great anger in my constituency and elsewhere in East Sussex because it denies the opportunities to a whole raft of children in the pilot scheme year.

One way in which that anger was demonstrated was through a large petition which was gathered by the IPNA and passed to me. It contained many hundreds of signatures and letters from the parents of children in my constituency. That was a very different experience from that described by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills). The protest—spontaneously organised in my constituency—shows the deep strength of feeling on the issue. The Liberal Democrats and the Lib-Lab pact have wholly misread the feelings and needs of my constituents in Eastbourne.

The debate is really about control, and Opposition Members' obsession with the need for LEAs to have absolute control over all pre-school education across the country. We believe in choice and diversity, and we believe that to be popular with the parents of the children affected.

9.9 pm

**Dr. Keith Hampson** (Leeds, North-West): The last time I made a speech in this place the Whips asked me to spin it out, but I shall have to curtail my remarks on this occasion. I have 20 years' experience as vice-president of the National Campaign for Nursery Education and I am passionately concerned about the situation in Leeds. Despite the Labour authority's bland forecasts and boasts, Leeds does not have a good track record on education. If one looks at the Audit Commission comparisons, one will see that education provision in Leeds is well below half that of comparable authorities. In my constituency in north Leeds there is very little council education provision.

I must point out—I apologise for falling into the trap myself in an earlier intervention on my right hon. Friend—that hon. Members keep talking about "state" schools. Why do we do that? It reinforces the impression—which is furthered by Labour Members—that somehow or other the Government are responsible for the quality of schools across the land. That is not the case. We should call them "council" schools. The Leader of the Opposition has sent his child to be educated outside Islington and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has rejected her borough because the council schools are of a poor quality. The councils have designed the school structure and allocated resources and they have interfered in the way in which the schools are run.

I return to what I said by way of intervention earlier. The position in Leeds is crystal clear. In 1991 the council commissioned Leeds university to examine primary education in that city and to produce an independent report on the back of an allocation of £14 million to primary schools. Some £11 million was spent on recruiting extra teachers, so no one could complain of a lack of resources or say that the schools were understaffed. The report, entitled "Primary Education in Leeds", condemned interference by the local authority. Although that had occurred for the best of reasons, the report argued powerfully that not only had reading standards failed to improve despite the extra resources, but the straitjacket imposed on teachers by the local education authority lay at the heart of the problem.

Leeds has model schools where teachers are trained in "good practice" and teachers believe that their careers are blighted if they do not deliver that good practice. That is the culture of bureaucracy that has bedeviled British education at all levels for decades.

Of course the voucher system is an experimental measure, but we should be looking for new ways of delivering quality education. That used to happen in the public sector. We used to have semi-independent local education authorities with very powerful creative directors of education. Alec Clegg in West Riding and the director in Leicester are classic examples.

**Mr. Spearing:** The Government are destroying them.

**Dr. Hampson:** The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) should listen to me. Those people are famous partly because they are so rare. We cannot say that the hundreds of local education authorities have brilliant directors of education, because they do not. That is the reality of the situation. Most local education authorities do things in the way that they have always been done and they want to continue to operate in that manner. Labour and Liberal Democrat Members reflected that mentality in their speeches today.

My right hon. Friend and I argue that we must find a way of delivering what good education is about. We know in our hearts that it is about creating a dynamic institution which has a life of its own, which has powers of innovation and which can look after itself and develop as it thinks appropriate for the benefit of the children concerned. Such institutions must be free from intervention by the council, the state and the advisors who continually latch on to them. We must have inherently dynamic and pioneering institutions.

We trust the parents; we assume that they want the best for their children. Today Labour Members have gone on endlessly—ye of little faith—as if parents have no concept of what is important for their children. They want parents to leave it to the council to determine what should be taught in schools. On the contrary, parents want to know what it is all about. They will sometimes choose a traditional school and atmosphere for their children and sometimes they will opt for a more pioneering, progressive school and atmosphere. That is the test for the market to determine.

The Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Peckham continually condemn the two-tier system on the basis that if everybody cannot have it, no one should. It is ironic that the hon. Lady is now saying, "I want it, but not everyone can have it".

The Opposition accept the central tenets of our case. They are accepting entrepreneurship because that is what a good school is, in that it runs itself. Professional excellence, given professional freedom, can ensure successful self-government. Let the teachers and heads get on with it.

The Opposition accept the market, because the market allows choice and the market is showing parents—the customers—what those entrepreneurial schools can achieve. There is a system of diversity. I would say to every local authority, as I say to that in Leeds, "If your local nursery provision is that good, you have nothing to fear, but for heaven's sake, let the parents have the choice to put it to the test, because even the council schools may change."

Leeds is denying scores of families a whole year of extra provision of nursery education—provision which my constituents are being denied, except where imaginative, creative parents, using buildings in a primary school in Cookridge, have set up a nursery school called Clever Clogs. Parents in Cookridge had no choice until that type of provision was introduced. That might have been an example for the whole of Leeds, using the voucher scheme.

Having been in education all my life, I have never regarded spending on education as something other than an investment. It is not a public expense but an investment in our children, their capabilities and their future. It is an investment in the nation's future because, in the tough, competitive world that we are now in, we have no future unless we educate well.

In both respects, the Bill tries to ensure that a system of diversity produces excellence. I am amazed that hon. Members representing both Opposition parties have not had the wit to realise it.

9.16 pm

**Mr. Peter Kilfoyle** (Liverpool, Walton): If today's debate were a boxing match and you were the referee, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would have the Opposition well ahead on points at this stage. *[Laughter.]* We had an opening round from the Secretary of State, who shadow-boxed with herself. We had a second round from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), in which he scored knock-down after knock-down. Since then, we have had a co-ordinated campaign from my hon. Friends the Members for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), for Barking (Ms Hodge), for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who have scored repeatedly against the Government's case.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), who is not in his place, should be aware that, 11 days ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) tabled questions to the Welsh Office to try to elicit from it detail of the proposals for a nursery scheme in Wales. He has not yet received a reply because, as we all know, the Welsh Office is in a tremendous fix over how it will apply that ill-thought-out scheme.

I am happy that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) appears to be extremely supportive of the Labour party case on the Bill, although he gave the game away for the Liberal Democrats in his intervention on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Brightside when he said that what he expects us and, presumably, his own party to do would, at a conservative estimate, cost 2p or 3p on the pound.

Conservative Members made a very poor fist of things in the debate. The right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) is an erudite fellow. He used a quotation from George Orwell with the intention of undermining the sincerity of socialists in their cause. I took the opportunity to dig out an extract from a speech made by the original one nation Tory, Disraeli, all of 151 years ago, to show that Conservatives never change their spots. He said:

"A Conservative government is an organised hypocrisy".

Has not that been demonstrated in the House today?

*[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]*

In his book, "Coningsby", which I have read—as have, I am sure, many one nation Tories—Disraeli said:

"Conservatism discards Prescription, shrinks from Principle, disavows Progress; having rejected all respect for antiquity, it offers no redress for the present, and makes no preparation for the future."

He might have been speaking about the Bill.

I welcome the speech of the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), who is undoubtedly mindful of the excellent nursery school provision in Bristol, using the efficient high scope method. I hope that hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills), who expressed himself forcefully in support of the Opposition's case, will have the courage of their convictions and, more important, represent the interests of their constituents by joining us in the Lobby. The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) invoked the phrase, "Ye of little faith." We have tremendous faith in the present effective delivery, mainly by Labour-controlled authorities, of nursery education provision.

**Dr. Hampson:** Come to Leeds.

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** I went to Leeds and saw what a Labour authority can do with a Family of Schools despite the depredations of successive Tory Secretaries of State.

We have long advocated nursery education for all three and four-year-olds whose parents wish it in appropriate accommodation and with appropriately qualified staff. In theory, the Conservatives have had a similar commitment since Lady Thatcher was Secretary of State for Education 25 years ago. After 17 years in office, the Government have come up with a voucher scheme. The Secretary of State has had a Pauline conversion during the past 12 months. She was so confident in the voucher concept in March 1995 that she told BBC radio:

"As a delivery method for nursery education, there are certainly no attractions in vouchers."

Aptly put. The right hon. Lady was in good company. Geoffrey Wright, leader of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities Conservative group told the Brighton conference on 20 July last year:

"I don't think nursery education should be hijacked by vouchers. We would be no better off and could be worse off, and that is not a suitable basis on which to make an investment or a gamble."

Even the right-wing Minister of State, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), conceded to the Centre for Policy Studies:

"For every parent with a voucher, there needs to be a school place somewhere and if there is too much of a mismatch then the virtues and joys of a voucher scheme will not be forthcoming."

I am not too sure about the virtues and joys of a voucher scheme, but I am aware of the vices and sorrows attendant upon the Government's misconceived attempt to hoodwink the electorate into believing that the scheme is a serious investment in our children's future.

The Bill's three stated aims are: to give children a better start to their schooling, to provide parental choice and to encourage diversity. To give children a better start, pre-school education must have assured quality, which implies higher teacher-pupil ratios than children currently experience in reception classes, which may be as low as 1:35 because of the way the Government have cut local authority funding. A better start implies spacious accommodation and quality equipment, but the Government plan to abolish the minimum standards required under the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. A better start requires an extension of the special educational needs code of practice to nurseries, with qualified teachers to apply it. It requires also regular and full inspections of registered nurseries by qualified LEA inspectors.

We are offered instead a pilot scheme that was rejected by most authorities, including Tory-controlled councils such as Solihull and Buckingham. We understand that, for electoral and ideological reasons, the scheme will not even be evaluated before it is pushed on to all authorities in England and Wales.

It is difficult not to sympathise with the hon. Member for Meriden, who told the House in the debate on the Loyal Address:

"I have been overwhelmed by the number of chairmen of governors, governors and parents who have come to my advice bureaux over the last couple of months . . . Bluntly, they were all concerned about why we should have a socialist, bureaucratic, central system of nursery vouchers dictated by the state, when individual local education authorities already have a good system."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 491.]

Quite so.

The Bill will add no extra nursery places at a time when even Tory backwoodsmen accept the old Jesuit maxim, "Give me a child till the age of seven and I will give you the man." Recent figures compiled by the Library suggest that 133,220 three-year-olds currently with nursery places will be threatened when the Government claw back £548 million to finance a flawed voucher scheme. The pilot scheme alone is costing £290 per pupil in administration costs. Perhaps that is what led the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) to protest in a letter to *The Times* on 21 June 1995. He said:

"A voucher scheme runs the risk of breeding ghettos of nursery school deprivation, or reinforcing inequalities."

He was right.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind has pointed out that not only do the vast majority of visually impaired four-year-olds have nursery places, but so do the majority of visually impaired three-year-olds. All receive support from local education authority visual impairment services, generally in mainstream nurseries. Under the voucher scheme, the RNIB wonders what pressures three-year-olds will face finding places in good nurseries that apply the code of practice.

The arithmetic is simple. The vouchers will be worth £1,100, yet according to the Department for Education and Employment the average full-time place costs about £2,500. Even a place in a reception class costs £1,600 per pupil. When money is clawed back from local education authorities and given to private providers, places will inevitably be at risk. The front-line risk will be borne by three-year-olds for whom there is no statutory provision in the Bill.

Even if we approved of the scheme, it would have to contain three elements to enable it to be delivered equitably. There would have to be an excess of provision over demand, which there is not. The vouchers would have to cover the cost of a place, which they do not. They would have to be worth enough to cover start-up costs

and training, and they would have to have a weighting for children with special needs. They manifestly fail to have any of those.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** How is state provision of nursery places helped by the attitude of most local authorities? In my constituency, the Holy Trinity primary school proposed to provide a nursery unit, which was fought every inch of the way by the Labour and Liberal Democrat council merely because it was a grant-maintained school.

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** Whenever the hon. Member speaks, I think of him as the Nosferatu of Gravesham. He comes out to pick over the bones of the Conservative party's dead educational policies. His question is a classic example. The hon. Member should be aware that, under 18 years of a Conservative county council, not a single nursery place was made available. He should also be aware that more than 2,000 three-year-olds are now in nursery classes, and that another 250 places are due to be provided this year. Because the voucher scheme will claw back more than £14 million from Kent, it imperils that extra provision as well as the current provision.

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Education told the House recently that

"Nursery education . . . has education and social benefits that far outweigh the investment required at that stage. It gives tremendous value for money."

I say amen to that. It is just a pity that the money is going into bureaucracy and hand-outs, often to those who can already afford private nursery education, at the expense of those in imminent social and economic need of local authority places.

Of course, traditionally, Labour local authorities have invested in early-years education. They have long put their money where their mouths are, but they are now unable to plan further provision because of the quixotic nature of the scheme. The only thing of which they are sure is that the voucher scheme is, as the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) described it, with his usual eloquence:

"a rather spatchcocked scheme to provide a little more partial nursery education to a few more people at the age of four."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 487-99.]

I had to look up the word spatchcock. It is a dead game bird, freshly grilled. It is not something that we are used to in Liverpool, Walton, I hasten to add.

The hon. Member for Buckingham damned the scheme with faint praise, but he did not do justice to the truth. What will the clawback mean for budgets in primary schools, given the average £1,600 cost of a reception place and a voucher value of only £1,100 per pupil? What ramifications does the scheme hold for the entire provision in any given primary school? What effects will be felt by those nursery schools which cater heavily for three-year-olds, for whom no provision is made in the Bill?

The reality is that the measure is ill-conceived. The Minister must give the following reassurances to the House. How will he guarantee quality in nursery education? What are the Government's proposals to ensure proper accreditation of nursery schools in all sectors, including the independent sector, rather than the risible self-assessment that has been proposed? Whence will he recruit qualified inspectors trained in early-years provision? Can he guarantee an acceptable degree of educational qualifications for staff in all nurseries? What guarantees will he give in respect of requirements for children with special educational needs? Will he pledge to the House that there will be no extension of the scheme until there has been a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot project, and until consequential amendments to it have been made?

I doubt whether the Minister can offer these guarantees, because the Bill is based not on educational, but on ideological, premises.

**Dr. Hampson:** It is certainly true that we need to monitor the scheme, but as the hon. Gentleman has gone on endlessly about the need for resources, does he accept another critical factor in the argument? I refer to the style, nature and quality of the teaching—not just resources. The education editor of *The Guardian* congratulated Leeds on the extra resources that it is pouring into inner-city schools, but then added that the standards of reading "actually fell". The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), a former education spokesman, was reported as commenting:

"Leeds is to be congratulated on publishing a report that is critical".

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** The hon. Gentleman should understand that that is why the Labour party emphasises standards. It is why we talk about reducing class sizes, and why we do not accept the Government's loose approach to the accreditation of centres and the qualifications of the staff in them under this scheme.

The ostensible purpose of clause 6 is to allow GM schools borrowing facilities for capital purposes comparable with those of LEAs. This is a chimera, for the simple reason that LEAs have to borrow through the Government against the public sector borrowing requirement, subject to heavy restrictions. Meanwhile, GM schools have had preferential capital grants from the Government far in excess of those available to other maintained schools—two and a half times as much, in fact.

Secondly, provision under the Bill cannot be seen in isolation from the other element outlined in the consultation paper: allowing GM schools to retain 100 per cent. of their capital receipts. Admittedly, taken together, the two elements might seem an attractive package not just to GM schools—particularly those on split sites—but to potential converts to the Government's failed drive to increase their number, but according to *The Times Educational Supplement* of last Friday, GM schools are, wisely, reluctant borrowers. Eighty per cent. of those surveyed by the TES refused to borrow on the open market. The Government failed to heed the warnings of their own consultation, to which only one in 20 GM schools even bothered to reply. The reasons for that varied, but the unease was uniform. Alan Crampton of Audenshaw high said:

"I am uneasy about mortgaging the school for another head to pick up the bill!"

Nigel Powis of St. Andrews, Weeley, in Essex, said:

"At the end of this year, I'll have about 300 pounds left, and you can't borrow against that."

John Bennett of Marshland high, West Walton, Cambridgeshire said:

"It puts a desperate need for money back on to schools for things that are really a landlord's responsibility".

*[Mr. Kilfoyle]*

Paul Beashel of the Deanes school, Benfleet, in Essex wrote:

"We just don't want to take on any debts"—

even though the school has just received £200,000 from the lottery for facilities that should have been provided by the DFEE. And Geoff Mason of the Maelor school in Clwyd said:

"There is not sufficient surplus to envisage being able to make the repayments."

So who will take up the new opportunity under the aegis of the Funding Agency for Schools? No one, if the National Association of Governors and Managers is to be believed. In its view:

"The association does not believe that the FAS, who will approve borrowing proposals on behalf of the Secretary of State, can acquire the necessary educational expertise."

More to the point, perhaps, the FAS—a quango packed with Tory placemen and women, has neither the efficiency nor the regard for public money necessary to exercise such a function. That was aptly demonstrated by Lord Justice Evans on 6 October last, when the FAS took itself to the Appeal Court and the appeal was thrown out. He said of the FAS:

"There is no evidence why the Agency could not reach its decision in time".

It could not reach a decision quickly enough to satisfy even the court, and we know how quickly the courts operate under this Government.

Lord Justice Evans went on to comment:

"It is regrettable that . . . the Funding Agency has not taken account of the Judge's observations . . . regarding the waste of public money."

The judge has the agency well weighed up.

Nor has true account been taken of the role of trustees, especially in GM Church schools. Many GM schools will be prevented from borrowing by the veto of the trustees. The Churches are afraid of the consequences for them if borrowing is to be a substitute for Government capital funding of their schools. Where does that leave us? The merchant banks do not want to know because the projects are too small. The clearing banks might want to know, but they will be cautious in the new market. Financiers are more interested in revenue than in assets, so why should they trust inexperienced schools with only dedicated education funding and little or no surplus?

The truth is that the Government set out three options in a handbook—joint ventures to develop school-community facilities; land swaps, with new build for land owned by a school; and new schools at sites alongside housing developments. Only the first option seems likely for most grant-maintained schools. After all, the facility will be limited to non-core assets and the Prime Minister has made a heck of a fuss about games, which precludes the wholesale disposal of playing fields.

We must not forget the vexed area of local education authority interest. Why should the rest of the local community ultimately pick up the tab for a charge on an asset, the receipts for which go 100 per cent. to a grant-maintained school? As one response to the Government's consultation said:

"Any moves to change the funding basis of GM schools, either capital or revenue, should be within a framework that ensures a level playing field for all schools. We see no case for GM schools to be funded more advantageously than LEA maintained schools."

I misheard for a moment and thought that that response came from a socialist education association; it was actually a Conservative education association response. Its vice-president is the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst) and its patrons include the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) and the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton). This Bill does absolutely nothing for nursery provision; it subsidises the private sector. It brings further division between LEAs and GM schools. In fact, it even divides GM schools on the basis of those that have disposable assets and those that do not—and that is a matter of historical accident anyway. The Bill is predicated not on educational need, but on ideological prejudice, as the Prime Minister and his faithful Secretary of State seek to appease the hard right of the Tory party.

These proposals are the fag end of a fag end education programme launched on 12 September and promptly scuttled by a fag end Prime Minister. The Sicilians have a marvellous expression to describe the political health of the Prime Minister, "Lui dorme coi pesci"—he sleeps with the fishes. I urge the House to reject the Bill.

9.37 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire):** This has been an enjoyable debate with some powerful contributions from both sides of the Chamber, with a few myths being spread that I intend to dispel. At the end came a speech of pure fantasy from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and I shall deal with some elements during my speech. First, I want to deal with the few common points in the debate—

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** My hon. Friend referred to a speech of pure fantasy from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). The hon. Gentleman claimed that no new nursery units had been provided in Kent for 18 years. I have to tell him that every one of the numerous nursery units in my constituency was provided by a Conservative county council. By contrast, under the Lib-Lab county council no new units have been provided—other than that provided by a grant-maintained school.

**Mr. Squire:** I am delighted that I gave way to my hon. Friend, who had great difficulty getting in earlier.

**Mr. Dunn:** My hon. Friend will recall that earlier the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) was asked many times about the statement in the Sheffield *Star* on 21 November, which reported him as saying:

"I am having no truck with middle class left-wing parents who preach one thing and send their children to another school outside the area".

We wondered why he would not answer any questions—now we know that his statement and beliefs are a direct criticism not just of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), but of the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Squire:** My hon. Friend has touched a raw nerve on the Opposition Benches, and we could all see that as we watched the debate this afternoon.

What has linked the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson)—my old foe in a pleasant sense—and my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and

Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) has been a broad welcome to the expansion of quality nursery education, because what it is about, notwithstanding the earlier contribution of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who disagrees with the definition, is the expansion across the country not just in local authority provision but in the voluntary sector and, indeed, the private sector.

There will be quality controls, which we have set out. We have accepted in full the recommendations of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority covering the quality outcomes—the desirable learning outcomes—that we would expect four-year-olds to reach. I had hoped that there would be broad agreement for that and for the way in which it should, would and must lead into key stage 1. We cannot be complacent about the quality of education being delivered to four-year-olds, looking at the entire country. We need to raise standards, and the sooner we start, the better. The Bill sets out our suggestion as to the way in which that should be done.

The second area that should be non-controversial is inspection—apparently, that is not so—under the control and framework of Ofsted, which has already in a relatively short time established a good reputation. I am delighted that it is in charge of inspections, but there is a belief, which simply is not founded in fact—I accept that it might have been a misunderstanding earlier on the part of the hon. Member for Brightside, but it is shared by Opposition Members—that money is being wasted on bureaucracy, and/or that the inspection regime will not be rigid. Let me say a little about it. We have made it clear that whether we are talking about the first phase, for which some £5 million is being set aside for administration and inspection, or the second, when it expands across the country, for which £20 million is being set aside, the large proportion of the money is for inspection. Given that an estimated 12,000 providers are not currently inspected, I should have thought that hon. Members would have broadly welcomed that. It is a clear quality commitment. How else do we underpin the expansion of quality nursery provision other than by guaranteeing that it is properly inspected? Instead of that, a myth has been propagated that a significant administrative expense is involved. It is not.

We are not talking about a large bureaucracy. My right hon. Friend, when she opened the debate, set out clearly what the stages were. From the point of view of the parent—the most important person in the whole equation—it is a question of the parent signing the form on behalf of the child, achieving the nursery voucher and deciding where he or she should spend it. That is not bureaucratic.

**Mr. Blunkett:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, as this is an important area. Is it not a fact that, under the validation system set out in the next steps document from the Department for Education and Employment, those seeking to provide will simply have to self-assess their organisation and fill in the validation form for their own—as it is described in the document—in-house purposes, and that the inspection costs for phase 1 can be assumed only to be a preparation for the second phase, as we heard earlier? If that is the case, is not the National Audit Office in a position to examine whether we are using £5 million for 17,000 places in an inappropriate manner? Is it not right for the Audit Commission, which is to report next week, to draw attention to the fraud that could arise from the system?

**Mr. Squire:** I hope that other hon. Members will not intervene for a similar length, or I shall have to scrap the rest of my speech.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point, the short answer is no. The provision, as I sought to explain earlier, restricts those who take vouchers to LEA-maintained classes or private schools registered with the Department, essentially, the voluntary providers—those registered under the Children Act 1989. That check is provided up front, as it were. The providers themselves must agree to be inspected, and must publish a significant amount of information, as well as going through the self-assessment schedule mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

I repeat what I said earlier. It is very simple. Either the hon. Gentleman can go along with the thrust of his theory, and maintain that on 1 April 1997 thousands of parents will find that good-quality existing providers cannot take vouchers because they have not yet been inspected, or—however reluctantly—he can agree with us that the balance of the argument lies in allowing the scheme to proceed, and ensuring that, as quickly as Ofsted can arrange it, people are trained to carry out inspections that will give us the quality that we consider essential. The hon. Gentleman has that choice, but we strongly believe that it is important not to disrupt existing good provision.

The second myth that the hon. Gentleman attempted to peddle was that there would be a million pieces of paper—or whatever the number was.

**Mr. Jamieson:** Two million.

**Mr. Squire:** The figure has gone up. There is inflation for you.

As I made clear, the vast majority of parents who choose just one provider of nursery education will hand over just one piece of paper at the beginning of each term. That does not strike me as bureaucratic, and there certainly will not be millions of pieces of paper.

I can tell the hon. Member for Devonport that early-years inspections for private education will take place at least every four years. He will understand that other inspection of private schools is not a matter for the Bill.

The hon. Member for Newham, South and my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth mentioned the possibility of fraud. My hon. Friend dealt succinctly with the checks that we are instituting to make fraud less likely. I shall not deal with matters with which the House would not expect me to deal, but, for the benefit of those who may not have been present when my hon. Friend spoke, let me repeat that each voucher will have the child's name printed on it, and each will have a unique serial number. Vouchers will normally be issued only in respect of children on the child benefit database, and payment will be triggered only by vouchers that have been issued legitimately. I do not think that it assists a rational discussion of our proposals if Opposition Members imply that a significant fraud is about to be perpetrated.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) disappointed me. He has said outside the House—as he is perfectly entitled to—that no extra places will arise as a result of

*[Mr. Squire]*

the Bill. For some reason, however, shyness overtook him this afternoon, and he spoke merely of a gimmick rather than of no extra places. I have news for the hon. Gentleman: already, all four phase 1 authorities are clear that extra places will be available from 1 April which were not available from last April. If that comes as a surprise to the hon. Gentleman, it may be because elementary economics are not the Liberals' strong suit. Broadly speaking, however, if extra funds are provided other things tend to happen, and that has been the case in this instance.

Serious points were raised about phase 1 and the extent to which it is a pilot scheme. Let me answer them as best I can. We shall examine a number of matters during phase 1. We shall, of course, examine the operation of the encashment of vouchers, and, indeed, the value of vouchers. We shall consider whether there should be regional variation. Several points have been put to me; I shall deal shortly with the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), when I talk about special needs. He also raised the point about the voucher's value, which I shall cover.

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths** (Edinburgh, South): Will the Minister guarantee that the low value of the vouchers at present, which has been widely criticised, will not, under any circumstances, be reduced?

**Mr. Squire:** I am not standing at the Dispatch Box today talking of guarantees on the values of vouchers. I have already said—you, Madam Speaker, heard me, as did the House—that the question of the value of the voucher is being reviewed. We will have at least two issues of the voucher during April and for the September term, where we will be able to start taking into account how that value operates. It would be foolish for either the hon. Gentleman or his party to suggest from that answer that the Minister is threatening a reduced voucher value. I have made it clear that I am talking about reviewing the value of the voucher.

I hope that I have reassured my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth about the value of phase 1. Some aspects of phase 1 are inevitably medium term—the question of how the Ofsted framework operates comes to mind. It is a medium-term thing—it will take two or three years to evaluate. Some hon. Members want a long-term view. Self-evidently, how phase 1 leads, in turn, to an improvement in key stage 1 and key stage 2 results is, by definition, a long-term matter. Hon. Members on either side of the House can say, "At any one stage, we must have this information before a pilot becomes live." I am satisfied that, on the things that can be reviewed in a relatively short time, we will have sufficient information.

**Ms Hodge:** Will the Minister give the House the reassurance and guarantee that all children aged four in the four pilot authorities in phase 1 will be guaranteed a place in a nursery?

**Mr. Squire:** The hon. Lady, who knows better than that, is being foolish. She knows as well as I that no magic wand can on 31 March suddenly create 100 per cent provision. I will tell her this, however, because she is sitting there smiling. She has no reason to smile. I have already said that more places will be available on 1 April than at present. That provision will grow. She has to allow time for partnerships to grow, including partnerships between LEAs and voluntary providers.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley, who has a distinguished record in education, the hon. Member for Bath and the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), the spokesman for Plaid Cymru, raised the issue of special needs, which is important. We are making it clear that all providers will need to make clear what their admission arrangements are and what their staffing is with regard to special needs pupils. It of course remains the case that LEAs retain responsibility for funding of statementing. I will carefully consider the question of a separate value for special needs during Committee and outside it. I hope that my right hon. Friend will accept that as a sincere commitment. On his other point, he wants the Bill to be extended to three-year-olds. The Bill has been deliberately drafted so that it may be extended at some time to three-year-olds.

A brief word for my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills), who was present earlier—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is here.] I am so sorry. He has moved—he is a highly mobile Member for Meriden and an honourable man. As he said, I have met him several times. He knows that he and I differ on the Bill's impact, which I suppose will not be demonstrated finally to our proof until it is enacted. With all sincerity, we would not introduce the measure if we considered in the slightest that it would have the impact—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The Minister's words will not be recorded unless he speaks to the House rather than to individual hon. Members.

**Mr. Squire:** I apologise, Madam Speaker.

We would not introduce the legislation if we thought that it would in any way have the outcome that my hon. Friend fears.

May I turn quickly to grant-maintained borrowing and then I shall come to the heart of the Bill.

No one seems to have opposed the hon. Member for Walton for making the classic mistake of believing *The Times Educational Supplement*. The figures in the article from which he quoted are different from the headline and show that more grant maintained heads are now interested in borrowing than when they were surveyed 15 months ago. It is now a third instead of a quarter. If a quarter of GM heads think that they may take advantage of it, that is good news. If the proportion is now a third, that is even better news.

**Mr. Kilfoyle** *rose—*

**Mr. Squire:** I shall not give way. I have given way much more generously than the hon. Gentleman who summed up for the Opposition.

I shall now turn to the key part of the Bill. The background is that across the country there is disparate provision of nursery education. It is strange, is it not, that certain buzz words or phrases produce a response in the Labour party like that produced by a silver cross being waved at Dracula. The first such phrase is "GM self-governing schools". As we have seen in the past

24 hours, the second one is "grammar schools" and the third is clearly "nursery vouchers". Labour opposes the Bill simply because it means greater parental choice.

**Mr. Riddick:** Has my hon. Friend heard the latest news? Out in the Lobby the word is that shadow Cabinet members wish to have the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) rebuked at Wednesday's shadow Cabinet meeting. Will we arrange protection for the hon. Lady, who is simply taking advantage of Conservative policies and Conservative choice?

**Mr. Squire:** I am absolutely horrified at what my hon. Friend suggests. In the past 24 hours we have seen the resignation of the Back-Bench education spokesman, the withdrawal of an oral question in another place on selection in education, and the resignation of what I am told is described as Labour's media chief. I am not surprised at what is happening, and it is all on one subject—parental selection. Imagine what will happen when vouchers are in everybody's hands. It will be astonishing.

I stress that the key matter is that we support choice. That is why we support vouchers. Myth No. 4 is that three-year-olds are threatened by the provision. As I have said time and again, the local education funding mechanism for four-year-olds is cash-neutral. That includes the provision in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden in Solihull. Far from the number of four-year-olds being reduced in the LEA setting, everything points to the number increasing against a background of increased provision for nursery education.

Opposition Members have said that they are in favour of the expansion of nursery education. They are probably in favour of inspection and a tighter regime. They have also said that they are in favour of provision for three-year-olds, although they have not said when that would happen. Above all, they have not said how there would be provision. It is one thing for the Opposition to oppose vouchers but it is another to say what they would do. They do not have a proposal, although we are told that after 16 or whatever years in opposition they may produce one in the next two or three months. Let us hold our breaths!

The Opposition recognise that if they make provision through the SSA local government funding system they cannot guarantee that the money will be spent on education, never mind nurseries. If they give millions of pounds to current low nursery place providers with not even a guarantee that they will provide nursery education they will face an enormous backlash from many of their councils that are delivering high provision.

The Bill is about creating universal education for four-year-olds. For the first time it will deliver quality education for four-year-olds and, also for the first time, it will provide underpinning by inspection across all settings. Via vouchers it will allow parents for the first time greater choice than they have previously enjoyed by putting them in the driving seat.

In contrast, Labour claims to support the expansion of nursery education, but fails to present a credible mechanism for delivering it. It claims to endorse our quality aims, but criticises the necessary costs of expecting all providers to ensure that quality. It claims to support parental choice in theory, but in practice it clings—as ever—to the idea of LEAs being in control and constraining that choice. The debate has highlighted which party is addressing the real issues of expanding nursery education. I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put*, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

*The House divided*: Ayes 285, Noes 253.

**Division No. 31]** **[9.59 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence

Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and Dr. Liam Fox.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Berningham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John

McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stern, Michael
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Joe Benton and**
**Mr. Robert Ainsworth.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).*

## NURSERY EDUCATION AND GRANT-MAINTAINED SCHOOLS BILL [*MONEY*]

*Queen's recommendation having been signified—*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required by the Secretary of State for making grants in respect of nursery education or for making payments to any person exercising any function by virtue of the Act,

(b) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act, and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in sums payable out of money provided by Parliament under any other Act, and

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums received by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Act and of fees received by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England or Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales under the Act.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 18th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),*

REPORTS ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION

That this House takes note of European Parliament Resolution A4-0102/95 on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union with a view to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference; the Report of the Council on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union, Cm. 2866; the Report by the Commission on the operation of the Treaty on European Union, SEC(95) 731; the Report by the Court of Auditors on the operation of the Treaty on European Union; the Report of the Court of Justice on certain aspects of the application of the Treaty on European Union; and the Report of the Study Group preparing for the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## PETITION

### Nursery Vouchers

**Mr. Iain Mills** (Meriden): I beg leave to present a petition from more than 12,000 residents of the constituency of Meriden and nearby. It declares

the grave concern of residents of Solihull over the detrimental effect that the present proposal for the introduction of nursery vouchers will have on Early Years Education (3-4 year olds in nursery and 4-5 year olds in reception) in Solihull.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education to reconsider this proposal.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## Policing (Birmingham)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

10.17 pm

**Ms Estelle Morris** (Birmingham, Yardley): I welcome this opportunity to debate policing and law and order in the city of Birmingham.

As well as bringing to the Minister's attention issues concerning our city, I want to refer to important issues in Yardley. In such a debate I risk giving the impression that our city is crime ridden and that half of those who live there commit crimes against the other half. That is not so. Birmingham is a thriving and successful city, which has fought its way through successive recessions and marked out a real future for itself. In discussing my constituency I also risk giving the wrong impression of what it is like to live there. It is on the outer ring of Birmingham and is a sought-after place in which to live. Like citizens throughout the city, the majority of my constituents are decent and honest people who want to live in the knowledge that they are safe in their community and secure in their homes.

As I refer to young people throughout my speech and comment on the problems that we have with some of those committing crime, I am only too well aware that most young people in our country are good people who contribute to their communities and want nothing more than to work hard, contribute their skills and be part of our society. I hope that the Minister will accept my comments against that important background.

The Government tell us that things are getting better and that they are winning the battle over crime. But whatever the Government's statistics show, the perception of my constituents is that things are getting worse. We know what the Government's figures say about crime in the west midlands. The figures show that crime has almost doubled under this Government and that violent crime has more than doubled. We know that there is a one in nine chance of being burgled and a one in four chance of a vehicle being broken into.

People in Birmingham feel vulnerable on all fronts. The headline news in the region today was of three incidents of stabbing—major crime in Birmingham that has been committed over the past weekend and recent months. That is the serious crime, which makes the headlines and shocks us all. Over the Christmas period, two Birmingham police constables, PC Jon Jackson and WPC Vanessa Greening, were viciously attacked and badly injured while patrolling in the Kings Heath area. Ten shoppers were attacked by a man with a knife in the Bordesley Green area and in recent weeks gangs of youths in the Aston area of the city have taken to the streets to battle out their differences. I am sorry to say that Mr. Tommy McGregor, a victim in the Netto supermarket stabbings, died in hospital yesterday as a result of the wounds that he received.

As well as big, horrifying crime that we all know about, there is what I term the lesser crime—anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour that occur day in, day out, and the fear of crime to which that behaviour leads. I am fed up of having to listen to stories from constituents who tell me that they have been burgled three and four times in a year. There are families whose neighbours have made their lives so miserable that they want to move. Youths hang about street corners causing disturbances; pensioners no longer open the door after dark; our public buildings and open spaces are vandalised and covered with graffiti. Such crime does not make the headlines and it does not lead the regional news; most of it does not even reach the official statistics, but it blights the lives of too many people.

I wanted to be sure about the views of my constituents in Yardley and over the summer I distributed a survey to every household in the constituency. I am not claiming that it is scientific, but it represents the real voice of thousands of people who live on the east side of Birmingham. The results were shocking: 40 per cent. of my constituents felt that they had been victims of crime in the past two years; 17 per cent. had not even bothered to report it to the police; more than one third felt that they had been treated badly as victims. Is it any wonder that 60 per cent. of my old-age pensioners feel vulnerable in their homes?

Yardley is not a high-crime area. I am not pretending for a minute that those with responsibility for securing law and order are sitting idly by and doing nothing. The West Midlands police acted promptly and bravely at the supermarket stabbings, as they did this weekend at New Street station. They have recently uncovered a lorry full of drugs in my constituency, in Tyseley; they support neighbourhood watch groups and work with schools. I acknowledge those achievements and thank them for their work and for the co-operation that I receive.

One of the consequences of effective police action on big crime is that officers are pulled out of areas like mine and drafted into the problem spots in the city, which is why the low-level crime goes unreported and undetected. Whatever those in power and authority have done, it is not enough. People in Birmingham feel that the situation is becoming worse, not better. Crime and anti-social behaviour are still major problems.

There is probably agreement between the Minister and everyone in the House on the need to work together if we are to get anywhere. But there must also be leadership, which is what the Government should be showing. There is no recognition by Ministers that the decimation of our youth service can encourage anti-social behaviour. There is no acknowledgement that more than 55,000 unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds can lead to problems. There seems to be no understanding that too many of our young people do not feel that they have a stake in the future of our city.

Why did the Home Office stop the funding of the safer cities project, which everyone agreed was successful? What sort of leadership cuts local government funding so drastically that crime prevention measures get squeezed out? Where is the initiative for dealing with anti-social behaviour before it turns to crime? Why do police tell people that they know who is committing crime, but that it is pointless to try to do anything about it? The Minister will not be surprised to learn that in my survey people called for longer sentences for those who commit crimes. It is also interesting to note that people felt that crime could be reduced by giving young people more to do and more opportunities.

Governments are judged by their actions not by their words, and the verdict of the people of Birmingham is that the Government have failed them on the issue that is

most important to them: ensuring a safe and secure city. We must change the underlying values of society if we are to tackle the problem, but that must wait until we have a new Government. Meanwhile, something must and can be done.

I shall tell the Minister what initiatives I and others are taking in my constituency and elsewhere in the city following the survey that I carried out in the summer. It is not for me to detect and deal with those who break the law; that is the responsibility of the state. However, we can take initiatives locally.

First, our local newspaper, the *Birmingham Evening Mail,* is stepping up its attack on crime. The newspaper already has a good reputation for working closely with the national organisation, Crimestoppers and it runs a weekly slot on Thursday appealing to the public for information about crime. I am pleased to announce that from next week the Crimestoppers contact number will be displayed very prominently across the pages of the city's biggest newspaper every day. I am grateful to the editor, Ian Dowell, and to the deputy editor, Ray Dunn, for their support for the initiative and for the way in which they have always worked, and shall continue to work, with people throughout the city to fight crime and anti-social behaviour.

Secondly, Crimestoppers will do all that it can to ensure that its telephone line is answered personally 12 hours a day and that an answer phone is available at other times. Thirdly, in my constituency there will be door-to-door leafleting of Crimestoppers information. Fourthly, we shall be piloting a project in Yardley to help the elderly to protect themselves against crime.

I shall be working with the Comet group and with the voluntary organisation Age Concern, which is making available to every pensioner in my constituency a fact sheet about safety in the home. In conjunction with that, the Comet electrical superstore will provide money-off vouchers so that pensioners can buy timed plug sockets in order to give signs of occupancy when they are home alone or when the house is empty.

That is what we are doing locally to combat crime. However, the Government must take action and show more leadership if we are to solve the problem. In my survey, people said that having more bobbies on the beat would reduce crime. Beat bobbies make a difference and crime decreases with regular police patrols. We also need stable policing. There must be sufficient police available so that when crises arise—as occurred in Birmingham recently—police are not diverted from my area and similar outer ring areas to problem areas.

We welcome the money that the Government have allocated to provide extra police and we look forward to seeing extra constables in the West Midlands force. However, the measure is very little and very late.

We need money for simple crime prevention. Every street should be lit and every back entry should be cleared. Subways that people are too frightened to use should be closed. The safer cities project should be reinstated so that communities can work together. We need a proper youth programme so that young people have somewhere to go and something to do. We need all those things, yet the local council has been told to make cuts of £48 million next year.

Young people who break the law need supervision. I do not want them locked away unnecessarily, but I want action taken against those who commit crimes and then brag about it on the street. The probation service has a good record in working with young people. Why cannot that service be expanded? It is easy to be alarmist about crime, but it is also too easy to refuse to stare the problem in the face. Any Minister who tells the House that crime has been conquered and any Government who pretend that crime is decreasing are burying their heads in the sand. We cannot remove the fear of crime while we have a Government who give people a message that does not match those people's experience.

As a country and as a city, we are good at tackling the big crime. That is a real success, and the people involved should be congratulated. What gnaws away at people's lives, however, is the incessant, everyday crime and what they consider to be crime. Every person in the city of Birmingham knows a relative, friend or neighbour who has been a victim of crime. That is not how the people of Yardley, of Birmingham or of the United Kingdom want to live. They deserve better, and the Government have an obligation to show some leadership so that they may have better.

I have outlined to the Minister the action that we shall take locally, but the responsibility for law and order lies with him. We need to know what action he will take to lessen people's fears. I look forward to hearing his comments.

10.30 pm

**Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) on securing the debate and I thank her and the Minister for giving me a couple of minutes to say a few words in the debate, which is so important to the people of Birmingham and to all the people of the west midlands.

In the west midlands, the risk of a household being burgled is one in nine, the risk of a vehicle being broken into is one in four and the risk of a person being assaulted is one in 78. All those statistics are worse than in 1979. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the problem of the fear of crime and the justified worry that so many people have that if they report crime nothing will happen as a result.

I want to tell the House of an instructive incident from my constituency, Northfield. In the summer, a man appeared outside a nursery with an air gun and fired pellets through the windows; indeed, pellets were found on the ground afterwards. The entire incident was witnessed by members of staff at the nursery, but to this day no conviction has resulted because police officers were apparently unable to reach the scene in time, even though the incident was reported while it was going on.

That matter has been taken up with the local police. I endorse what my hon. Friend said about the great efforts that the West Midlands police are making, but at that time the response rate for urgent crimes—crimes requiring police response in 10 minutes at the outside—was only 76 per cent. I am pleased that the figure has increased since then, but there remains a 15 per cent. chance that if a crime of that nature is committed the police will be unable to reach the scene within their response time.

That means that we need changes. I endorse what my hon. Friend said about the need for more bobbies on the beat and for better response times as a result of improved police staffing levels. We also need the organisation

*[Mr. Richard Burden]*

behind that, and the back-up through the vital partnership between the police, local authorities and many other agencies. Here I pay tribute to the *Birmingham Evening Mail* for its initiatives in conjunction with the Crimestoppers organisation.

The Government must realise that it makes no sense to say that one wants to reduce crime, especially youth crime, and at the same time to impose on local authorities cuts which mean cuts in the youth service and youth provision. The two just do not go together.

I appeal to the Minister to address the considerable problems that my hon. Friend has outlined, and to build the partnership against crime that people in Birmingham, and people throughout the country, deserve.

10.33 pm

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean):** I thank the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) for the opportunity to debate issues of law and order in Birmingham. The hon. Lady drew attention to several of the anxieties of her constituents and those important issues are of interest to people throughout the country.

For too long there has been a depressing view that we are powerless in the face of increasing crime. That is not a view to which I and my ministerial colleagues in the Home Office have ever subscribed. We have listened to the anxieties of those people at the sharp end of the fight against crime and to their opinions about how we, as a Government, should respond to those anxieties.

We do not underestimate the problems, but we believe that we can win—although it is a tough battle. I share the hon. Lady's distress at recent attacks on officers in the West Midlands police. I am pleased to be able to report today that WPC Vanessa Greening, who suffered a broken skull after being set upon by vicious louts, is making a good recovery. I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in sending our good wishes to her, and to every other officer, not only in Birmingham but throughout the country, who is injured in the course of their duties.

Attacks on the police, such as that suffered by police officers in Birmingham recently, demonstrate the need for the best available protection. West Midlands' chief constable is keen that his officers should be able to use CS spray for self-defence, and CS is an effective incapacitant. The Association of Chief Police Officers decided last Thursday to start operational trials in 16 forces in England and Wales, starting on 1 March. West Midlands police will be one of the trialling forces. The trials will be the subject of expert evaluation, and we shall watch progress with interest.

Our strategy for dealing with crime has four main strands. We must do all that we can to prevent crime. We must do all that we can to catch criminals. We must ensure that when they have been caught they are tried fairly and speedily. And we must make sure that if they are convicted, the courts have all the powers that they need to deal with criminals appropriately and effectively.

Our objectives in dealing with law and order are widely shared, and we are making progress towards relieving the fears that many of our constituents face.

Last September, with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, I was able to announce the biggest fall in recorded crime in our history. Those are not just Home Office figures. They come from all the police forces throughout the country, who give us the figures. On top of earlier falls, recorded crime fell a further 5 per cent. for the 12 months to June 1995. The West Midlands police area was no exception, with recorded crime falling 5 per cent. in the 12 months to June 1995. Although offences of robbery rose, there were significant falls in offences of burglary—which decreased by 9 per cent—and in offences of violence against the person, which fell by 19 per cent.

The latest recorded crime figures highlight the fact that, although the level of crime is still far too high, the dedicated efforts of the police and the community at large can result and have resulted in significant falls in the number of recorded crimes.

**Ms Estelle Morris:** Is the Minister not concerned about the problem of unrecorded crime? Has his Department done anything to establish the extent of crime? In my experience, the public feel that the system will not deliver and so there is no point in reporting crime. That is why the figures that the Minister has given bear no relationship to the public perception of crime levels in the community.

**Mr. Maclean:** Of course we have undertaken research. The British crime survey figures, which are published every few years, are consistent. Of course there is a lot of unreported crime, which remains fairly consistent. Recently, we have seen a declining trend in the British crime survey which measures unrecorded crime. In fact, it is self-reporting. The public, depending on their memory, tell researchers the level of crime that they have, in their belief, witnessed. That trend has been going the same way as reported crime figures.

Some crimes, such as murder and violence, are subject to high reporting levels. Car theft produces almost 100 per cent. reporting. At the other end of the scale, vandalism is certainly subject to low reporting levels. Nevertheless, the levels of recorded crime have been falling. There has been no change in recording practice in the last two years. The police know that levels have been falling. The insurance companies will say that claims have been falling. That all follows the same trend, which is good news.

Of course I would like the news to be even better and the fall in crime to be not just 5 per cent. each year but 10 per cent., 15 per cent. or 20 per cent. We would all like that. The fall has shown that we are not helpless in the face of rising crime. A myth has grown up since the war: just because crime has risen under every Tory and Labour Government—it certainly rose under the last Labour Government, just as it has risen under this Government—we tend to believe that nothing can be done. People say that the rise in crime is inevitable; it is, they say, a statistical trend in every west European country, and we are all doomed to rising crime for ever more. That is bunkum. It is possible to cut into the problem—with effective police action, backed up by proper legal changes and, crucially, partnerships in the community.

Let me turn now to the resources available to West Midlands police. This year the force's spending power is about £329.3 million. That is an increase of 4.3 per cent.—an extra £13.5 million—over the base budget for 1994-95. That is a substantial increase, above the

national average, and clearly demonstrates the high priority that the Government place on fighting crime. The police authority has sensibly taken full advantage of the additional funds available in setting this year's budget.

In addition, West Midlands police did not have to find a further sum this year to pay for common police services such as the police national computer. The year before, that cost them £2.6 million, which they did not have to cough up this year. Those extra resources should provide scope to increase local policing levels. I understand that the chief constable is expecting force strength to increase by 181 during 1995-96.

The Government's commitment to the police will be maintained in the next financial year too. Under our current proposals, the basic funding available to West Midlands police for the financial year 1996-97 increases by £14.5 million, or 4.4 per cent. over the equivalent figure for last year. Again, that is above the national average. Next year, West Midlands will not have to find a further sum to pay for common police services.

The £343.7 million to be allocated to West Midlands police in 1996-97 includes their share of the funding being made available for the 5,000 additional officers over the next three years announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Under our proposals, West Midlands' share of the additional funding in the first year will be ff1 million. That alone would be sufficient to recruit an extra 52 extra constables. Based on a similar distribution mechanism, and assuming that the chief decides to spend the money on extra bobbies, this initiative alone could provide the force with an extra 258 constables after three years and will help the force to achieve high visibility policing.

The hon. Lady said that she was pleased with the money we are putting into the West Midlands force this year. I hope that that did not give the impression that this year was a unique occasion. The West Midlands force, like every other in the country, has received substantial extra funding from the Government. The net result is that the money available to the British police service now is about double what it was in 1979 in real terms. That is only to be expected: the extra 16,000 officers and 16,000 civilians whom we have recruited do not come cheaply. The police are an expensive resource, but they are also valuable and worth while.

The fight against crime cannot be left to the police alone. The Police and Magistrates Courts Act 1994 sets out a new framework for policing which will help the police service to fight crime in partnership with the public and local police authorities.

The Act gives police authorities and chief officers the freedom to make the best use of their resources in return for greater openness and accountability. It is not for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to set targets in relation to the national objectives that he specifies. It is a matter for local decision by the police authority as to what local targets should sensibly be. In future, police activities will be more clearly focused on the public's priorities. In turn, the public will be kept informed about the service that they can expect and how well their force has performed.

I know that the police share my concern about the misery caused by crimes such as burglary and car theft and are determined to do all that they can to fight it. To increase the number of detections for burglaries, and to target and prevent crimes which are a particular local problem—drug dealing, for instance—are key objectives that have been set for the police. Throughout the country, police forces have undertaken initiatives specifically to tackle those types of crime, often using intelligence-based methods such as crime pattern analysis and the targeting of offenders.

I am sure that hon. Members will be aware of Operation Christmas Cracker, which was undertaken on 5 December. It was the largest operation against burglary that this country has seen, involving 12,000 officers from 40 forces in England and Wales. The police targeted people suspected of being involved in burglary and completed 3,772 dawn raids. In all, 3,327 people were arrested and £1.8 million worth of stolen property was recovered.

I was pleased to learn that the West Midlands force has had some even more recent successes. On Saturday 6 January the drug squad seized a metric tonne of cannabis, equivalent to a million deals and with a street value of £10 million. Three men were arrested. The following week the regional crime squad recovered Ecstasy tablets worth more than £1.5 million. Some of those were a very nasty mixture indeed of anaesthetics and stimulants. The West Midlands force deserves our congratulations for those operations and, indeed, all its other operations against crime.

Preventing crime is as important as tackling its consequences and the concept of partnership is central to our crime prevention strategy. That vital work cannot be left to the police alone; communities have a central role to play. Successful partnerships are essentially those which have developed local solutions to local problems, and they are successful. I have seen many in operation. I came hotfoot from Durham this morning, where I witnessed yet another partnership being created by the county police force and the Royal Mail.

All over the country, business, community groups, local authorities and the public are working with the police to reduce and prevent crime in their areas. Local knowledge and expertise is being used to solve local crime problems. In Birmingham South, for example, the police, the probation service and the city council are working together to provide a swimming training scheme for local youngsters during the Easter holidays. An anti-burglary scheme in west Birmingham, involving local residents and businesses, has contributed to a 30 per cent. reduction in crime levels. Those are good, cast-iron examples of local partnerships and we happily encourage more and more of those.

Businesses have helped in many different ways, from offering discounts on home security products to members of neighbourhood watch schemes, to direct—and often substantial—contributions towards the cost of town centre closed circuit television schemes. In Birmingham, initiatives such as the many business watch schemes, bus watch and radio link schemes for city centre retailers show what can be achieved through local co-operation, with benefits both to businesses and to the wider community.

*The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MADAM SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 23 January 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Fraud

1. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement as to measures which his Department and agencies are taking to reduce social security fraud. [8789]

**The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley):** Last July, I announced my new security strategy to give new emphasis to prevention and deterrence of benefit fraud. That involves extra checks on benefit claims, matching of information on the Department's computers and the introduction of benefit payment cards to replace order books and girocheques.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that excellent reply. Does he agree that the biggest personal fraud of pension funds was perpetrated by the late Robert Maxwell? Does he further agree that the biggest collective fraud of pension funds would occur if the Labour party ever got its stake on pension fund holders?

**Mr. Lilley:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. I suppose that the late Robert Maxwell was almost the only socialist Member of Parliament ever to show a personal interest in private pensions, but my hon. Friend is right to sound the alarm bells at any Opposition suggestions that they want to get state hands on our pension schemes. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the Leader of the Labour party recently visited Singapore—the principal difference between whose system and ours is that the state controls pension schemes—because they want to get their hands on our successful private pensions, which are the envy of the rest of Europe.

**Mr. Bradley:** We welcome any measures that the Government may introduce effectively to tackle fraud, wherever it may appear in the social security system, but we question why, after 17 years in power, the Government have taken so long to introduce such measures. However, will the Secretary of State clarify exactly what his financial targets are for fraud? There appears to be a contradiction between the Budget Red Book figures and those in his uprating statement. Will he tell us today, therefore, precisely what his annual fraud figures are for 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99?

**Mr. Lilley:** My objective, which I spelled out in detail when I published the new anti-fraud strategy in July, was to reduce the fraud level by—we believe that this is possible—about 70 per cent. over a five-year period. To spell out a specific year-by-year path is asking a little too much of a Minister at the Dispatch Box. I can remind hon. Members that we have had no positive ideas on how to reduce fraud from the Opposition, who, in the words of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), have for too long been associated with the freeloader.

**Mr. Batiste:** In his initial answer, my right hon. Friend referred to the social security card. What progress is he making with it? What will it consist of? Will it use new technology? What savings does he expect to make against fraud as a consequence of its introduction?

**Mr. Lilley:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for welcoming the card. We are in the advanced stages of reaching agreement and of choosing a final winner in relation to the private finance initiative plans to introduce the card. With it, we shall be able virtually to eliminate fraud and abuse of the order book system, which amounts to about £150 million a year. In due course, we hope to make savings in the administration of handling benefit as well.

### Income Support

2. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children under 16 years of age are in families receiving income support; and what proportion of all children this represents. [8790]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans):** Around 2.98 million children are in families receiving income support, representing 25.5 per cent. of all children under 16 in Great Britain.

**Mr. Ashton:** Are those not appalling figures? One in four children are living at that poverty level, never getting to go to a pantomime, never having any decent toys for Christmas, never getting a change of clothes unless they go to jumble sales or Oxfam, and never going on a school trip or holiday. What has happened to the Tory policy of one nation?

**Mr. Evans:** Those are disturbing figures. However, if I tell the hon. Gentleman that, of those 2.98 million children, 1.8 million are children of lone parents, he might realise the fundamental social problem. The important point is that, since 1992, we have enabled 200,000 lone parents to move off income support and on to family credit, gaining, on average, £30 a week. With our child care disregard provisions, which have been announced, that trend should be accelerated.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that payments to under-16s in that category are sufficient to ensure a proper and reasonable life style? Will he further confirm that they will not be victimised in the way that they would be if Labour policy on choice in schools has its way?

**Mr. Evans:** Parental choice in schools, which Conservative Members—if not all hon. Members—strongly support, can lead to additional expense. On the main point of my hon. Friend's question, a judgment must

be made on the levels of income support that the Government believe to be appropriate in all the circumstances, including those that he adumbrated.

**Mr. Wicks:** Does the Minister agree that, under Beveridge, income support was intended to provide a safety net in the social security system? If one in four children are now dependent on income support, does that not show the failure of Government policy? Have not the Government turned what was once a proud welfare state into an expensive and complex dependency state?

**Mr. Evans:** No. The fact that income support provided a safety net on a scale undreamed of by the late Sir William Beveridge is a mark of the development of welfare principles in changing social conditions. As I said, 1.8 million—two thirds—of the 2.98 million children referred to in my main answer are the children of lone parents. That is a very real social problem. The way to tackle it is to provide incentives to work, which is what we are doing through family credit.

## Fraud

3. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what priority has been given to tackling fraud in his social security reforms. [8791]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald):** The fight against fraud is a top priority. Last year, the crackdown on benefit fraud saved a record £717.6 million from fraud detected and stopped. We are well on the way this year to achieving another record-breaking amount.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I thank my hon. Friend for his determined effort to crack down on cheating, because cheating is nothing other than stealing. Will he confirm that, among other measures, the Department plans to visit 1 million homes to check that applications are correct? Will he further confirm that, last year, under that system, there were 9,500 prosecutions, with a 95 per cent. conviction rate being achieved? Is that not a success?

**Mr. Heald:** I confirm the information provided by my hon. Friend. However, there will be not only the 1 million additional visits, but the bar code scanner, data matching, hotlines, data cleansing, the Post Office reward scheme and the new benefit payment card, all of which will provide a tough range of measures to deal with benefit fraud.

**Mr. Frank Field:** I congratulate the Government on slowly trying to get to grips with the major issue of social security fraud. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The operative word was "slowly", but I am grateful for the support of Conservative Members.

Why was it that, when the Government published their report on housing benefit fraud last week, the Department seemed to emphasise fraud by claimants, when most housing benefit fraud is by landlords? Why did the report estimate lost taxpayers' revenue at £1 million when evidence before the Select Committee—which the Treasury Bench is following—estimated it at £2 billion?

**Mr. Heald:** The housing benefit review published last week was the most detailed study ever of housing benefit fraud, dealing with more than 5,000 cases and involving 52 local authorities. We believe that the estimate of £1 billion for housing benefit fraud is accurate, although clearly the figure may be higher in some areas and lower in others.

The review called for tough measures to deal with fraud, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced last week £10 million of challenge funding for local authorities, tough new incentives for local authorities to crack down on fraud and a new housing benefit central register to stop people claiming in one area and then going to another area and claiming again. We shall also be working with the Audit Commission to toughen up the procedures for claiming housing benefit so that we have a system that pays the right amount to the right person at the right time.

**Mr. Nicholls:** Was there not also a serious social security fraud when the Labour party suggested that the Singaporean way of administering pensions was in some way preferable to ours? Will my hon. Friend remind the House of the difference between the two schemes?

**Mr. Heald:** Using false representations to obtain benefits is an offence, but that does not apply to Labour politicians making false representations to claim votes. One of my right hon. Friend's initiatives to crack down on fraud is data matching, or comparing one claim against another. That is why we believe that it is instructive to look at the claims made by the leader of the Labour party and compare them with what people such as John Monks and the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) have said. Stakeholding means forcing people to take out a second state pension and putting the funds in the hands of the trade unions. We all know that the rate of return from the Singapore scheme—a stateholding scheme—is 2 per cent. over inflation, whereas the rate of return since 1980 of the British pension funds, which administer our private schemes and have £600 billion-worth of assets, is 10 per cent. over inflation.

**Mr. Skinner:** More than two years ago, the Public Accounts Committee—chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon)—investigated fraud by employers. Is the Minister aware that the Committee estimated that about £300 million was lost each year because employers were refusing to hand over their employees' national insurance contributions and taxes? In my constituency, a young lad who lost his fingers while working a wood-cutting machine could not claim a single penny piece, because his employer had not handed over his national insurance. As it is more than two years since £300 million was found to be missing, can the Minister tell me how many of those involved have been prosecuted?

**Mr. Heald:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and it is vital that we have measures that deal not just with claimant fraud, but with fraud by employers, landlords and anyone else. If the hon. Gentleman cares to write to me about the individual case to which he referred, I shall look into it. Nobody must think that collusive employers and landlords are having an easy ride—we are after them as well.

**Mr. Stephen:** Is my hon. Friend aware that a favourite racket of those involved in fraud is to sub-let their flat

and go and live with friends or relations while continuing to claim housing benefit? What is he going to do about that?

**Mr. Heald:** My hon. Friend is right, and the measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last Friday will provide substantial help as we try to solve that problem.

### Incapacity Benefit

4. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently receive incapacity benefit; and what was the equivalent figure for invalidity benefit 12 months earlier. [8792]

**The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt):** At 30 November 1995, just under 1.7 million people were claiming incapacity benefit at either the short-term higher rate or the long-term rate. The equivalent figure for invalidity benefit a year earlier was 1.73 million.

**Mr. Wigley:** The Minister will recall that his predecessor—the current Secretary of State for Wales—announced on 27 January last year that there would be a saving of £410 million in this financial year from the change from invalidity benefit to incapacity benefit. Given that it is clear that such a reduction in expenditure will not be achieved, will the Minister give an assurance that his Department will not try to claw back that money by making the incapacity test even stiffer? Will the Minister assure the House that the Government will not try to get the money back by, for example, cutting the mobility allowance for hospitals to rake in £40 million? Will he instead find additional resources to maintain the level of support needed by those currently on invalidity or incapacity benefit?

**Mr. Burt:** A figure that I recognise better is £210 million in the first year. The point that I should convey to the House and to the hon. Gentleman is the outstanding increase in invalidity benefit in previous years—it doubled over a decade. It was important to put a curb on that growth. The figures that I have given to the House show that that has happened. It is too early in the year to say what the savings will be at the end of the year, because of the build-up of case load. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the incapacity work test will remain properly designed to ensure that those who can work do so, and that those who are incapable of work are not obliged to register for it. We have no intention of changing the test or of making any of the other changes to achieve the object that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

**Mrs. Roe:** I welcome the successful introduction of incapacity benefit. Will my hon. Friend confirm that those people who leave incapacity benefit may be helped through improvements to the disability working allowance?

**Mr. Burt:** Yes, my hon. Friend is quite right. Some 7,400 people are now receiving disability working allowance, with an average payment of £54 a week. Some changes were made this year: the single person's threshold was increased; the couple's allowance was increased; and, an extra £10 a week is available for those working 30 hours or more. I hope that the disability working allowance becomes better known and is taken up more often, because it is an important part of our progress to ensure that people who are able to work get back in work.

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** After nine months of the new incapacity benefit, will the Minister accept that recipients of the old invalidity benefit were not, after all, a load of malingerers, scroungers and leadswingers? Why did the Department of Social Security set up its data-recording procedures so that we cannot be told which claimants of incapacity benefit were claimants of invalidity benefit? Is it because the Government do not want us to know how far the living standards of disabled people have fallen because of the reduction in benefit?

**Mr. Burt:** I do not think that any Conservative Member has suggested that every claimant of invalidity benefit was workshy, a leadswinger or anything else. The Government recognise, but Opposition Members fail to recognise and make clear, that some people who were claiming a benefit from the British people were not entitled to it and should have been on a different benefit. Accordingly, we were prepared to make the hard decisions to change the rules.

Those decisions are justified by the disallowances that have already occurred because of the test for incapacity benefit. Above all, the change proves that, when there are difficult decisions to be taken—that is the responsibility of Government—we are prepared to do so. That is the difference between the responsibility of Government and the failure of the Opposition.

**Mr. Ian Bruce:** Does my right hon. Friend welcome the initiative entitled Priority 2000, in which private employment agencies are making a commitment to get people with disabilities back to work and to do so at no cost to the taxpayer, with the great benefit of ensuring that people with disabilities who also have abilities can get back into useful work in the economy?

**Mr. Burt:** Yes. Some excellent projects are taking place all over the country to encourage disabled people back into work, which—in this year, with the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—will make the important point to employers that the disabled work force is an important part of the work force and that disabled people are no longer to be discriminated against and will give excellent service. I welcome projects such as the one my hon. Friend mentioned, which will help to progress a change of attitude to assist disabled people into work.

### Family Credit

5. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average hourly wage earned by family heads who receive family credit. [8793]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The average hourly wage earned by employed family heads who receive family credit is £3.85.

**Mr. Winnick:** Is it not of some importance that a large majority of those who receive family credit are paid a

very low—in some cases, disgracefully low—wage? Is it not also of interest that, while many Tory Members of Parliament are campaigning to double the parliamentary salary to compensate, in some cases, for loss of consultancies, those same Tory Members are firmly opposed to a decent and fair wage? Does that not show their hypocrisy on this issue?

**Mr. Evans:** Let me deal with the serious part of the hon. Gentleman's question. If we accept his premise that help should go to those who need it most, we must also accept that the difficulty with a minimum wage is that research has clearly shown that, purely in terms of social security targeting, the richest 30 per cent. of the population would gain more than the poorest 30 per cent. That is because many of the people who are on the lowest wages are members of households in which someone else is in a much higher bracket. At the same time—let us be absolutely clear—a minimum wage destroys jobs.

**Mrs. Lait:** Does my hon. Friend agree that many of those on family credit are single parents? Did he see last night's "Panorama", in which a 17-year-old pregnant girl was clearly about to join the ranks of those on family credit? That programme focused on Hastings, which outraged many of my good constituents. Could he say how our social security reforms are reducing dependency on the welfare state?

**Mr. Evans:** I did not see the programme to which my hon. Friend alludes. The important point is that family credit is helping people back into work—including 200,000 lone parents since 1992.

### Habitual Residence Rules

6. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effects of the habitual residence rules on British citizens who have lived abroad. [8794]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** We continue to monitor the position of British citizens who do not satisfy the habitual residence test.

**Mr. Flynn:** Will the Minister consider the cases of three of my constituents who, for the major part of their lives, have lived in Britain, been British taxpayers and paid national insurance, and are now in real hardship? One of them is a wife, the victim of marital violence, while another is a young woman who is expecting a baby on St. David's day. Was it really the intention of the Government to cheat British citizens and recent British taxpayers of benefits to which they were recently entitled and for which they and their families have paid many times over?

**Mr. Evans:** If the hon. Gentleman will send me details of the names of his constituents, I shall be happy to look into each of the cases that he has mentioned. I should stress that whether a case meets the test of habitual residence is a matter for the independent adjudicating authorities, and Ministers cannot interfere. The difficulty that he and his Front-Bench colleagues have not addressed is that the reforms, between August 1994 and November 1995, have saved £37 million. To draw up a test that satisfies European law and prevents that sort of abuse was the right way to proceed.

**Mr. Hawkins:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that the need for the habitual residence test has been highlighted by magazines such as *Time Out*, which described London as

"a honeypot for young Europeans"?

Does he agree that the increasing incidence of benefit tourism has shown that the habitual residence test was vitally necessary and is welcome to British taxpayers, and that our system, when compared with restrictive social security systems on the continent, has been described by *Time Out* as "generous"?

**Mr. Evans:** My hon. Friend is right on every point.

### Child Support Agency

7. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operation of the review procedure of the Child Support Agency. [8795]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell):** A child maintenance assessment may be reviewed on various grounds. A variety of changes have been made over the past year to streamline and improve the procedures.

**Ms Squire:** Does the Minister share my concern that one of my constituents asked for a review of the basis on which his assessment had been made on 1 August 1995, is still waiting for the review to be completed and is in severe financial difficulties as a result? Will the Minister undertake an investigation of my constituent's case and ensure that appropriate action is taken to prevent any similar delay for my constituents or those of other hon. Members?

**Mr. Mitchell:** I am aware of that case, as the hon. Lady has raised it with me. I have looked at it personally and found that problems have arisen, some of which are certainly the Child Support Agency's fault. Her constituent's case is now undergoing simultaneously a change of circumstance review and an appeal, and I have given instructions that it should be taken forward as a priority.

**Sir David Madel:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Child Support Agency still has some way to go before it reaches a reasonable level of accuracy of assessments? Does he further agree that staff in certain offices must show more patience and understanding when talking to our constituents about the complicated, detailed matters which our constituents are obliged to pass on to them?

**Mr. Mitchell:** My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of civil, courteous and effective treatment by agency staff at all times. Staff training has been increased significantly over the past year. It is important to recognise that, following last year's significant changes, the policy is now fair. The CSA will never be loved, as it enters people's lives at a difficult time. Its key challenge, however, is to continue to improve over the coming months, as it has over the past year.

**Ms Lynne:** Is it not disgraceful that the Child Support Agency takes on average 211 days to process a claim and,

of those, only 29 per cent. are right? Is it not also disgraceful that the Child Support Act 1991 is emotionally damaging children brought up in lone-parent families? Is it not time that the Government scrapped the Act and brought in a unified family court system?

**Mr. Mitchell:** The hon. Lady's contribution is typical of the unconstructive suggestions that we hear from the Liberal Democrats. A Liberal Democrat policy document says:

"Some Liberal Democrat ideas are difficult to understand and over complicated."

Nothing could be more true of what they say about the Child Support Agency. The hon. Lady should pay tribute to the fact that accuracy in the CSA is increasing and has increased significantly since last year. It has been set a target of 75 per cent. accuracy and is running at just over 70 per cent. I am advised that, in the past month, the CSA's accuracy has approached 80 per cent. of all the cases that have come before it.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the Child Support Agency has some way to go before it is as good as we all want it to be, hon. Members should congratulate its chief executive on the great improvement that she has made during her time in that job? Will he keep in sight the minority of fathers who can but will not pay, and who do not want to know what it costs to bring up their children, and let them know that the taxpayer will bail them out no longer?

**Mr. Mitchell:** My hon. Friend is right. I shall pass on his generous and accurate remarks to the chief executive of the CSA. Over the past year, Parliament has made significant changes to the agency's operation. We have introduced the 30 per cent. rule, which means that no absent parent will pay more than 30 per cent. of his or her net income for current maintenance. In addition, we shall shortly pilot the departures process, which will add to the system an important degree of fairness that may have been missing in the agency's early days.

**Miss Hoey:** Will the Minister consider a simple move that would change attitudes? Will he change the terminology that we use and get rid of the term "absent parent", which no other country with a child support agency uses, and use instead titles such as the "payee", or "non-custodial parent"? The fact that a parent is "absent" does not mean that he or she does not care about the child. Why cannot that change be made immediately?

**Mr. Mitchell:** The hon. Lady has raised that point before, most recently in the Select Committee, so I am aware of her concern. I agree that the terminology is not entirely satisfactory, but it is not easy to find an alternative form of words to meet our requirements.

### Guaranteed Minimum Pension

8. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to introduce a guaranteed minimum pension; and what estimate he has made of the cost of a guaranteed minimum pension of £80 a week. [8796]

**Mr. Heald:** We have no plans to introduce a guaranteed minimum pension. It is estimated that a scheme of this type, based on £80 a week, would currently cost up to £5 billion.

**Mr. Coombs:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way to deal with the challenges of an increasingly aging society is not through a guaranteed minimum pension, which may not be sustainable, but by better targeting of benefits towards those who most need them, and the provision of private pensions? Is it not interesting that it has been announced today that £600 billion is invested in investment funds and pension schemes in this country, which is a far greater sum than is invested in all the other European countries put together?

**Mr. Heald:** A guaranteed minimum pension would force every pensioner to submit to a means test. It would amount to a tax on thrift. Many people who had a private pension would receive nothing—there could be no greater disincentive to save. As my hon. Friend said, £600 billion is invested in private pension schemes in the UK. That money is invested efficiently, unlike money invested in the stakeholder scheme, in which the trade unions would be involved and which might produce poor returns such as they have in Singapore.

**Mr. Denham:** Is not the truth that, under the Tories, more than 3 million pensioners are today forced to depend on means-tested benefits, and perhaps 750,000 do not apply for their entitlement? Is it not also true that more than 1 million pensioners receive less than 20 per cent. of average male earnings—the amount provided by the basic state pension alone in 1979? Is not the truth behind the Minister's words that the Government have betrayed today's generation of pensioners and are in the process of betraying tomorrow's?

**Mr. Heald:** The hon. Gentleman is right: take-up is important. That is why the Government have set up about 80,000 information points to which we send information about pensions so that pensioners are aware of their rights. The hon. Gentleman got carried away with his rhetoric. The rise in pensioners' incomes since 1979 has been 51 per cent. in real terms. Some £1.2 billion of extra help has been given to those on income support. When the hon. Gentleman considers the proposals that he suggests for stakeholding or stateholding, does he think that a return rate of 2 per cent. is anywhere near equivalent to the performance of our private sector pensions, which currently give a return of 10 per cent?

### Asylum Seekers

9. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about the payment of social security benefits to asylum seekers. [8797]

**Mr. Lilley:** I have received a number of items of correspondence about asylum seekers from a variety of sources.

**Mr. Marshall:** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that 70 per cent. of asylum seekers who are on benefit misrepresented their assets and means when they came to this country, and that 90 per cent. of claims for asylum are shown to be bogus? Do not those facts and the rapid increase in the number of asylum seekers underline the need for action and the sheer irresponsibility of those who oppose any action?

**Mr. Lilley:** My hon. Friend is right: 70 per cent. of those who claim to be asylum seekers did not, originally, when they entered the country and were asked by immigration officials their reasons for doing so, say that they were seeking asylum—they said that they were visitors, tourists or business men. They had to demonstrate and convince the immigration officers that what they said was true. They had to demonstrate that they had the means to support themselves when here and the means to return home subsequently. They usually showed that they had someone to stay with here. In those circumstances, it seems perfectly reasonable that they should not receive benefit if they subsequently change their story and declare themselves to be asylum seekers. That is the rule that we are introducing under the new regulations.

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Is the Secretary of State aware that both the Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Hume have recently written jointly to the Prime Minister to express their concern about the Government's proposals? What has his response been—simply to plough ahead? Will he now answer the question that he has consistently refused to answer: when all benefit is withdrawn, how are people to live? How are they to feed their children? Will they starve? Has humanity completely disappeared?

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Gentleman was not here when the statement was made—he was seeking asylum in Singapore, I believe—and consequently he perhaps did not hear the reasons for what we have done and the justification for the changes. As I have just explained, I believe that justification to be sound. The only people who will be required to live on their own resources after making a claim for asylum will be those who have demonstrated to the immigration authorities that they have the resources on which to live. My response, on receiving the letters from the noble prelates to whom the hon. Gentleman referred, was to offer to see them before I made my statement.

**Mr. Churchill:** Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread resentment about the fact that foreign nationals from outside the European economic area can qualify for British social security almost as soon as they arrive in this country? Is my right hon. Friend further aware that Canada has a five-year residence requirement before any foreigner can qualify for Canadian social security? Is it not time that we introduced similar rules in this country?

**Mr. Lilley:** My hon. Friend is right. Until recently, our rules were considerably laxer than those of most other countries, both as regards people from within the European economic area and those outside it. We have tightened up—rightly—in both cases. We have introduced an habitual residence test, which will, I hope, stop—and has largely stopped—benefit tourism in Europe, and we are tightening up on claims by asylum seekers.

We are also determined to remain a safe haven for people who genuinely seek asylum and are fleeing persecution from abroad. They come here for our freedom, not our benefits.

## Child Support Agency

10. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to improve the accuracy of assessments by the Child Support Agency. [8798]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The Child Support Agency has already introduced a range of measures to improve accuracy.

**Mr. Miller:** Earlier, the Minister spoke about accuracy of between 70 and 80 per cent. That is a tremendous contrast with the last report of the chief adjudication officer, in which he said that only 29 per cent. of assessments were entirely correct.

Is the Minister saying that there has been an incredible improvement, or is the impression, held by hon. Members on both sides of the House, that the Minister is speaking about entirely different sets of figures, correct? I believe that that is what he is doing.

**Mr. Mitchell:** No. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the agency has significantly improved its accuracy. The report to which he refers says that the key ingredients to ensure further substantial improvements in accuracy are already in place. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's recognition that accuracy, which is at the top of the agency's agenda, is improving.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** While I commend my hon. Friend on the improvements that have been achieved in respect of the CSA, and on the contribution to them that has been made by Miss Ann Chant, I remain worried about the number of inaccurate assessments. Is it not about time that an independent review or appeal body were established, to which aggrieved mothers or fathers might appeal?

**Mr. Mitchell:** I thank my hon. Friend for his opening remarks. We continually keep under review whether there are ways in which we might improve the performance and procedures of the Child Support Agency, and we are bearing in mind the argument that he has just made.

## Child Support Agency

11. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disciplinary actions have been taken against employees of the CSA who have breached confidentiality of clients. [8799]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** Twenty staff have been disciplined for breaches of confidentiality since the agency was set up in 1993.

**Mr. Jamieson:** Is the Minister aware of the case of Mr. Marc Carder of Plymouth, the personal and intimate details of whose case notes were leaked to the media by a member of the Child Support Agency, which led to headlines about his case in the *Evening Herald*? First,

what will the Minister do to recompense Mr. Carder? Secondly, what will he do to ensure that such action cannot happen again? Thirdly, what he has done about the employee who leaked those details?

**Mr. Mitchell:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the employee who leaked those details has been sacked. The CSA takes breaches of confidentiality very seriously. Three members of staff have been sacked for that offence; all three came from the Plymouth CSA centre.

### Asylum Seekers

12. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what extent his proposals for reducing the scope for asylum seekers to claim income support apply to the provision of free school meals to their children. [8800]

**Mr. Lilley:** Only those entitled to income support are eligible for free school meals for their children.

**Mr. Timms:** Can the Secretary of State confirm that some asylum seekers will not be permitted to work, will not be able to claim any benefits, and will now not be able to claim free school meals for their children? How does he expect them to live?

**Mr. Lilley:** That is not the situation. Asylum seekers are entitled to work—and they receive such an entitlement—after they have been in the country for six months. The responsibilities of local authorities under the Children Act 1989 will not change. Local authorities have a duty to ensure that children in their areas do not suffer hardship, and they must make financial provision to prevent that.

We hope that the vast majority of asylum seekers will either be genuine refugees who make that claim at the ports, and will therefore be entitled to benefit, or will have the means to support themselves, be able to demonstrate that fact and be able to support their children. The risk of hardship to which the hon. Gentleman refers therefore does not arise.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 January. [8819]

**The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major):** This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Mrs. Kennedy:** Is the Prime Minister aware of the latest Lloyds bank business in Britain survey which shows that business confidence has fallen and that three quarters of companies in the north west have failed to invest? Last week, the Minister for Trade said in the House that Britain is not

"in the first division of industrialised nations".—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 730.]

Does the Prime Minister agree with that statement?

**The Prime Minister:** Unlike most other countries—some of which the hon. Lady no doubt fondly believes are doing better than us, when they are not—the United Kingdom's output has risen in every quarter for almost four years. It is now 6 per cent. above its previous peak. Growth in 1995 was 2.6 per cent., which is about the level that was forecast by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. No economy in western Europe has performed as well as the British economy in the past 12 months, or is doing so.

**Mr. Kenneth Baker:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that parents who send their children to grant-maintained schools and grammar schools should be welcomed as stakeholders? Is it not morally indefensible for such parents to grab privileges for their own children while denying them to other children?

**The Prime Minister:** I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. I am glad to see that many right hon. and hon. Members are now using some of the opportunities that my right hon. Friend framed as Education Secretary. The events of the past few days prove that, as they say, the Labour party has changed. Yesterday's Labour party said that it would abolish GM schools the day after tomorrow; today's Labour Members say that they will abolish them once their children have finished their education.

**Mr. David Evans:** What about the Oratory?

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Hon. Members are wasting time. I have not yet named the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), but I have time to do so before 3.30 pm.

**Mr. Blair:** We see the baying mob. If Conservative Members think, after the damage that they have done to this country, that they will ride to popularity on the back of a decision about 11-year-old boys, they credit the British people with too little sense.

Will the Prime Minister confirm the figures in today's Confederation of British Industry manufacturing survey, which show that orders are flat and that business optimism is decreasing? Taken with the latest figures on living standards, which show that, last year, living standards fell for the first time for more than 12 years, is it any wonder that the feel-good factor is absent and that the Prime Minister has had to call a special Cabinet meeting for tomorrow to encourage it?

**The Prime Minister:** Perhaps I may offer my sympathies to the right hon. Gentleman on his current predicament. I am glad that he is supporting the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in her decision. He must back her. He certainly cannot sack her, because all she is doing is playing follow my leader.

A few days ago, the right hon. Gentleman said that there were some very good things about Britain, but when it suits his purposes he is quite happy to pervert the statistics to try to score cheap points and damage the country. The facts are that living standards have risen by 40 per cent. since 1979 and take-home pay after inflation has risen by £80 a week for the average family—and it is

expected to rise by a further £450 next year. The right hon. Gentleman cannot name a country in Europe that has an economic performance that equals ours at present, or the opportunities from the platform that we have produced. Not one.

**Mr. Blair:** I thank the Prime Minister for his kind words of concern about pressure. The difference between us is that I will not buckle under it. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Other hon. Members have questions on the Order Paper and I want to hear them. Let us have order on both sides of the House.

**Mr. Blair:** Will the Prime Minister confirm that, despite the 25 per cent. devaluation of our currency, we still have a trade deficit with the rest of Europe? The right hon. Gentleman asked for comparisons with Europe. Will he also confirm that, during the whole period of Conservative government, employment and growth levels in investment have been lower than in any other major European country, and that we have fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league? Is there not now a direct contrast between the speeches of the Prime Minister and the experience and reality of the vast majority of the British people?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman should not be so sensitive about his difficulties. I just want to be tough on hypocrisy and tough on the causes of hypocrisy.

If the right hon. Gentleman wants to know about the state of the country, I remind him that we have the lowest level of inflation for more than 50 years, the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years, the lowest unemployment of any major European country, the lowest basic rate of tax for more than 50 years and more inward investment than the rest of Europe added together, and we export more per person than Japan or the United States. Those are the facts about the country. However much the right hon. Gentleman tries to run it down for his own partisan political interests, that is what we have created and those are the opportunities that we will build on, up to and beyond the general election.

**Mr. French:** Did my right hon. Friend see reports last week about the social services inspector who sought to bring pressure to bear on a children's playgroup because it was said that the toys in use were not of the correct colour and therefore not politically correct? Is he aware that that story emanated from the same local authority that was responsible for the safari boy—a Labour and Liberal-controlled authority that never loses an opportunity to say that it cannot fulfil its responsibilities because it is short of money? It is currently trying to close much-needed adult opportunity centres.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes his point very clearly without my adding to it. If the leader of the Liberal party wants to comment, he can no doubt turn to his own advisers. Perhaps this is one of the policies that they have told him were "barmy" and "duplicitous", and "would bankrupt the nation".

**Mr. Ashdown:** When it comes to crimes against humanity, surely there can never be any place for neutrality. Is it not true that no just and durable peace can ever be built unless justice is not only done but seen to be done against those who perpetrate war crimes? Will the Prime Minister confirm that the Government expect IFOR—and will support it—to take every step necessary to safeguard war crimes evidence, to protect the investigators and to ensure that these people are brought to book?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman touches on a very important point. We strongly support the work of the war crimes tribunal and have done more than most to help it with financial support, equipment, and seconded staff; and we have provided evidence to the prosecutor's office.

IFOR will conduct regular foot patrols and aerial reconnaissance over the area. It has been asked to report any unusual activity, such as any attempt to disturb the site.

**Mr. Couchman:** Will my right hon. Friend take time during his busy day to write to the head teachers of St. Olave's school in Orpington and its sister school, Newstead Wood school for girls, which my daughter attended, to congratulate them on running such excellent schools that they attract pupils from 15 miles and two boroughs away?

**The Prime Minister:** I am delighted to congratulate those schools on the excellent opportunities they offer their pupils. It is certainly our policy to make sure that every school offers the same sort of opportunity. We believe it right for parents to take those opportunities.

Q2. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 January. [8820]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Michie:** I want to ask a simple but serious question. The Prime Minister continually describes Britain as the enterprise centre of Europe. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may laugh, but does not the right hon. Gentleman find it unbelievable that Britain cannot afford to supply lifesaving equipment such as a nebuliser and a humidifier to an 80-year-old constituent of mine who suffers from cancer and communicates via a throat microphone? The country apparently cannot even afford to pay £79 of service charges. What sort of enterprise centre is that?

**The Prime Minister:** I suggest that the hon. Gentleman provide my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health with the details of that case so that it can be examined. If he were genuinely concerned about the matter, that is what he would have done—instead of raising one case out of 8.5 million patients without providing the opportunity to examine its details.

The hon. Gentleman knows that there is a test of whether the health service is doing better. It is not a test that I have set; it was set by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). The test, he said, is whether more people are treated as a result of the health service reforms than ever before. We have met that test: 1.5 million more patients are

being treated. Why does not the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, instead of raising these cases in this forum, rather than where they should be raised?

## Ministerial Visits

Q3. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to pay an official visit to Cirencester and Tewkesbury. [8821]

**The Prime Minister:** I have, at present, no plans to do so.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** If my right hon. Friend were to visit my constituency, he would discover that parents have opted for six out of eight secondary schools to become grant-maintained. Will he commend the principled stand of certain Opposition Members, who made the correct choice of school for their children? Is it not the height of hypocrisy to seek to deny that choice to my constituents and others?

**The Prime Minister:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about that. I believe that the view of most people in the country is that the hon. Member for Peckham was right to exercise choice in favour of her own child. No one objects to that. What is wrong is that the Labour party would deny those same choices to other parents throughout the country.

## Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 January. [8822]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Salmond:** Is the Prime Minister aware that Robert Burns might be birling in his grave in this, his bicentennial year, at the prospect of the Scottish Secretary laying a wreath at his memorial in London? Excise duties, in which the poet might have had a vested interest, have been increased, but can the Prime Minister point to a policy of his Administration that reflects the qualities of compassion, equality, Scottish patriotism and human understanding that flow through the works of Robert Burns? Is there a policy that reflects any of those virtues?

**The Prime Minister:** I strongly suspect that, if the great poet were here today, he certainly would not support the policies of the hon. Gentleman. He certainly would not support policies of extra taxation that will drive more Scottish opportunities out of Scotland and more Scots out of Scotland, and he certainly would not propose the isolationism that underpins the hon. Gentleman's policies.

**Mr. Tim Devlin** (Stockton, South) *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Does the hon. Gentleman wish to raise a point of order?

**Mr. Devlin:** I am sorry, Madam Speaker. Perhaps you could not hear me in the hurly-burly, but I was seeking to raise a point of order. It relates to the method by which people whose names are not recorded in *Hansard* might indicate whether they were abstaining. I understand that, in a Division last night, the Leader of the Opposition did not vote. I should like to know whether that was an abstention or whether he just failed to appear.

**Madam Speaker:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would ask the Leader of the Opposition—that is not a matter for the Speaker.

# Child Support (Appeal)

3.31 pm

**Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enable liabilities of absent parents assessed by the Child Support Agency to be reduced on appeal where those assessments can be shown to cause exceptional hardship; and for connected purposes.

My Bill seeks to introduce a much more effective and far-reaching system of review of the assessments that are raised by the CSA against absent parents for the maintenance of children from previous relationships. I am pleased to see that the Minister responsible has kindly waited to listen to the debate.

I should make it clear at the outset that nothing in the proposal seeks to disturb the concept that parents have—rightly—a moral and legal duty to make reasonable provision for their offspring. Maintenance payments have always been—and should always be—enforced against a parent who leaves the matrimonial home and can afford to pay, but, despite that, refuses or delays to pay a realistic contribution towards the upkeep of the children. It is important that every effort should be made to encourage prospective parents, particularly prospective fathers, to understand that, in having children, they are taking on a responsibility that lasts for life.

I should also make it clear that nothing in the Bill would detract from my support for the position taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who, as social security spokesman for my party, has led a crusade against that unhappy measure, the Child Support Act 1991, having regard, as she has rightly said, to the perverse and pernicious effect of the practice, implementation and enforcement of the Act. I believe that she is absolutely right to seek its abolition.

Sadly, however, I am realistic enough to expect that there is next to no chance of that happening under this Government. If this Parliament runs for another 15 or 16 months, as it may, that is too long to wait for the necessary change. Therefore, this amending Bill seeks to mitigate further the worst effects of the legislation in the short term, pending a new legislative framework which I hope will be introduced in the next Parliament.

I suspect that my case work is far from unique, but I despair every time a constituent consults me about the Child Support Agency. Since I was elected in 1983, I have tried to maintain an active interest in social security and related matters. I accept that it is an area that often involves difficult decisions and the implementation of a complex and technical system that often leaves constituents dissatisfied, but I can usually obtain some measure of reconsideration, reconciliation or redress from the rest of the social security system. However, in my experience, there is no such redress under the Child Support Act system.

In particular, there is no redress for parents separated from their children who are willing to pay but simply cannot afford the level of liability assessed. It is that particular group of people about whom I am particularly perturbed and whose situation the Bill specifically addresses.

I took part in the legislative proposals which brought the 1991 Act into being. I do not believe that it was Parliament's intention to devise a set of circumstances in which there is no possibility of any real discretion being applied to the facts and circumstances of individuals who are willing to pay but who are being forced into what is effectively perpetual penury without any effective right of appeal on the level of maintenance levied by the agency.

That contrasts vividly with my experience in a previous incarnation in the criminal courts in Scotland, where even people found guilty of criminal offences had the consideration of the sheriff or the judge in the High Court of Justiciary, who, by law, has a duty to consider the facts and circumstances of each individual case before a fine is levied. If that is good enough for criminals, it is good enough for the people being dealt with by the CSA.

I have literally dozens—I have counted—of constituents who are willing to pay but who are caught in exactly the situation that I have described. The latest example that I came across was in Hawick last Friday. The men there are not hothouse flowers—they are usually tough independent characters—but one man was in tears in front of me because his wages had just been arrested. It was obvious from an earlier interview that he was completely riddled with guilt because he could not pay more for his child despite wanting to, but now he had the additional ignominy—in a small community such news gets round town, into the pubs and everywhere—of being known to his mates as someone who could not pay what was required of him by the CSA. That wage arrestment added to his shame.

That man has given up work because he is not much worse off. Of course, arrears accrue in perpetuity, but they are already at a level that he cannot possibly afford, so it is no skin off his nose. What sort of outcome is that? Who wins in such a situation? Certainly he does not win, and certainly the child does not win because this interferes with the relationship between father and child. Certainly the state does not win, because he will end up initially on unemployment benefit and probably on long-term unemployment benefit through the income support system. That is a typically unhappy outcome of a not unusual set of circumstances.

The original Act has existed for long enough for us to judge whether it is doing the job that it was designed to do. Alas, I have concluded that the difficulties that it has produced, and continues to produce, are chronic, complex, endemic and impossible to handle without a radical overhaul.

I accept that the Government have proposed amendments, but they fall considerably short of what is needed to deal with cases such as the constituency case that I described. The so-called departure system that is to be introduced shortly is by no means a deliberative review of individual circumstances. Of course it helps; it introduces the idea that hardship cases can be examined. It does not go nearly far enough, however, and for that reason we voted against the relevant legislation last year—rightly, in my view.

We still maintain that the amendments constitute an inadequate response to problems which we expect to continue after the introduction of the new system in May, affecting in particular absent parents who are still willing to pay some amount of maintenance.

Even more pressure will be put on second families. There is evidence that second families are being badly disrupted by the continuing pressure that they already experience. Who does that help? How does it help the

children? Where, in such circumstances, are the paramount interests of the child? Where is the interest of the absent parent, and where is the interest of the state? In the long run, we must pick up the cost in one way or another.

For that and other reasons, I consider the current legislation—including the amendments that we anticipate—counter-productive. I believe that this flawed legislation should be scrapped altogether, but if we cannot achieve that until the next Parliament my amending Bill will, I trust, go some small way towards further mitigating its worst effects.

If Conservative Members, and the Government in particular, support the Bill and it becomes law, they will be able to offer constituents who come to their surgeries some hope of an effective opportunity to argue their cases before an independent tribunal that would have power to vary the liabilities assessed by the CSA. If the Government do not support the Bill, it will not succeed; but at least I shall be able to tell my constituents in Hawick that I tried.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. Alan Beith, Mrs. Ray Michie, Mr. Paul Tyler, Mrs. Diana Maddock, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Mr. Chris Davies, Mr. David Rendel, Mr. Don Foster and Mr. Simon Hughes.

CHILD SUPPORT (APPEAL)

Mr. Archy Kirkwood accordingly presented a Bill to enable liabilities of absent parents assessed by the Child Support Agency to be reduced on appeal where those assessments can be shown to cause exceptional hardship; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 16 February and to be printed. [Bill 45.]

# Orders of the Day

## Finance Bill

**(Clauses 36, 105, 112 and 139 and Schedule No. 15)**

*Considered in Committee.*

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

*Ordered,*

That the order in which proceedings in Committee of the whole House on the Finance Bill are to be taken shall be Clause 36, Clause 105, Schedule 15, Clause 139, Clause 112.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

### Clause 36

CHARGE TO TAX

**Mr. Tim Smith** (Beaconsfield): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. May I seek your guidance? Do you anticipate that there will be a debate on clause stand part, or a wide-ranging debate on the first amendment?

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris):** The occupant of the Chair never anticipates whether there shall or shall not be a debate on clause stand part until the debate on the amendments has taken place, but the debate on the amendment must be confined to the amendment.

3.45 pm

**Ms Dawn Primarolo** (Bristol, South): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 24, line 32, at end insert

'provided that the tax shall not be charged until such time as a matching cut in the main rate of employers' national insurance contributions has been made.'.

The amendment's purpose is to bring the rebate in line with the levying of the landfill tax.

The landfill tax was announced in the Budget in 1994 as a tax with an unusual purpose. Rather than raising revenue, it is intended to change behaviour and to encourage the production of less waste by business and consumers, less disposal of waste in landfill sites and, most important, more recycling and other recovery of the value from waste. The detailed proposals to be implemented in the Finance Act 1996 and the statutory instruments that will follow later in 1996 must be measured against that yardstick.

Most important, the subject of the amendment involves the fact that revenue from the tax is to be passed back to business by way of a rebate of employers' national insurance contributions. Within certain limits, rebates will also be given for contributions to certain "environmental trusts". The 1995 Budget confirmed the linkage to national insurance contributions, although it is not complete as the landfill tax is collected for six months from 1 October 1996 and the national insurance contribution rebate comes into effect from 6 April 1997. Our amendment seeks to bring those two dates in line. I should like to explain why that should be done.

Many detailed provisions, which will be set out in secondary legislation, are pertinent to the rebate, but we cannot discuss them this afternoon. The functioning of the environmental trust scheme, the definition of qualifying

*[Ms Dawn Primarolo]*

materials and the cost-compliance assessment will be considered in secondary legislation, but it is the rebate that we are concerned with today.

I need to put it on the record that Labour is broadly in favour of landfill charges and that we are not objecting today to the principle. We made it clear in our document "In Trust for Tomorrow" why we supported a landfill tax. It is based on the principle that the polluter should pay, it targets most dangerous waste, and it introduces credits against increased charges for landfill sites that install equipment to generate energy from methane. Charges should reflect differing regional environmental impact, and that must be done alongside a package of other measures.

We agree with the conclusion of the report from the House of Lords Select Committee on Sustainable Development, which states at page 75:

"It is not realistic to expect people to change their lifestyles for moral reasons alone. We need appropriate fiscal and legal measures to overcome the barriers to the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption".

That is the purpose of the landfill tax. There is serious doubt, however, that that laudable aim can be achieved by the Government's proposals.

The Government state that the aim of introducing the new tax is that the additional costs arising will be passed on to waste producers. For local authorities, that suggests that council tax payers should bear the additional cost through an increase in their council tax bills, which will create, in theory, the incentive for them to reduce waste and to make better use of their waste produce. However, any incentive would be very weak.

The problem with the national insurance rebate is clear because council tax payers pay for waste disposal at an undifferentiated sum within their council tax bills. In addition, authorities are already spending at their capping limits, so any additional cost that is not reflected in those limits could result in serious reductions in services elsewhere. The relationship to the national insurance contribution rebate is crucial. If the desired move from waste disposal to waste reduction and recycling is to happen, there must be a major awareness and education campaign on the issues, so that the public can understand the rationale behind the tax.

The problem with the mechanism in the clause is that the conditions on British landfill sites vary. Disposal without energy recovery is at the very bottom of the waste hierarchy. Likewise, landfill sites without the benefit of modern technology to monitor conditions and recover methane are environmentally a poor option for disposing of waste. Inevitably, waste contains a certain amount of moisture and during the process of that waste breaking down leachates—liquid from waste—sinks to the bottom of the land and methane is produced. By the Government's own admission on page 20 of their draft waste strategy,

"landfill sites are the largest single source of methane emissions in the UK, and methane is the second most important greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide."

Therefore, the relationship of the rebate and the environmental trust to those who manage the sites needs to be tightly drawn.

Many of the sites have problems with high levels of leakage, which threaten to contaminate the surrounding environment. Delays in money being made available to improve the sites clearly exacerbate the problem. However, surveys show that half the landfill sites operate the dilute and disperse method, which allows leakage into the soil and water beneath the site with no attempt at controlling it. If those sites are to have access to rebates, that will simply encourage bad behaviour. Some sites use modern engineering techniques to monitor and control gas emissions. Indeed, I know of a good one in Avon, which would not be rewarded for its good practice through the payment scheme mechanism in the clause.

I want now to deal specifically with the national insurance contribution. Treasury press notice 138/94 of 29 November 1994 quotes the Chancellor as saying in the 1994 Budget statement that it was his intention

"to look at ways to offset the impact of landfill tax on business, including compensatory reductions in employers' national insurance contributions. This switch in the balance of taxation will discourage an activity which damages the environment while helping to cut the costs of investment."

That was a good statement.

In his 1995 Budget statement, the Chancellor confirmed the switch, saying:

"The money raised by the landfill tax will allow for a matching cut in the main rate of employers' national insurance contributions by a further 0.2 per cent. to 10 per cent. from April 1997. That will cut the cost of employment by half a billion pounds and will make it cheaper for businesses to create new jobs."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1064.]

The intention of the amendment is to take the Chancellor's words and put them on the face of the Bill, and it is difficult to see how the Government could possibly object to that.

A clear undertaking has been given time and time again that the tax would be levied and the national insurance contributions would come back at the same time as the compensation. Indeed, the intended reduction was confirmed in the Secretary of State for Social Security's annual national insurance contribution review. Since the annual national insurance changes are introduced by statutory instrument, there is no direct reference to the proposed reductions in the Finance Bill. Consequently, there is no guarantee that the tax will always be offset by national insurance changes in the future.

In addition, although the tax will be introduced in October 1996, the rebate does not take effect until six months later on 6 April 1997. As the proposals do not affect businesses equally, the process will obviously result in winners and losers. If, as the Government intend, the tax succeeds in deterring dumping on landfill sites, revenues will decrease. That will affect future rates of national insurance contributions.

To give an example, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has made the following calculation—local authorities collect approximately 22 million tonnes of waste a year, so the tax will mean an added cost in the region of £154 million a year. The Government's response to the consultation on the landfill tax last year stated:

"The concerns of local authorities are also understood by the Government. Local authorities are responsible for the collection and disposal of household waste, and it is recognised that the cost of the tax in respect of such waste that is landfilled will fall on them. The proposed reduction in employers' NICs will affect local authorities and, over the coming months, the Government will address the issue . . . in the context of the local government finance settlement."

A reduction of 0.2 per cent. in employers' national insurance contributions for the whole of local government only adds up to £30 million. There is therefore a net cost of more than £120 million. This is not accounted for in the local government settlement, and authorities will have to find the money from elsewhere. A further delay in introducing the national insurance rebate will clearly make that situation more difficult.

The net costs arise because local authorities have labour-intensive services, and are therefore likely to benefit more than average from reductions in national insurance contributions. Not only do they dispose of waste generated from their own operations—as would be the case in industry generally—but, as waste disposal authorities, they are responsible for disposing of waste generated within their boundaries.

On Budget day 1995, the Secretary of State for the Environment sought to buttress the considerations of national insurance by saying:

"The establishment of environmental trusts will complement and reinforce our policies for sustainable waste management, for example by promoting recycling, and strengthen the environmental credentials of the landfill tax. The trusts scheme has the potential to generate up to about £100 million of private sector expenditure for environmental improvement."

The trusts will be funded by contributions from landfill operators. Local authorities cannot apply to the trust for money because they do not run landfill sites. The money that the operators pay in comes out of their own pockets—it works something like a donation to a charity, on which companies receive tax relief—but they do not pay as much as they would if the rebate did not exist.

Someone more cynical than I am might ask why landfill site operators would want to pay into a scheme that would be a net cost to them, particularly when there is a rebate delay. The idea of the tax is to reduce the amount of waste that goes into landfill, but unless the site operator is also a waste producer, and most are not, why would they want to reduce the amount of waste, which produces their profits, going into landfill? The operators have no incentive to do so, and the manner in which the national insurance contributions are returned does not encourage them.

4 pm

The Government say that site operators will be able to increase their charges to pass on the incentive to the waste producers. Will there be any safeguards on the amount of the charge increases? Could a landfill operator, for example, pass on the cost, not only of the tax but of its contribution to the environmental trust? I shall give another example from my county, while it still exists. Under these proposals, disposal of the waste generated by Avon county is estimated to cost £1.4 million in 1996-97 and £2.8 million in 1997-98, while the total rebate to the authority would be less than £500,000 in the first year. Considerable costs would be borne there, and it is antagonised by the delay.

There should be greater emphasis on providing economic mechanisms to encourage the recycling of construction and demolition waste. One suggestion, beyond a weight-based tax, is to band it to reflect the level of environmental protection in place at different sites. The idea is to discourage un-engineered sites and to encourage further investment in advanced landfill disposal facilities with containment systems. That would be a sensible way to buttress the national insurance rebate and the applications to the environmental trust for funds—but it does not do that.

Any substantial increase in cost is likely to encourage the cowboy element in the industry, which seeks the cheap option by fly tipping. Although the Government have said that they will look into the problem, the costs of dealing with it are still in doubt and the decisions still have to be made. Like the attempt to label VAT on domestic fuel an environmental measure, the proposed implementation risks of the tax are in danger of discrediting the idea of environmental taxation. It is therefore in the interests of all hon. Members to ensure that the proposals are clearly drafted and that they deliver their drafters' objective.

The Government say that the aim of the tax is to promote a more sustainable approach to waste management. If that is so, why is landfill the only option being considered? Are we sending a signal to the market that landfill is the preferred method of disposal, and are we in danger, therefore, of not making the connections with future development?

Most commentators say that, if the tax achieves anything, as it stands, it will create a distortion in the market in favour of recycling, re-use and environmentally friendly policies. The theory of environmental taxation is that it should be set at the level of the marginal external costs of the environmental damage, but those costs must include wider considerations than have been given in this submission.

The question is whether the tax achieves its purpose. It does not favour recycling over non-landfill, and incineration or dumping at sea could increase. The tax structure does not recognise the fact that, in some cases, landfill is the best method of disposal from an environmental viewpoint—indeed for some waste it is the only method. In those cases, it operates, at best, as a straight tax on disposal and not as an environmental tax.

The tax does not recognise that, in some cases, material can be of positive benefit in a landfill site while still being waste to the person who is disposing of it. Inert materials are a classic example. They can be used as backfill in mine workings or to cap landfill sites. As a result, the tax does not encourage as much as it might the matching of waste from one business to the needs of another. The tax is a blunt instrument for distinguishing waste according to the degree of environmental damage that it causes.

There will be more incentive for individuals and businesses to evade their environmental responsibilities, both in respect of the fly tipping of rubbish on other people's land and of disposing of material on their own land without complying with licensing requirements under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The tax is flawed in one important respect. During the consultations, the Government made it clear that the objective of the tax is to force waste producers either to produce less waste for landfill or to find a place higher in the waste hierarchy for their output. Unfortunately, the current proposals do not do that.

Most importantly, the proposals do not provide for commitments that were given to the House. National insurance contributions and the tax are levied at the same time. This is a tidying-up amendment that would put into legislation the commitments made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, over two years, for national insurance

*[Ms Dawn Primarolo]*

contribution cuts to run in parallel with the levying of the tax. I hope that the House will accept the amendment as a positive contribution to an important debate.

**Mr. Tim Smith:** The proposed landfill tax has my full support. I have always thought that, if the Government were to intervene in the market to change the environmental behaviour of industry and commerce, the best way would be by means of a fiscal instrument such as this rather than by endless extra regulation of businesses. I believe that it is possible to change behaviour quite quickly by using the tax system. I understand the Treasury's reluctance to adopt green taxes—after all, there will be no net addition to the Revenue.

Our one green tax is the extra tax on leaded petrol, which has been extremely effective in persuading motorists to change to unleaded fuel, with considerable benefit to the environment. The landfill tax breaks new ground, because it is principally a tax on business. It is right that the Treasury should have consulted widely before introducing it, to ensure that it impacts fairly on business.

The tax has my full support, because I have several landfill sites in my constituency. As there is a great deal of gravel in the Thames valley, it has many landfill sites. They are not popular with local people, because they are messy, smelly places. There is no doubt that more could be done to recycle many waste materials, including paper.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) mentioned the response of councils. Of course they will be concerned if the only option available to them is to pass the costs on through extra council tax, but that is not the only option available. The tax should concentrate the minds of councillors on finding other ways to dispose of the waste. For example, my council—South Bucks district council—has recently introduced the separate collection of waste paper, which will allow it to send paper off for recycling rather dumping it at landfill sites. That is a major step forward. The tax will inevitably encourage other councils to adopt a similar approach.

The important thing for business is to keep a close eye on the objective of the tax. As a matter of principle, it should be levied only where there is a satisfactory alternative that offers an environmental improvement. I guess that that is the case in most examples that one could think of, but I want to mention a company in my constituency, British Alcan of Gerrards Cross, which makes aluminium products. It has a chemical plant in Scotland, which produces not only 220,000 tonnes of an aluminium chemical every year but 220,000 tonnes of red mud.

I am not sure what red mud is, but there is no alternative to dumping it in a landfill site, which the company owns and operates. The company has tried to find alternative uses for the red mud, but nobody seems interested in using it for motorways or anything else for which it might be suitable. As the company operates in an international market with world prices, if we simply impose an extra tax of £7 or even £2 per tonne on what it does, we shall simply render it uncompetitive in that market.

I hope that, when we consider the details of this provision in Standing Committee, we can take the issue a little further forward. I appreciate that today we are debating only the narrow amendment, moved by the hon. Member for Bristol, South, that the introduction of a national insurance rebate should be brought forward to October. I do not know when those who collect the landfill tax will first pay it to Customs and Excise, but if it is anything like VAT, there will be a four-month delay and the first payment will be in January, although the tax may have been collected in October. A company's cash flow position may therefore be a factor.

I support the tax in principle and hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look at the matters that I have mentioned in relation to British Alcan in Committee.

**Sir James Molyneaux** (Lagan Valley): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), particularly in the light of his distinguished record as a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office. Having held that office, he will be as aware as I am of the 26 extremely small councils that will be responsible for handling the landfill tax. He will know that they are starved of resources and that their rating machinery does not compare to the machinery that exists on this island. That is why I have doubts about the principle of the landfill tax.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) used an unfortunate term in her speech when she said that pressure must be applied on polluters. In Northern Ireland, the "polluters" are those 26 small councils, so it is not fair that the victims should be regarded as the polluters. The councils are not large employers of labour. They provide services mainly to their ratepayers rather than large industrialists with an enormous amount of waste for disposal.

To what extent does the hon. Lady think that those councils would benefit from a cut in national insurance contributions? I doubt whether they would benefit greatly; after all, most of the waste they collect is household waste. They will be compelled to collect the landfill tax mainly from householders, and will then have to resort to imposing the burden on ratepayers.

As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield will understand well, we have a peculiar layer of local taxation called the "regional rate", which relates to some mythical council area in north-east England and is pure guesswork. I cannot see how the councils could benefit from a reduction in national insurance contributions unless they transferred the full burden of collecting the tax and the tax itself to ratepayers in their individual counties. The House will have gathered that I am not making a case for the landfill tax, but I am inclined to oppose it as, particularly in our case, it clobbers the wrong sector.

4.15 pm

**Mrs. Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I am speaking to amendment No. 5, not because the Labour party opposes the principle of a landfill tax or levy but because we feel that such a tax should be a fiscal instrument that operates in a way that can truly be said to benefit the environment. The costs and benefits of the employers' national insurance contributions have not yet been properly worked out. The amendment attempts to address those issues and highlight the aspects of the landfill tax or levy that still cause great concern to businesses and major employers that are involved in waste disposal and that will therefore be liable to the environmental tax.

When the Environment Select Committee conducted an inquiry into recycling, we were convinced of the case for the waste hierarchy that puts waste reduction at the top, followed by waste recycling or waste recovery through incineration, followed by incineration without any energy recovery, followed by landfill. That hierarchy is roughly correct, particularly in a small, over-populated set of islands such as Britain, where it seems ridiculous to use large areas of land, often in overcrowded urban areas, and to have large, dirty lorries trundling to and fro, causing extra environmental pollution while distributing heavy-duty landfill waste among tips. Such an operation presents a cost to the public, particularly in large, urban conurbations. We are very much in favour of taking whatever measures we can to ensure that those costs are met by businesses in a way that affords better environmental solutions to waste disposal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) also said that large-scale landfill sites that are inadequately managed can also pose a danger. The existence of methane in large landfill sites is well known. If sites are well managed and the necessary resources are provided, the methane can be a source of useful energy recovery; but if the resources are not provided, the site becomes dangerous to the public and to residents living around it. For those reasons, it makes sense to have a fiscal incentive that ensures that the costs to the local community and to commercial waste firms are addressed. We have tabled the amendment because the tax, as presently worked out, does not take proper account of those implications.

There is an absence in the Finance Bill generally of complementary incentives from the other side of the waste industry to accompany the landfill levy. In the Environment Select Committee report on recycling, published on 6 July 1994, we concluded that we did not believe that there was a case for the imposition of a landfill levy at that time. Where a levy was to be imposed, however, we believed that it

"should be imposed in order to encourage alternative forms of waste management."

In order to encourage alternative forms of waste management, more effort needs to be taken to complement a landfill levy; to encourage other—

**The Chairman:** Order. The hon. Lady knows that she is drifting far from the amendment, and we are possibly having a clause stand part debate. I hope that she can return to the amendment.

**Mrs. Jackson:** Mr. Morris, I think that you will accept that my argument returns directly to the implications of the amendment.

I am arguing that, unless there are alternative incentives for big waste disposal authorities and unless the costs of the landfill levy are counterbalanced immediately by an offset in employers' national insurance contributions, the costs will fall especially on local authorities, which have the overall duty of waste disposal in their areas, in such a way as to constrain their initiatives to promote or put resources into complementary types of waste disposal.

The local authority in Sheffield in whose area I live has a magnificent reputation for incineration combined with heat recovery. It will be unable to continue developing such initiatives if that element of local authority spending is constrained. The authority estimates that the landfill tax will take £900,000 of its budget in the first year and £1.8 million in the second year. The authority is worried because, to this day, it has received no assurances from the Department of Social Security of the amount or scale of the compensation that will come back to it in the employers' national insurance offset.

Far from the landfill levy being part of an environmental policy that will help to redress the negative side of the waste hierarchy in Sheffield, the good schemes that the authority wants to promote may be constrained by the way in which the tax is levied. A great deal of material that goes into landfill could be used, with a small amount of research and development investment, for anaerobic composting, which could benefit Sheffield's large municipal parks. That is the type of complementary waste operation that may be difficult to cope with as a result of the landfill tax as it is presented at the moment.

The steel industry will be affected. We received a document from the British Iron and Steel Producers Association saying that its initial calculations show that the annual direct gross cost of the landfill levy will be about £18 million and that the national insurance offset will only marginally reduce that. Steel is probably the industry best suited to recycling. I am very proud of the company Stocksbridge Engineering Steel in my constituency, and I am always amazed that its works transforms 10,000 tonnes of messy scrap metal into 12,500 tonnes of engineering steel for use in the aerospace and other specialised industries. That is accomplished in one week, and all the company's products are recycled from scrap metal.

Stocksbridge Engineering Steel, as a major steel producer, simply cannot afford the landfill tax. According to its calculations, it will mean on-costs of 36p for every tonne of steel produced—which will amount to almost £200,000 a year. The firm wants certain elements of the levy to be reconsidered in view of the extra costs that will be imposed.

For example, it requires the definition of waste to be clarified further. The firm wants to know which of its waste will be declared inert waste and which waste will be charged at £7 per tonne. Until it is clear about which of its waste will be charged at £2 per tonne and which will be charged at £7 per tonne, it will find it very difficult to plan and to finance its forward projections on the extra cost to the business. That is of particular concern when, as the amendment points out, firms are still unsure about the benefits that will accrue from national insurance contributions.

There is a further cost and a further complication for the steel industry in areas such as South Yorkshire. Anyone who is familiar with that area will know that there is much derelict steel industry land and many empty factories in South Yorkshire. The technology has changed and, although the industry is not producing less special steel, it is producing it in very different ways in a much smaller area.

The steel industry has been left with large areas of land which can be reclaimed only through landfill operations and it must dispose of its waste, while facing the added costs imposed by the landfill tax. The industry must also pay for the waste that is used to reclaim and redevelop many derelict sites, such as those in Rotherham at Templeborough which are owned by the firm that controls

*[Mrs. Jackson]*

Stocksbridge Engineering Steel in my constituency. The landfill tax would impose that second cost on the British steel industry, on top of the £200,000 that I have mentioned already.

In addition, it is also unclear whether the disposal of material that is used in reclamation will be subject to landfill tax. I am sure that we will return to many of the issues when we discuss other clauses in Committee, but I think that it is important to raise the matters now in the Chamber. The firm is the largest employer by far in my constituency. Any issue that will cause the firm such financial concern—36p on-costs on every tonne of engineering steel that it produces—is serious. The firm supplies about 60 per cent. of the manufacturing sector with steel, so it will be a problem for manufacturing production nationwide.

I am aware that there are other matters, such as the dredging issue, on which we will have further discussions. I have given the reasons that lead me to believe that the amendment should be considered seriously and supported. The Government have not thought through how the balance of the extra costs of the landfill levy will be complemented by the cuts in national insurance contributions.

4.30 pm

**Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): I am pleased to speak to the amendment. I had the opportunity to talk about the landfill tax during the Budget debate, and I welcomed it. I still welcome the landfill tax, and I have now had the opportunity to consider it further. My support for it is still substantial, although I have some reservations about one or two issues.

The importance of the landfill tax in the Budget is that it moves taxation from labour to environmental issues, such as pollution. That must be right, and I look forward to future Budgets pursuing that approach. I am, however, concerned that the landfill tax will come into effect on October 1996, but the discount on national insurance contributions will not come into effect until April 1997. That is the issue that amendment No. 5 addresses.

I strongly believe that those two issues should be closely linked, and that there should be no gap between them. If the Government believe that we should switch taxation from labour to pollution, a clear manifestation of their support would be a timetable that coincided. At the moment, there is a clear six-month gap, and that is not acceptable.

In essence, the aim of the policy is to tax pollution. I wish to examine that aim in relation to domestic waste producers—all of us who put our waste in dustbins. The policy as it stands does not provide the necessary linkage. Although it is a green policy, it is one of which no one will be aware. The ordinary householder will not be aware of the landfill tax, and that is a real weakness.

Local authorities will face some difficulties, as some of my colleagues have already mentioned. It is clear that the landfill tax will cost local authorities more. The final figures have yet to be worked out, but the provisional figures seem to show that the additional cost for local authorities, which collect about 22 million tonnes of domestic household waste a year, will be about £154 million. There will be a reduction in national insurance contributions of 0.2 per cent. Perhaps the Minister will tell us the level of wages that that national insurance discount will affect. I suspect that it will be about £10,000, so full-time employees will get the discount but part-timers will not.

Nationally, the additional cost to local authorities will be £154 million, but the rebate on national insurance costs might be about £30 million. In other words, local authorities will face a net additional cost of something like £124 million. It is plain as a pikestaff that someone will have to pick up these costs; it seems to me that that "someone" will be the poor council tax payer.

I am particularly concerned about my local authority in Nottinghamshire. Judging by the figures that it gave me just this morning, it seems that the county council disposes of 500,000 tonnes a year of household waste. I should like to praise local authorities, which sometimes do not get the praise that they deserve. Many years ago, there was a move in Nottinghamshire towards incineration. The Eastcroft incinerator disposes of an average 125,000 tonnes of domestic waste a year, leaving a substantial amount—375,000 tonnes—to go into landfill.

I should like to ask the Minister whether the ash from the incinerator will be classified as inert material—an important point. The difference between a disposal cost of £7 a tonne and £2 a tonne—for inert material—can make a great deal of difference to council tax payers. Certain bodies such as the CBI have questioned how the categories into which waste is divided for the purposes of the £7 band and the £2 band are defined. I know that consultations are going on, but the guidelines eventually issued will have to be clearly understood by everyone. This, I am afraid, is yet another example of legislation being passed without the ground rules being clear, and that is not good practice.

As I said, 375,000 tonnes of domestic waste go into landfill sites in Nottinghamshire.

**Mr. Tim Smith:** Does that mean that no recycling at all is going on in Nottinghamshire? Would not the councils there be well advised to consider changing their behaviour, instead of just passing on all the extra tax to council tax payers?

**Mr. Tipping:** Of course. Had he been listening, the hon. Gentleman would have heard me talk about the early construction of an incinerator in Nottinghamshire; it heats domestic and industrial properties throughout the city of Nottingham. The hon. Gentleman will also know of the work done by local authorities to recycle paper, glass, and so on. Obviously we should support all such work, but there remains the problem that not all domestic waste can be recycled in that way. A large amount will still go into landfill sites, as it does in Nottinghamshire.

The cost to the local authority next year—a part year—will be £1.3 million, and in 1997-98 it will be £2.6 million. We may set the national insurance discount against that, but it amounts to a mere £130,000. There is clearly a large gap which has to be met by someone. I do not believe that local authorities will meet it; rather, it will be passed on to council tax payers.

I know that local authority associations have taken up the matter recently with Ministers, particularly Ministers from the Department of the Environment, and I expect

that there will soon be a discussion in the House about the financial settlement for local authorities next year. I hope that the Minister will talk to his colleagues in other Departments about this issue, because there is a strong case for examining the capping levels that have been put on local authorities, particularly those that are also waste disposal authorities—usually, county councils.

I look forward to Ministers from the Department of the Environment coming to the House and explaining to us, perhaps next week—

**The Chairman:** Order. Not this afternoon, when we are discussing the Finance Bill.

**Mr. Tipping:** I am grateful for your advice, Mr. Morris.

Perhaps Ministers will come to the House shortly—next week or perhaps the week after—to say how the gap between the extra costs to local authorities and the discounts on national insurance contributions, which is what the amendment is about, will be met. I very much hope that the Government will listen to the voice of local authorities on that issue and consider relaxing the cap.

The landfill tax is a potential tax on coal. Electricity generators burn coal. I do not believe that they burn enough. I would like them to burn more and to keep the pits in Nottinghamshire and throughout the country going. The consequence of burning coal is that waste—fly ash—is collected at the end. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) spoke about reclamation. Fly ash has been used for many years to reclaim sites. There are areas of dereliction all over the industrial midlands and the north. I would be keen for us to examine ways to discount some element of the taxation on fly ash. It is an issue not just for coal mining areas but, for example, for Bedfordshire, where clay has been extracted from the ground to produce bricks, and, gradually, the pits are being filled. If there is an environmental benefit from that, it deserves careful consideration during the passage of the Bill.

I ask the Minister to confirm that fly ash will be classed as inert waste and taxed at the rate of £2 per tonne rather than £7 per tonne. That is an important issue, as it is eventually a tax on consumers. Although there will be some discount for the generators—for example, PowerGen and National Power—through national insurance, that will not go any way towards meeting the cost for disposing of fly ash. I have figures from both generators. I shall not discuss them this afternoon, but I know that they have written to Ministers on that point.

It is clear that the disposal of fly ash will cost the generators tens of thousands of pounds. My real fear is that, in a competitive energy market, the coal industry, which has declined rapidly over recent years, will once again be put under a very real threat. It is a serious issue, at which the Minister should look. It is linked to the discounting of national insurance charges, and it is not sufficient to make up the extra cost.

There are many other issues that I would like to pursue on the landfill tax, but the appropriate place to do, that is upstairs in Standing Committee. I am concerned about fly tipping. We need to look at that. We need to look at best disposal practice in landfill sites. The landfill tax—I shall not over-egg the case—could lead to difficulties in that regard.

I ask the Minister to consider having a de minimis rule for small operators. As the Bill stands, all operators will have to comply with the legislation.

I am still a supporter of the landfill tax. I am an ardent supporter of green taxation. The points that I make are meant to be helpful to the Minister. I look forward to pursuing them during the next few weeks.

4.45 pm

**Mr. Ian Pearson** (Dudley, West): I confess that I am relatively new to the concept of landfill taxes. Almost two years ago, before I was elected to the House, I was a member of a team that visited Slovakia with the president of the Institute of Wastes Management and a person who had a doctorate in composting. We discussed landfill taxes, and the conclusion that the experts reached was that, in the majority of cases, burying rubbish, rather than other methods higher up in the waste disposal hierarchy, was the best solution for the United Kingdom.

I shall make a general observation about the detail behind clause 36. As with many other clauses, much of its effect is hidden in secondary legislation, which will appear later and might get less scrutiny than it deserves. There are three Treasury orders, one Customs and Excise order and 15 sets of Customs and Excise regulations on landfill tax to come.

A press release at the time of the Budget stated that there would be consultation on the secondary legislation in the spring of 1996, and that the instruments would be laid during the summer. It is not clear to me whether that process will include exposure of draft regulations—the provisions of the Finance Bill were not released in draft—so I would appreciate clarification from the Minister on that, and on whether there will be draft regulations for businesses to comment on.

Like other Opposition Members, I do not object in principle to the concept of a landfill tax—a number of us have supported green taxes for a considerable time—and I do not object to the method by which the tax has been raised. I pay tribute to the Government for listening to the voice of industry and moving away from an ad valorem basis of taxation towards cost per tonne. By doing that, we are falling into line with landfill tax regimes in Europe.

At the moment, as I understand it—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—five European countries have landfill taxes, and all of them have weight-based regimes. Denmark is the most expensive, with a tax of £20.67 per tonne. In France, depending on whether waste is municipal or hazardous industrial, there is a charge of £2.50 or between £5 and £8. The proposed regime seems to be in accordance with that. In Germany, the charge can vary from £10 to £41 for hazardous industrial waste. Whether there should be a higher band for hazardous waste is a potential issue. In Belgium—

**The Chairman:** Order. What the hon. Gentleman is saying is most interesting, but he must relate his comments to the rebate on employers' national insurance contributions. That might be in order, but just recounting the facts is not.

**Mr. Pearson:** Thank you, Mr. Morris.

When considering the burdens on business—the Government have made great play of the fact that there is a matching national insurance contributions rebate to

*[Mr. Pearson]*

ensure that there is no burden on business—we must ensure that there is a level playing field. Other European countries do not have, and never have had, a matching rebate. What is more, a number of European countries do not force businesses to pay landfill tax. The Government should consider establishing a level playing field across Europe for landfill taxation. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will press for a common European standard on landfill tax.

The Environmental Services Association, formerly the National Association of Waste Disposal Companies, represents companies that provide waste management and related environmental services. It is the lead body and it shares some of my concerns. It says that it

"fully supports the development of a sustainable waste management policy, but is concerned that isolated fiscal instruments may not be the best method of attaining such a policy in accord with the best available technology not entailing excessive cost . . . principles."

The tax appears to be a one-off, with a matching cut in contributions, as the amendment says. Environmental taxation is not seen in the round. Partly as a result of that—I hope that I am not misquoting him—Peter Neill, the chairman of the ESA, said:

"Waste producers—both domestic and commercial—must be aware that this is a tax which will ultimately be paid by themselves."

That is a salient point of which we should be aware.

The views of businesses that emerged from the consultation exercise that began in March 1995 are interesting, and I am surprised that the Government have not supported some of them. According to the official summary of responses to the consultation paper that was published on 1 September, of the 249 responses expressing a view on the Government's landfill tax and their plan to cut employers' national insurance contributions, only 25 were in favour and 173 were against. The Government argue that that imbalance arises because, generally, the businesses that responded were more likely to be net losers than net gainers.

There are clearly winners and losers, but the real reason for that overwhelming opposition is that many employers in the industry recognise that there is no real link between national insurance contributions rebates and reductions, which are basically to do with industrial policy, and an environmental policy, of which landfill tax is one small, isolated, example. It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that the landfill tax proposal and its matching national insurance contributions reduction is a con trick, and that the Government have simply found a new wheeze for raising additional taxation, which has been adopted by five other European countries.

**Mr. Tim Smith:** That is nonsense. The whole point is that, although the tax is new, it will not raise any extra revenue. The money is being handed back to industry and commerce. One of the greatest tax burdens on industry and commerce is national insurance contributions, because they constitute a levy on jobs. Why does not the hon. Gentleman welcome the reduction?

**Mr. Pearson:** I welcome the reduction in employers' national insurance contributions, but I am saying that that reduction is a sensible measure that the Government should and would have wanted anyway. I see no compelling reason for a link between the two. If something is worth doing, it is worth doing for its own sake, and that applies both to environmental taxes and to reductions in national insurance charges.

In addition, there is no guarantee that the 0.2 per cent. reduction will hold in the medium term. If, as seems likely, employers modify their behaviour and, as a result, make less use of landfill, the revenue raised from the landfill tax will decline. The Red Book projections show a surplus yield to the Exchequer through to 1998-99. They say that, in 1996-97, landfill tax will produce a net £110,000 above national insurance contributions reductions. In 1997-98, landfill tax is forecast to bring in £450 million, and employers' national insurance contributions reductions are forecast to cost the Exchequer some £495,000. It is only in 1998-99 that there will be a cumulative surplus yield to the Exchequer. I therefore remain to be convinced of the importance of the link between national insurance contributions and the landfill tax.

Contaminated land is an issue of great importance to my constituency, Dudley, West, in the black country. I have had representations from the Building Employers Confederation and a number of other organisations which are concerned about the effect of the landfill tax on them. Much redevelopment of contaminated land—I have some major developers in my constituency—is undertaken through Government grant regimes.

Government grant is allocated only on the basis that the projects would not proceed unless such money was forthcoming. The landfill tax makes no exemption for contaminated land, so the Government will have to pay out more in grant in order to redevelop the land, or developers will decide that they do not want to proceed with much needed urban regeneration. Exempting waste taken from contaminated land from landfill tax is worth considering.

The tax will also affect my local metropolitan borough council, which currently disposes of 120,000 tonnes of waste per annum. It does not take a mathematician to calculate that, at a rate of £7 per tonne, the cost to the authority will be £840,000 a year. Estimates suggest that the reduction in national insurance contributions will benefit the authority to the tune of about £300,000 but, as a result of the landfill tax, it will be about £500,000 out of pocket, and the cost will almost inevitably be passed to the consumer.

5 pm

The authority is currently engaged in discussions with a number of companies in connection with an incineration contract that it wants to let. I suspect that there will be a strong trend among authorities that are major users of landfill sites towards incineration. No one would object to that if the incinerators conformed to European standards—environmental benefits would result—but it is feared that they will not.

At present, my local authority makes considerable use of recycling. In the event of a long-term contract with an incineration company, it will try to deliver the best possible deal to council tax payers, but it will lose money. The Government should act, perhaps by means of the "other services" part of the standard spending assessment.

On the one hand, small businesses will be subject to the landfill tax; on the other, they will benefit from national insurance contribution rebates. The tax will, however, be

subject to VAT, which will be charged in accordance with section 19 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994: landfill tax will be deductible in the computation of profits or income for direct tax purposes. The Government should consider exempting small businesses that will have to wade through all the regulations and Treasury orders—and pay extra VAT on their landfill tax.

I think that landfill tax should be aligned with VAT as far as possible. I understand that the Law Society recommended that, and that operators who are not registrable for VAT should be exempt from the landfill tax.

One of the penalties of the tax is the imposition of a separate interest charge on tax shown on returns but not paid by the due date. I have often spoken in the House about the effect of late payment on small businesses, but the House should note that the Bill proposes a complete departure from previous tax arrangements. We are replacing the default surcharge regime with a penalty interest rate. The compounded interest rate of 10 per cent. over the standard rate could rapidly add up to a large sum: with an interest rate of 7 per cent., after three years, the penalty interest could amount to some 66 per cent. of the tax. If it is good enough for the Government to introduce legislation on late payment to raise money for themselves, surely it should be good enough for them to do the same for businesses.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): I support the amendment, as it would delay the onset of the tax, but it would be more sensible to levy a zero rate for inert materials on land disposal sites, because they do not cause the environmental problems that might justify a landfill tax. A zero rate would allow our chemical industries to compete with those elsewhere in Europe.

The Government have introduced the tax as an opportunistic way of raising more money, and they have done so in their usual fashion. Admittedly there has been consultation, but they have ignored the arguments for zero rating for inert materials, thus cutting across long-standing contracts and investments made years before and damaging the competitive position of the firms that made those investments. It is extraordinary that a so-called business man's Government should make no allowance for investment decisions made some time ago, and should suddenly slap on a tax that will penalise British firms that are in competition with European firms that do not have to pay such a penalty.

I raise the issue because the tax will have a serious effect on Tioxide, a Grimsby firm which produces titanium dioxide.

**The Chairman:** Order. Is the hon. Gentleman going to relate his remarks to—

**Mr. Mitchell** *rose—*

**The Chairman:** Order. "Order" means "sit down". I hope that the hon. Gentleman will relate his remarks to employers' national insurance contributions. Perhaps he did not hear the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) move the amendment, and therefore missed the significance of that issue, which he has not yet mentioned.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I mentioned it in my introduction, Mr. Morris. Tioxide is a major contributor to Grimsby's economy, but it will not benefit massively from a reduction in employers' national insurance contributions because it is a capital-intensive, rather than an employment-intensive, industry. The reduction is one way of palliating the blow, but I think that we should do that in other ways.

I was about to cite the decisions that Tioxide made. The main waste product in the production of titanium dioxide is sulphuric acid. Disposal is a problem. There are two possible treatments of the waste: it can be concentrated and recycled, or neutralised to form gypsum. Tioxide decided to comply with the European directive on waste disposal, and opt for the neutralisation treatment. That commercial decision was taken on the ground that gypsum, an inert material, could be disposed of in two ways—first, as an ingredient in plasterboard manufacturing further along the Humber bank and, secondly, in an ex-British Steel ironstone quarry at Roxby, close to the Grimsby site. It planned to fill in the quarry there with the inert material, and the site was to have been made available for various leisure uses once it had been filled in—a sensible procedure.

As a result of that commercial decision, which was taken some time ago, when there were no proposals for a landfill tax in exchange for a compensating reduction in employers' national insurance contributions, Tioxide went in for a two-stage neutralisation system at the Grimsby site. Its substantial investment was tailored to produce gypsum, partly for plasterboard manufacture and partly for disposal in the quarry. The Roxby quarry landfill site was set up with a licence to take only gypsum or similar waste. Tioxide negotiated a direct rail link to the site to minimise disamenity and an agreement to convert the site into a nature park once it had been filled in.

Tioxide took a commercial decision in a competitive titanium dioxide market. Its competitive position will not necessarily be improved substantially by a reduction in employers' national insurance contributions, but it will be changed by the impact of the tax on landfill, the method by which it decided to dispose of the material.

The neutralisation system produced an investment at Grimsby of £27 million. That major decision and investment is now called into question by the sudden imposition of a landfill tax, against which Tioxide has protested. The employers' national insurance contribution reduction is minimal, and inadequate compensation, because competitors in Europe operate on the basis of zero-rating for landfill disposal of such material.

Tioxide was complying with the industry-specific European Community directive that aims to harmonise competition by applying similar environmental constraints to every producer in the sector. The idea of that directive was to reduce liquid effluents and increase solid waste effluents. It therefore encourages firms to use landfill. When European competitors do that, they have the benefit of no landfill tax or of zero-rating for the inert gypsum material that they produce, but Tioxide is suddenly faced with a decision to tax the product in this country.

Tioxide has done its best to meet European requirements, but the Government have come in, with little consideration for the realities, the scale of the investment or the competitive position of the firm, and slapped on a tax, proposing compensation by way of a reduction in employers' national insurance contributions. That compensation is not sufficient, because this industry is not labour-intensive.

*[Mr. Mitchell]*

Not much can be done with the material except place it in a landfill site. Tioxide has made a long-standing arrangement that will result in a nature park. It is in intense competition with Europe. It has complied with the EC directives and now, suddenly, the Government have blundered in and decided to tax in this fashion. It is typical of the Government's lack of concern for the competitive position of British industry that they can suddenly slap on such requirements—thinking that they are giving some compensation when they are not—and not take the competitive position into account.

The Government should approach this matter by asking: what are the damaging consequences of this material? Is there methane gas? No, there is not. Is it inert? Yes, it is. The problems that would justify the taxation do not arise in relation to this material. It should, therefore, be zero-rated. The national insurance contribution concession is not enough. I ask the Minister to tell me what concessions can be made to compensate a firm such as Tioxide—which has headed into long-standing contracts and commitments and which has invested £27 million in the treatment of waste—for this sudden blow and sudden change in its competitive position vis-a-vis European competitors.

5.15 pm

**The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory):** The amendment has given opportunities for a fairly general debate on the landfill tax. May I respond to some of the points raised and correct some of the misapprehensions that exist, especially among Opposition Members?

The landfill tax will essentially do two things—encourage good environmental practice and raise money that will be used to cut the main rate of employers' national insurance contributions. It will therefore help employment and the environment at the same time. The hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) is right: we are not alone in introducing such a tax. It already exists in Denmark, the Netherlands, France and parts of Belgium and I understand that the Italians are proposing to introduce such a tax. In general, the rates of those taxes are above what we are proposing.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** Is it not a fact that there is zero rating for the disposal of inert materials such as the gypsum that I referred to?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I understand that that is not true. There are a number of specific reliefs and exemptions in some countries, but they do not, as I understand it, cover entirely the point that the hon. Gentleman raised, but I will touch on the case that he instanced.

This is not an environmental European tax. We have no desire to harmonise such tax rates throughout the European Community. We are introducing it in this country because it suits British conditions and it is good for our environment. Also, we can relieve taxation on employment in the way that I have mentioned.

It is not the first time that the British Government have used taxes to encourage better environmental practice, but this is the first tax that will be introduced specifically for environmental purposes. We are using an economic instrument to achieve an environmental goal.

The objects of the tax are to ensure that landfill waste is properly priced and that the charges that are borne by waste producers reflect the environmental harm that is caused. Landfill operators will bear the tax and will have to account for it to Customs, but they will pass on additional costs to those who produce the waste. It is important that the disposal costs that those producers face reflect the full environmental impact of landfill.

That environmental impact can take a number of different forms—the production of methane, which, as the Committee knows, is a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming; or pollution of groundwater. It may not have a direct environmental effect—it could be in the category of nuisance to local residents. Committee members who have landfill sites in their constituencies will know that landfill operations frequently cause problems of dust, dirt, noise, litter, seagulls and traffic movements. It is important that all those external costs are captured and attributed to the waste producer.

**Ms Primarolo:** The right hon. Gentleman said that the site operators would pay the tax—which we know—and that they would pass that on to the waste producers, presumably through increased charges. We will look at the mechanisms for that in Standing Committee. Local authorities have a responsibility to dispose of other people's waste and industrial waste, and they collect waste within their boundaries. What mechanism does he envisage to ensure that, in those circumstances, the waste producers bear the increased charge? Local authorities have the responsibility to collect but they may be capped or restricted on spending—and they have not yet been told by the Government how they are expected to cope with the loss of revenue resulting from the extra charges that they will have to pay.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The landfill operator will bear the costs and then pass them on to waste producers. I shall deal with local authorities later in my remarks. However, the local authority—a district council, for example—will be in the best position to influence the amount of waste that is landfilled and the amount diverted to recycling or other waste streams. It will be in the best position to take the necessary corrective action.

**Sir Roger Moate** (Faversham): Waste disposal diverted into recycling or incineration is more expensive than landfill—even more expensive than landfill plus the landfill tax. Come what may, local authorities will face an extra cost for disposal, which must be paid for by somebody—by the local authority, the national taxpayer or the council tax payer. If we impose a green tax, someone has to pay it. That charge will have to be met in the coming year by some local authorities. Can my right hon. Friend give an estimate of the total revenue that will come from local authorities this year and next year, which will have to be collected from local council tax payers?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** My hon. Friend is not entirely correct in saying that alternative waste disposal such as recycling is necessarily more expensive than landfill. For example, with aluminium cans the industry will melt them down to make new aluminium products. That waste stream is, in some cases, cheaper than landfilling that metal. Indeed, there are already a number of good and self-sustaining recycling schemes, even without the

incentive of a landfill tax for material dumped into holes in the ground. The tax will give a further impetus to what is already happening with recycling.

I repeat the point that capturing those external costs, whether they be pollution or a form of nuisance to residents and others, is an important consideration. It will encourage the waste producers, whoever they may be, to look for ways to produce less waste and to reuse and recycle more waste if they cannot avoid producing it. We know that there is substantial scope for businesses and others to adopt better waste management practices. The tax will give them a precise incentive to continue to do so.

In other words, what we are proposing will reinforce the existing policy of sustainable waste management, which was set out in considerable detail in the White Paper published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment last month. The concept in the White Paper was of a waste hierarchy, headed by waste minimisation. The most desirable aim must be not to produce so much waste. Lower down the hierarchy is re-using waste.

Further down again comes the recovery of waste, which can include recycling, composting and energy recovery from incineration. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), who is no longer in her place, was under the misapprehension that the landfill tax would somehow act as a disincentive or inhibition on composting. In fact, the reverse is the case, as the hierarchy shows. If waste can be composted, it will avoid landfill tax. At the bottom of the waste hierarchy is disposal, which includes landfill.

The landfill tax will be an important means of moving waste up the hierarchy and away from landfill. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) said, bafflingly, that the tax would send a signal that landfill was the most desirable means of disposal. That calls into question her understanding of the whole principle of the tax because the reverse is the case. By taxing landfill, we are providing an incentive to move to other, more environmentally benign means of dealing with waste.

**Ms Primarolo:** A study for the Department of the Environment undertaken by Coopers and Lybrand showed that, with a levy on landfill even as high as £20 per tonne, recycling would still remain a relatively unattractive financial option and that the use of the tax alone would not be enough to develop alternatives. Therefore, essentially the Government are saying that landfill is all right or that options that are worse than landfill but cheaper are also all right.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The hon. Lady is now arguing for a much higher rate of tax, which can only double the anxiety expressed by some of my hon. Friends. If she is suggesting that the modest tax we are proposing will not boost recycling in the way that we wish, that is an argument for a higher charge. We do not accept that. Although the tax will not overnight create vast quantities of recycled waste, that might be a good thing. By flooding the market with recycled products, we might kill the very process that we are trying to promote. We believe that the tax rates of £2 and £7 will at least nudge the market towards a greater use of recycled materials and therefore move waste generally up the hierarchy that I described earlier.

**Mr. Winston Churchill** (Davyhulme): Would not the penal rates of taxation on landfill favoured by the Opposition—as, indeed, they favour penal rates of taxation in almost every area—encourage cowboy tipping?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** That is a serious point, which my hon. Friend was right to highlight. All that we have heard this afternoon is reaffirmation that the Labour party is a high taxer by nature. When it sees a tax, its instinct is to raise it.

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor proposed the landfill tax in his 1994 Budget, he made it clear that he wished to consult widely on the details. That will include secondary legislation—to answer the specific point raised by the hon. Member for Dudley, West. In fact, the details in the Bill are the fruits of the consultation exercise. We thought long and hard about the rates and we also consulted outside interests. The tax will be levied per tonne. The standard rate, which will apply to most waste, will be £7 per tonne.

Following the persuasive representations that were made during the consultation exercise, we decided that there will be a lower rate of £2 a tonne for inactive or inert waste. Examples of this are soil, sand, gravel, brick, concrete, glass and so on. These do not decay to any significant extent and have much less potential to pollute the atmosphere or groundwater with gas.

It remains important to provide an incentive to recycle materials such as aggregates in the construction industry, and these should be taxed in most cases at the lower £2 rate. Taxing such materials will encourage a reduction in the amount of aggregates that are extracted from the ground and will encourage people to seek ways of recycling them wherever feasible.

The differential between the £7 and the £2 rates reflects the different environmental impacts of different types of waste, as well as the arguments that were put to us during the consultation exercise. Customs and Excise is now consulting on the exact details and types of inert waste to be involved.

**Mr. Tipping** *rose—*

5.30 pm

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I shall anticipate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping). The question of fly ash is being investigated, and I cannot give a definitive answer at the Dispatch Box as to whether fly ash is genuinely inert or whether it includes some form of pollutant that would put it into the £7 limit. I will make further inquiries about the matter.

**Mr. Tipping:** I am grateful for the Minister's assurance that the issue is at least being examined. Could he turn his mind to the issue of ash from incinerated domestic waste? Will that be classed as inert? Is there not a case for the classification of soil, for which there should be no charge at all? I make this point not because I am a high taxer, but because I want the tax to be practical and efficient.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The residue from the incineration of domestic waste will bear the landfill tax, but as it has been reduced in volume considerably from the initial waste stream, the overall quantity of household waste will be taxed less if it has been through an incinerator. That, in turn, gives exactly the right signal

*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]*

to those involved in the incineration of domestic waste, particularly if that includes energy recovery—as it does near the constituency of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping).

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) asked me about some specific cases that do not relate to the amendment. As a result, these cases will probably be better examined upstairs in the Committee, of which, I am happy to say, my hon. Friend will be a member.

I ought to make the general point that, even where alternatives to landfilling do not presently exist or where the alternatives are not economic at present, it is important to ensure that the environmental costs of landfilling are properly reflected in the charges paid. That will, in turn, encourage innovation and research into alternatives to landfilling that may not presently exist, and so promote in the future the environmental objectives of the tax to which I have referred.

Much the same argument applies to the point raised by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), although I am not fully familiar with the industrial process that he described. I think that the hon. Gentleman said that the first waste product would be sulphuric acid, which would surely be a high-grade, dangerous product to dispose of and would incur in all circumstances a higher charge. The firm which he instanced had put in a process to render that waste inert in the form of gypsum and, in so doing, move it from a higher charge to a lower one and save itself an equivalent sum of money. I will have to investigate the point made by the hon. Gentleman, particularly as I may stray out of order if I continue on that subject.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** I am grateful for the Minister's promise of an investigation. To facilitate such an investigation, I should make clear the point that I was making. There are two methods of waste treatment, and Tioxide chose the second method—to neutralise it to produce gypsum—because of the availability of a British Steel quarry. The infill of gypsum would convert that quarry into a nature park.

That was a commercial decision affecting the company's competitive situation, but the company was not warned by the Government that there was to be a tax on inert material disposed of in this fashion. The company faces competition from other European countries, primarily Germany, where there is no such landfill tax, and France, where inert materials such as gypsum are zero-rated. The Bill will seriously and adversely affect the competitive situation of this firm. Why do the Government not zero-rate inert materials such as gypsum that are environmentally benign?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I have commented on that matter, but I shall look again at the specific point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

I had better get on more directly to the Opposition amendment, which affects the timings. The tax will come into effect in October of this year, and in a full year will yield about £450 million. That is an approximate calculation, but it is the best we have at present. Because revenue is collected quarterly in arrears, the yield in this financial year will be about £110 million.

The amendment leaves the implementation date in place, but seeks to bring forward the announced cut in national insurance contributions to the same date. This is another enormous uncosted commitment by the Labour party, and blows another hole in Labour's claims to be the party of fiscal rectitude. Labour has landed an enormous bill on to the desk of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who is very anxious not to play the old game of giving money away with one hand while putting up taxes with the other to cover the difference.

While Labour has made a big and uncosted commitment, we nevertheless rejoice when it repents of its old high-tax policies. I remind the Committee that in 1979, employers paid 13.5 per cent. in national insurance contributions, including the infamous national insurance surcharge, which was a direct tax on jobs. We have brought the rate down to 10.2 per cent., and it is less than that for lower-paid employees. That is one of the important reasons why we have the lowest non-wage labour costs of any major European economy, and correspondingly low unemployment.

The revenue from the landfill tax will enable us to cut the rate further to 10 per cent. But if Labour really wants to emulate our policies on employment generation, it must adopt all of them—including our rejection of the damaging European social chapter with its possible consequences, and the minimum wage, which would deal a body blow to low earners. I welcome Labour's support for a cut in national insurance contributions, and we will do that as soon as practicable.

The mid-year changes would impose a very significant compliance burden on the businesses which pay it. We are not talking about the 1,400 or so businesses that will be paying the landfill tax, but of the millions of taxpayers who pay national insurance contributions. Those taxpayers would all be affected by any mid-year switch in the rate.

There is another—I think, better—reason for rejecting the amendment, which is that it requires a matching cut that would require us to match the revenue from the landfill tax, penny for penny, with cuts to national insurance contributions. That is considerably less generous than what we are proposing. The tax will raise about £450 million in a full year, but the national insurance contribution cut will cost £500 million in its first full year. The year after that, it will be more generous still and cost some £120 million more than the revenue from the landfill tax.

**Sir Roger Moate:** That is an important point, particularly in relation to the burden on local authorities. If my right hon. Friend is correct in saying that the national insurance rebate reduction will more than offset the additional costs to be borne by local authorities collecting or paying the landfill tax, does that therefore mean that there is no justification for local authorities—Labour local authorities in particular—suggesting that the tax is a reason for increasing the council tax this year?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** There are bound to be winners and losers. Not all businesses or types of business will unequivocally be winners, because they may incur landfill tax charges that are greater than any benefit that they receive in national insurance contributions. That is true for local authorities as a whole.

I should like to say another word about local authorities—particularly to attempt to answer some of the points that have been made by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux). I am aware that the Environmental Protection Act 1990—which brought into effect a chain of waste management regulations in England, Wales and, subsequently, in Scotland—does not yet apply to Northern Ireland. As I understand it, starting this year, the Northern Ireland Office will introduce equivalent regulations and environmental requirements.

I can make a general point about Northern Ireland that is similar in England and Wales: local authorities are in a good position to influence the amount of landfill tax that they pay because they are the movers and shakers in the recycling, composting and incineration industries as they affect domestic waste. Many local authorities have already made investments in those industries, often with Government support. Indeed, the Government have given or have made available some £50 million-worth of grants to local authorities for investment in recycling.

**Mr. Tipping:** I accept two of the points that the Minister has made. First, resources have been made available to local authorities through credit approvals and the rest; but more needs to be done. Secondly, local authorities are actively making an attempt in this sphere. The bottom line is that landfill is substantially cheaper than recycling. How can we encourage more recycling when the cost difference between the two schemes is so wide?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** We can bridge that gap only by an enormous increase in the landfill tax, which we will not contemplate for many reasons—but the tax helps. The tax sends the right price signal and gives the right incentive to move more of the waste up the waste hierarchy, away from landfilling, towards other means of waste management, including recycling. Local authorities in all parts of the United Kingdom are in a good position to take advantage of that. On grounds of practicality, the cost of administration and because it is of benefit to the great majority of businesses, I urge the Committee to reject the amendment.

**Ms Primarolo:** The Paymaster General has made some interesting criticisms of our amendment. He attacked it because he said that it was a spending commitment and it reflected our desire to increase the cost of landfill. That is not the case.

I wonder, and the Committee may wonder, whether the Paymaster General knows when the election will be because, even if what he said were true, for it to be a spending commitment we would have to be in power by April, when the mechanism comes into effect. At the moment, I do not think that we will be. The Paymaster General then stood on his head by saying that our amendment, if it goes through, will be less generous and that there will be less money available to assist in landfill. It might have been better had the Paymaster General stuck to the amendment rather than trying to make the rather dubious political points that he made.

5.45 pm

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To avoid any misunderstanding, let me clearly spell out the fact that the hon. Lady's amendment would bring forward the date of the national insurance cut to 1 October this year. In the current financial year, that would cost an extra £210 million. That is why I say that the Labour amendment is spendthrift and uncosted.

Our proposals are more generous in the round because—unlike an insistence that we match the cut, penny for penny, to what is raised in future by landfill tax—after the present year and in future financial years, we will give away more in national insurance contribution cuts than we will raise by landfill tax. That is all taken into account in the published Budget arithmetic.

**Ms Primarolo:** I am fascinated to hear the Paymaster General describe the words of the Chancellor of the Exchequer as spendthrift because the amendment reflects the Chancellor's commitment on matching finance from the employers' national insurance contribution that he made in his two Budget statements literally word-for-word. The Paymaster General is still trying to have it both ways: one minute he says that we are spending money and the next minute that we are not spending enough.

Let us return to the serious debate about the amendment. The Paymaster General has still not explained to the Committee why the original proposals and the statements made to the Chancellor said that matching cuts in the main rate of employers' national insurance contribution would be made. He has not explained why there is the delay, and he has not adequately explained how local authorities will be compensated for increased charges if they fall on the local authorities as a result of the imposition of this charge. In particular, he has not explained how that will affect local authorities that are in serious financial difficulties, regardless of whether they are Labour or Conservative-controlled, although I realise that there are not many Tory-controlled authorities left.

In relation to the national insurance contribution mechanism being used for matching finance, the Paymaster General did not give an undertaking that the mechanism would definitely be in operation in future years. In moving the amendment, I made it clear from the Dispatch Box that an annual decision is taken on national insurance contributions. There is no clear guarantee in the proposals that that mechanism will be permanent or will last for as long as the landfill tax.

Many of my hon. Friends have made it clear that we are concerned not only about the tax's impact on local authorities but about its impact on business and the possible effect of distorting waste management away from the laudable objectives that the Government initially put before us. It is incredible that the sugar beet industry, for instance, will have to pay to put topsoil that has been removed from sugar beet back on to the ground. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members wish to intervene, I should be happy to let them. The Paymaster General gave a wide-ranging response to the debate and it seems reasonable that, as I stuck to the amendment in moving it, I should be able to reflect on some of the points that he made before we debate clause stand part.

The tax takes an inert material such as topsoil and charges an industry for putting it in a hole in the ground. The Paymaster General tells us that that is a sensible environment strategy. We do not accept that.

Our amendment seeks only to take a lead from the Chancellor of the Exchequer—something, admittedly, that we do not do very often. We sought to take him as a man

*[Ms Primarolo]*

of his word in the two statements that he made, which were reinforced by one from the Secretary of State for the Environment, and put what he said into the Bill. That point has not been answered by the Paymaster General.

I am tempted to go beyond the amendment, but I shall withhold my remarks until the clause stand part debate. We will withdraw the amendment but because of our dissatisfaction, we intend to vote against the clause. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 24, line 35, at end add—

'(4) A disposal is not a taxable disposal if the material disposed of consists entirely of soil derived from the processing of agricultural produce.'.

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes):** With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 2, in page 24, line 35, at end add—

'(4) A disposal is not a taxable disposal if the material disposed of consists entirely of dredgings.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (4) "dredgings" means material forming part of or projecting from the bed of—

(a) any river, canal or other watercourse (whether natural or artificial), or

(b) any dock or harbour (whether natural or artificial)

which is removed by whatever means.'.

**Mrs. Winterton:** The amendments raise important issues that should be considered by the Government. The landfill tax is designed to encourage the reduction of wastes. All hon. Members approve of that. However, there are some anomalies that need to be aired and that I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will consider.

The return of uncontaminated soil from agricultural produce, especially from the sugar beet industry, to landfill sites in the area whence it came—merely returning soil to soil—should not be taxable. That case is especially valid because one of the factors that causes the industry's inability to dispose of soil is the restrictions that have been agreed with officials to prevent the spread of rhizomania.

As many hon. Members know, when sugar beet is harvested, some soil adheres to it. In the harvest of, for example, 8 million or 9 million tonnes of sugar beet, approximately 500,000 to 1 million tonnes of soil will also be delivered to the processor, depending on the weather conditions of the season—whether the ground is wet and heavy. In general, the proportion of soil delivered with beet has declined in the British sugar beet industry as it has developed improved on-farm cleaning methods, which must be welcomed. They have resulted in some of the lowest proportions of topsoil delivered with beet in Europe. In France, for example, the proportion of topsoil delivered with beet can be as much as 30 per cent.

When sugar beet is processed, the topsoil is collected separately and conditioned before being sold on for a variety of uses, including horticultural and landscaping work, other recreational amenities, improvements to agricultural land, civil engineering projects and the capping of landfills. The industry has worked hard to develop markets for the topsoil, and the long-term aim is for all sugar industry topsoil to go to such markets.

In the past, the topsoil delivered with sugar beet was returned to the growing regions whence it came, but this is no longer possible because of the need to control a soil-borne root disease of sugar beet called rhizomania, which entered Britain from the continent. As part of a control policy agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, topsoil can no longer be returned to beet-growing farms. That has meant that, until alternative markets are developed for the topsoil—which, at present, cannot be marketed—it has to be returned to landfill sites. In 1995, one company involved in the industry sent approximately 500,000 tonnes to nine landfill sites owned and operated by that company.

The intention of the tax is to encourage industries to be more efficient and produce less waste. As the beet industry has done a lot to reduce the quantity of soil leaving farms, the effect of the tax will be merely to increase costs, which have been estimated at between £1 million and £2 million extra annually for the industry, depending on the quantity of soil to be disposed of in a particular year.

To summarise, the return of uncontaminated soil that is representative of a region is merely the return of soil to soil and surely cannot be held to be waste disposal. Indeed, if all the soil could be removed from beet on the farms of origin, there would be no question of attempting to label the soil as a waste. The application of a plant health and hygiene measure to control the spread of an agricultural disease should not be used to charge an extra tax.

The application of the tax where the soil is actively used in the environmental management of a landfill site—for example, in forming the sandwich layers between waste in a landfill or in the final capping of a landfill—will increase the costs of operating landfill sites to no good purpose because the soil will still be needed. Up to a fifth of the contents of a landfill can be soil. Surely it is only equitable that, where soil is placed in a landfill site that is owned and operated by an individual company, and where there is no public facility and no cost to the public, it should be exempted from what is proposed.

I have a constituency interest in respect of amendment No. 2(5)(a), involving the extraction of brine from caverns, which has taken place in Cheshire since Roman times. In the salt purification process, residues are returned via a closed-loop circuit by pipelines to where the brine originates in underground cavities. As no environmental impact arises out of that method of disposal, a landfill tax on salt residues, under the "polluter pays" principle, cannot be justified.

The salt industry, especially British Salt in my constituency, has invested considerable sums in developing the best practical environmental option to dispose of salt purification residues. Unlike soil, there is no market elsewhere for the residues.

**The Second Deputy Chairman:** Order. I am a little concerned that the matter with which the hon. Lady is dealing relates more to an amendment that has not been selected than to the one that she claims she is speaking to. I am not happy about that.

**Mrs. Winterton:** I stand admonished, Dame Janet. May I make one final point, however, which relates to a matter raised in the previous debate? The reduction in

national insurance contributions would provide British Salt with an annual saving of approximately £926, whereas the landfill tax at the lower rate would cost the industry £36,000 a year. That would be a tremendous on-cost for the industry that feeds that commodity to the chemical industry.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look favourably at the case of soil produced as a by-product of the agricultural process and the other matters that I raised, because they are valid arguments and need to be considered carefully. I hope that he will give an encouraging reply.

6 pm

**Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I wish to speak to amendment No. 2 in so far as it affects a number of inland waterways in my constituency. I am grateful to those who tabled the amendment for raising this important issue. The Government must think it through carefully. I hope that the Minister will allay fears by confirming that the Government did not intend to create a tax on inland waterways. I understand from correspondence thus far that that is not the case.

The Manchester ship canal is not just a major route into the ports of Runcorn, Ellesmere Port and further up into Manchester, but a drainage system that collects its water by natural mechanisms from a number of rivers in the Mersey basin. Close to my home in the constituency of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), is the River Weaver, which flows into the ship canal. That river deposits material into the canal, and the canal needs dredging as a result. Such natural phenomena should not be subject to a tax, as envisaged by the Bill.

The National Association of Boat Owners often writes to me on issues relating to narrowboats, because of the presence of the canal museum in my constituency. It has drawn to my attention a study undertaken by the Construction Industry Research and Information Association in consultation with waterways organisations and English Nature, which reported that

"Dredgings are natural materials which do not arise from any polluting activity, or industrial or commercial process. They are not waste in the conventional sense, and the operator disposing of them does not create them. The tax would not result in a reduction in the amount of material created."

It is a simple phenomenon of the river systems that feed those canals.

"They are therefore not the materials, nor are the operators the polluters, at which the tax is aimed."

Clearly, dredging is an essential part of such canal systems. Those not familiar with the area's geography may be interested to know that the lagoons into which much of the dredged material is deposited were not created simply for dumping materials but are a function of the creation of the ship canal, which cut off much low-lying land from the Mersey basin. They have created a wonderful habitat for a number of species. That process, which has continued since the canal was first built, has enriched the environment and it is important to handle it with great care and sensitivity. The Bill would penalise the Manchester Ship Canal Company and, subsequently, users of the ship canal not only for a natural phenomenon but for depositing materials in lagoons that are best served by being recovered and transformed in the same way as other marshland.

A number of other companies have written to me. GATX Terminals Ltd. points out the economic impact on the ports, from Eastham through to Runcorn. When I first moved to the north-west in 1977, a day rarely went by when a large ship did not pass up the canal on its way to Manchester. That no longer happens. The ports are extremely depressed, and financial penalties will put them at further risk.

I have also received a copy of a letter from the chairman and chief executive of Shell UK, which raises some important points. The Stanlow oil refinery abuts the shores of the ship canal in the Ellesmere Port area. Shell points out:

"Because of the specific geographical circumstances of the Manchester Ship Canal, about 700,000 tonnes of dredgings are not disposed of at sea".

Instead, they are put into the lagoons that I described earlier.

In many other localities, port authorities could be required to dispose of dredgings at sea but that is not the case in the circumstances that I described. Appropriately, Shell's letter was sent to the Minister for Industry and Energy, and I hope that he brought it to the attention of Treasury Ministers. Shell argues that the proposed tax would impact on the costs to both the Manchester Ship Canal Company and a number of users.

Against that background, the Government should take a fresh look at the case. The materials are not waste materials in a conventional sense, but simply a function of nature. The rivers that feed the waterways create the materials that have to be dredged to keep the commercial, environmental and pleasure facilities open. Those materials cannot properly be regarded as waste materials in the context of the tax.

**Mr. Churchill:** I welcome the Chancellor's Budget, including the concept of a landfill tax. That tax is intended to be environmentally friendly by taxing landfill tipping of commercial and household waste. However, as it relates to port dredgings, the tax is clearly and categorically environmentally hostile—it is that aspect of the tax which lies at the heart of amendment No. 2.

The impact of the new tax will be devastating for ports throughout the United Kingdom—none more so than the Manchester ship canal. Were this part of the Finance Bill to pass on to the statute book unamended, it would amount to a declaration of war on the Manchester ship canal and the company that operates it. I am sure that that cannot have been the intention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor—or, indeed, the Government. I therefore venture to hope that my amendment is pushing at an open door.

It is true that the Manchester ship canal no longer carries the volume of traffic of previous years. As recently as the 1970s it was common to see 10,000-tonne container vessels slipping silently up the waterway between fields of cabbages—an amazing sight. Even today, the canal represents an important factor in the economic life of Greater Manchester, Salford and many other communities along its banks. The Manchester ship canal is important to those companies that import vast quantities of grain, and it is especially important to the major oil companies, all of which have oil refineries or terminals on it.

The canal is indispensable to the operations of the numerous companies—the more than 1,350 individual companies—in Trafford Park which the hon. Member for

*[Mr. Churchill]*

Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and I have the honour of representing. Trafford Park is one of the greatest of the Government's many success stories. Thanks to the Government's policies on enterprise zones and development corporations, in the past 10 years, employment in Trafford Park has increased by more than 50 per cent. The number of people who come each day to Trafford Park to earn their living has increased from 25,000 to more than 37,500. Many thousands of those jobs would stand to be blighted if decisions were taken in the House which rendered uneconomical the operations of the port of Manchester, the canal and the Manchester Ship Canal Company that operates it.

**Mr. Keith Bradley** (Manchester, Withington): I support the amendment and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way.

Is it not estimated that the tax on the Manchester Ship Canal Company could be as much as £5 million a year, which would, in itself, put the company out of business? As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, that would have a devastating impact on the regional economy and on the many multinational companies and the smaller companies that thrive owing to the Manchester Ship Canal Company and its support. Will the hon. Gentleman give my assurance to the Minister that the Opposition support the amendment and hope that the Government will recognise its importance to the future of the companies situated on the ship canal and the Ship Canal Company itself?

6.15 pm

**Mr. Churchill:** I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman for assuring me of his support and for his offer of support from the Opposition. I endorse what he has said about the importance to all the communities in the Greater Manchester area of this great undertaking. It is not only the commercial undertakings that would be damaged were the Manchester Ship Canal Company to go under. Our constituents, over a vast area, would get their feet wet because the ship canal provides drainage for 750 square miles. Not only would the tax have a devastating commercial impact, but the adverse environmental impact would be every bit as great if the company operating the canal were forced into bankruptcy and the canal was allowed to silt up.

In order to keep the canal and the port of Manchester open, the Manchester Ship Canal Company has to dredge no fewer than 1 million tonnes of silt and sludge from the canal each year. It is, for sound economic reasons, discouraged by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from dumping the waste at sea. It is therefore left with no choice but to dispose of its dredgings on landfill sites. The Manchester Ship Canal Company has estimated that, if the Finance Bill's landfill tax provisions were to pass on to the statute book unamended, the company could face a financial liability of between £1.8 million at the bottom of the scale to £4.7 million at the top, depending on how the water and pollution content of the dredging is assessed by the Customs and Excise.

I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Paymaster General for his assurance that he does not intend, at least for the time being, to make the water content of dredgings taxable. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that the Treasury has made a remarkable and important concession. It is a great relief to know that the Treasury has not yet come up with a way of taxing $H_2O$, but doubtless that omission is, even now, being worked on in a broom cupboard in an office in Great George street. For the moment, we have been assured that the water content of dredgings will not be taxable, and I take the Minister's assurance at face value.

If the clause were to pass unamended, the Manchester Ship Canal Company would face bankruptcy and my constituents, and those of other hon. Members, would stand to get their feet wet as a consequence of the canal silting up.

I bring to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister the fact that the Manchester Ship Canal Company does not create those dredgings, or such pollution as the dredgings contain. Those come down as silt in the tributaries to the River Irwell and to the ship canal. Nor does the company profit from the disposal of such dredgings, which cost it many millions of pounds a year to remove.

Two years ago, the Manchester Ship Canal Company and the ship canal celebrated the centenary of the canal's opening by Queen Victoria in 1894. The canal is a monument to the spirit of enterprise of the Victorian era and the entrepreneurship of the burghers of Manchester. It continues to serve a vital function, environmentally and commercially.

It would be nothing less than a tragedy if a free-enterprise Government—which the present Administration pride themselves on being—as a result of the Bill, unwittingly forced the Manchester Ship Canal Company into bankruptcy and caused the canal to silt up. I cannot believe that that is the Government's wish or intention. However, I should be enormously grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for his assurance about that, because otherwise I shall be impelled to press the amendment to a Division.

**Mr. Tipping:** The effect of the landfill tax on the sugar beet industry has been mentioned several times. I hope that the Minister will listen to the anxieties that have been expressed on both sides of the Chamber.

I have a direct constituency interest. Although British Sugar's factory at Newark is not in my constituency, many of the suppliers, farmers and producers are based in the Sherwood constituency and in north Nottinghamshire.

I have visited British Sugar's factory at Newark. There are eight similar factories, and I believe that many hon. Members share my worries. I have been impressed by the way in which the factory has become increasingly efficient. The market is highly competitive, and I have no doubt that the management and work force of the factory are keen to maximise profits and make the plant as efficient as possible. Their record speaks for itself.

As sugar beet is lifted, soil is lifted too. Over the years, the amount of soil lifted has been reduced substantially. I understand that between 8 million and 9 million tonnes of sugar beet are lifted annually, which results in about 500,000 tonnes of soil being left as waste. That is an excellent relationship, compared with that in competitor nations. In France, 30 per cent. of the tonnage is soil waste.

In the old days, soil was taken back to the farms and spread on the land, and obviously that was a sensible way to proceed. The difficulty has arisen because of a disease

called rhizomania and the fact that it is no longer considered acceptable to spread that soil on the ground. Other ways of disposing of the 500,000 tonnes must be found.

British Sugar and others have worked on that problem. The residue is used for landscaping, horticulture and other purposes, and more research has been undertaken. In the long term, it may be possible to find other uses, but a substantial amount of soil remains to be disposed of.

In fairness to British Sugar, we should acknowledge that it has set up eight landfill sites of its own. The cost of a landfill tax on the disposal into its sites will be about £2 per tonne. That may cost the sugar beet industry, which competes in a highly competitive market against international concerns, as much as £2 million.

Sugar beet operators are being disadvantaged. I hope that the Minister will undertake to consider the issue carefully, for three reasons. First, sugar beet operators desire to put soil back to soil; it is the way of nature, and they should be helped to do so, not taxed. Secondly, they are forbidden to return soil to soil by Government guidelines and legislation to combat rhizomania. Thirdly, we should acknowledge that the disposal has been done by the company itself in its own landfill sites.

Given that background, for those three reasons there is a compelling case to reconsider the issue and to consider the notion of disposing of soil in that use under a different category—not the inert category, at £2 a tonne, but a new, zero-rated category.

I hope that the Minister will listen to the opinions of hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber, study the amendment carefully and give us the benefit of some further thought on that matter.

**Mr. Tim Devlin** (Stockton, South): I have listened with great interest to the debate, especially to the persuasive speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) and the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller). However, what is suggested in the two amendments may lead us into the danger of creating an interesting anomaly in the way in which the landfill tax might operate, were those amendments to be accepted.

The real problem is the definition of waste in landfill generally. The tax, which would encourage recycling and waste minimisation, is designed to tackle local authority waste and commercial industrial waste, which might be eliminated if minimising such waste were encouraged more. Unfortunately, certain processes, such as the dredging of canals and the washing of sugar beet, inevitably create unavoidable residues that are not, in the usual definition of waste, regarded as waste products. Those residues are simply what has come up from the earth and, when they return to the earth, cannot be regarded as man-made waste. There is an obvious difference between that position and the usual position in a commercial or public landfill site.

The most common items in any landfill site, by mass, are telephone directories. If we seek ways to minimise the bulk in landfill sites, the first thing that we might do is compel all telephone companies to collect their telephone directories and recycle them. That would take about one third of household waste out of any landfill site.

The Minister told the House the environmental reasons for raising the new tax. I strongly support what the Government are doing. I have qualms about the use of inert material such as soil from sugar beet and dredgings from canals, but let us compare those types of material with the material that is left after ores have been processed. Ores come out of the earth and, after the metal has been extracted from them, a certain amount of rock is left. It comes in the form of pure, inert—albeit chunky—pieces of soil, but it is from the earth and is usually placed into landfill straight afterwards.

There is no way of minimising the amount of inert rock material that results from processing an ore into a metal. I shall give the Committee a specific example. A company in my constituency, Harcros, provides most of Europe's chrome. The chromium ore is mined in South Africa and Russia, it is brought to this country by ship and transported by road to the factory, where it is melted in a giant furnace to produce the chrome which appears on our cars, refrigerators and other domestic appliances which we use every day.

The residue from that process is an inert grey powder which must then go to landfill. The amount of powder resulting from the process cannot be minimised: it is produced in direct proportion to the amount of ore used, which is dependent on how much metal must be extracted. There is no way that Harcross can minimise the waste inert material that it produces. It disposes of the material in clay-pits and it sells the clay to a brick manufacturer next door. The firm owns the landfill site, which is not available for public use.

6.30 pm

The firm can control the amount of waste material produced only by cutting production. Therefore, I am afraid that the landfill tax will impose a severe penalty on that company. If it installs new processing machinery to ensure that there are no poisonous chemicals in the residue, it will not be allowed to offset the cost of the machinery against the amount paid in landfill tax. The company has its own landfill site and it is not depriving others of landfill facilities, but the costs that it incurs will eventually be passed on to the customer.

**Mr. Miller:** The hon. Gentleman presents a compelling argument in the context of a specific case. However, does he agree that there is a difference between general waste that is derived from mineral exploitation and the circumstances described in amendment No. 2, in that the waste material that is derived from mineral exploitation is manmade, whereas the waste that is found in inland waterways is deposited naturally by the river courses which feed those waterways?

**Mr. Devlin:** The inland waterways are manmade also. Material is excavated from those waterways by way of a human process in the same way that extracting metal from an ore is a human process. We are in danger of creating an anomaly in that regard.

We may also create an anomaly in the case of development corporations. My hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) mentioned the Trafford Park development corporation; the Teesside development corporation is located in my constituency. In both cases, large areas of land—which are called brown-field sites—are being reclaimed. Those areas were previously subject to industrial development and in many cases their reclamation involves removing concrete, tarmac and other

*[Mr. Devlin]*

materials. That waste material is removed and used as landfill on another part of the site, or it is taken from the site and landfilled elsewhere.

In such cases, the landfill tax could be viewed as a tax on urban regeneration, as that material must be removed from the surface before any further development can take place. The directors and the board of the Teesside development corporation are concerned about the matter and have raised it with the Department of the Environment. I hope that the Department has passed on those concerns to the Treasury, and I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister respond to them in due course.

I invite my hon. Friend to consider carefully the two amendments in the context of sugar beet soil and river dredging. However, there may be other cases—such as urban regeneration and the extraction of mineral ores—where the ordinary operation of the human development process involves the transfer of earth to another site. Rubbish waste is not created, and I question whether it is just to impose a landfill tax in such cases.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I listened carefully to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin). Many of his points must be considered further in Standing Committee, because they fall outside the scope of the two amendments under consideration. However, I do not dismiss his remarks and I can reassure him that, if the spoil and waste from mining are not categorised as controlled waste, they will not be taxable under the proposals. My hon. Friend went on to describe an industrial process which would be taxable.

On amendment No. 1, the case for exemption for processing certain agricultural waste soil was advanced very ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander)—who could not be present—is also concerned about the issue. He has sugar beet growers and processors in his constituency and he fears that the new tax will damage that industry. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) made a similar point.

I have listened carefully to the views expressed, but I stress that the landfill tax is designed to encourage all waste producers to reduce the amount of waste produced. In this instance, the soil that adheres to the sugar beet during processing is a waste product and must be disposed of in some way.

British Sugar has reduced the amount of soil that adheres to sugar beet roots so that it has to wash and transport less waste material, and the landfill tax might be an incentive to reduce waste even further. The industry is also exploiting the market for good-quality soil that is washed from the sugar beet. There is a ready market for such soil in some parts of the country. It is used for landscaping landfill sites, golf courses, and so on. At present, the industry disposes of some soil in that way, although the concentration of nine processing sites in the eastern part of the country has caused some market saturation in those counties.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** I refer my hon. Friend to another valid argument. British Sugar is no longer allowed to dispose of waste soil at the site from which it was taken originally. That was the usual practice until it was restricted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in an attempt to stop the spread of rhizomania. Will my hon. Friend and his Department examine the problem and perhaps advance some helpful proposals?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** My hon. Friend has told the Committee about rhizomania and the restrictions placed on British Sugar about returning the soil to the areas where sugar beet is grown. Those restrictions do not prevent the soil from being used for landscaping, and it can be returned to agricultural use for pasture. The restrictions are important for the suppression and prevention of rhizomania.

The case for an exemption has not been made, but I wish to be helpful to my hon. Friends and other hon. Members who have raised the issue. I will ensure that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food discusses the matter further with British Sugar to see whether the agreement to prevent rhizomania can be relaxed or adapted to permit British Sugar to dispose of surplus soil in ways that are impossible at present.

Furthermore, I will ensure that Customs and Excise, for which I am responsible, continues its fruitful discussions with British Sugar. Those two organisations could define the problem exactly, and examine the possibility of allowing the company to set some of the soil aside in storage, temporarily and without paying the tax, pending the return of the soil or its sale to markets. The continuing discussions will assist the company concerned and other root and vegetable processors in trying to ameliorate the impact of the tax. One of the aims of the tax is to give an incentive to do what the company is already doing—to seek other markets and other ways to dispose of the soil.

**Mr. Tipping:** I am grateful for the interest that the Minister has shown in the subject and for the discussions that are to take place between British Sugar and Customs and Excise. In those discussions, will the excise be mindful that British Sugar disposes of the waste itself? The waste goes to its own sites and it bears the costs. In effect, the whole operation is financially neutral and that may be an area for fruitful discussion.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I am aware of that point, and I will emphasise it to the officials.

Amendment No. 2 deals with dredgings, and the case for exempting them. I am aware of that case because, during the extensive consultation that took place, it was made repeatedly by those who own and operate ports and waterways. Dredgings are currently within the scope of the tax, because they are controlled wastes under Department of the Environment regulations. Therefore, disposal of that material to landfill is taxable. However, that illustrates the point that such material that is not landfilled—in other words, disposed of at sea, on the bank of a canal or on land in other ways—is not taxable. So, much of such material does not fall within the tax. However, some of it does have to go to landfill and will fall to be taxed.

I wish to emphasise the point, which was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), that such material is only dry waste. He made light of that point, but some of those who are complaining about the impact of tax have mildly exaggerated its effect by including all the water that may be mixed up with the materials that will be landfilled. A conversion factor will

be applied, and we are seeking to tax only dry weight. However, I accept the point that some dredgings must be landfilled and will fall to be taxed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme made several powerful points, as did the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston and other hon. Members who are familiar with that important canal and waterway. The distinction that can fairly be drawn in this case is that the waste that operators are disposing of exists only through natural forces. I accept that point. The soil and the silt that they are dredging are being returned to dry land. As has been pointed out, dredging has the beneficial result of keeping waterways clear for navigation and preventing floods.

Dredgings form a relatively definable category of waste that it was not the intention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to tax when he announced his proposals to the House more than a year ago. I cannot accept amendment No. 2, because it would amend the wrong part of the Bill, and we need to define further exactly how an exemption would operate. I hope that the Committee will accept that I wish to find a way of exempting dredgings. With that assurance, I hope that the amendment will be withdrawn.

**Sir Donald Thompson** (Calder Valley): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** My hon. Friend is just in time.

6.45 pm

**Sir Donald Thompson:** Would it not be paradoxical if some canals were to attract derelict land grant for clearing and restoration, as they do now, and were simultaneously taxed?

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Life is full of paradoxes, but we can probably do without that one. In the spirit of what I have announced, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme will withdraw the amendment.

**The Second Deputy Chairman:** Order. The hon. Member for Davyhulme does not need to do so, because amendment No. 2 has not been moved.

**Mr. Churchill:** I wish to express my appreciation to my hon. Friend the Minister, to the Chancellor and to the Government for accepting the clear-cut case that those of us who have spoken to the amendment feel exists for exempting canal and port dredgings from the ambit of the tax. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, and I am delighted to accept his assurance that a suitably drafted amendment will be introduced later during the passage of the Bill. On that basis, I am more than happy not to press amendment No. 2.

**Mr. Miller:** My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) and I have listened to the Minister's response about the Manchester ship canal. Given the powerful arguments that have been advanced, will the Minister assure us that, before a new amendment is introduced, he will urgently consult those companies and their representatives from that river basin? This is an important issue.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** This subject has been characterised throughout by a willingness to consult, and we will continue that. We hope to exempt dredgings in a precise way that does not give rise to any ambiguity, and we shall consult on the wording.

*Amendment negatived.*

*Question proposed*, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Roger Stott** (Wigan): May I first apologise to the Minister? I had to leave the Chamber when he was replying to the remarks that were made on amendment No. 5. I wish to say what I would have said had I remained in the Chamber at that time.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) said earlier that the polluter must pay. I have no problem whatever with that, but I have a problem with clause 36.

The hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), who is just leaving the Chamber, and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) will be aware that the metropolitan authorities in the old Greater Manchester area joined together to become their own waste disposal authority. My local authority, the metropolitan borough of Wigan, which has a population of almost 250,000, decided some years ago to pull out of the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority. As a former mining area, Wigan can dispose of its waste considerably more cheaply alone than if it remains part of the authority. This arrangement has applied for the past five or six years.

I want to stress that what we are putting in the landfill sites in my constituency and in three or four others in old mining areas is domestic waste. We are not putting in industrial waste. I have visited the landfill site on many occasions, and I am convinced that it is extremely well managed. The methane is extracted safely, and there are special precautions to prevent leaching into the water courses. The tip is sprayed and covered each evening. The Minister talked about the nuisance created by seagulls. My local authority, which owns the tip, has engaged a falconer who comes along with his falcon and scares away the seagulls.

Even disregarding the employers' national insurance contributions, this tax will mean that council tax payers in the metropolitan borough of Wigan will have an additional burden placed on them. My authority is already rate-capped. It owns the landfill site, it manages it properly and it then reclaims the land for community purposes. The tax will amount to a wheelie bin tax on the council tax payers of Wigan.

I have no problem with making polluters pay for their waste, stored in landfill sites or elsewhere, but I hope that my hon. Friends will press again in Committee the point that the tax penalises my local authority for putting domestic waste in a landfill site that we own and manage. Even taking into account the money that will come back to the local authority in the shape of national insurance contributions, we shall be about £750,000 worse off as a consequence. That cost will fall directly on my constituents and on the rest of the metropolitan borough. It is therefore not a good idea, and I hope that something will be done about it at a later stage of the Committee's proceedings.

**Mr. George Walden** (Buckingham): I am sorry to say that what is poison for one constituency is pure honey for another. My constituents will be delighted with this measure. There was a rash of applications for landfill sites a few years ago. When I looked into the detail, I found to

*[Mr. George Walden]*

my horror that, for various historical and geological reasons, Britain is covered with quarries and disused gravel pits—most of them in my constituency. I then discovered that we were turning our country into a place where other countries were attracted to dump their rubbish. I learned that, for geological reasons and because of the availability of sites here, the costs were horrifyingly low. Other countries also offer more incentives to incinerate.

I pride myself in a small constituency way on having given a little push to this tax. I am glad to see Treasury Ministers, of all people, improving their environmental credentials by introducing the tax.

I have written to the Minister about the fact that my constituents in Pitstone and Ivinghoe are threatened by a massive landfill site that will badly damage local amenities in an area of outstanding natural beauty. I should be pleased to hear more details, as soon as my hon. Friend has them, about the Government's exact intentions in respect of the tax.

The last thing I want is that the tax should impede business in any way. I was interested to hear hon. Members raise objections in that regard. I was glad to hear the Minister imply that there might be some solution to those objections. I have in my hand a letter from Shell UK to the Minister for Industry and Energy about the Manchester ship canal. Those who, like me, have had a small hand in pushing this idea forward do not want to inhibit our industries in any way.

In any event, I congratulate the Minister on introducing the measure.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon): This is an important measure. It is interesting to note how widely the principle behind it is accepted as a desirable method of dealing with the problems. I agree with the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) that pressure on many sites in rural and suburban areas has become intense. To the extent that the tax will concentrate people's minds on finding other ways of disposing of waste, it must be highly desirable.

It is also true that the measure will pose difficulties for some industries. Some of the paper mills in my constituency produce inert waste that is not easily disposed of. Nevertheless, we all accept that the nettle must be grasped if we are to tackle these environmental problems.

Hon. Members have already mentioned the difficulties from the local authority point of view. There are also concerns as to how quickly they will be able to adjust. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) tells me that Gloucestershire county council reckons the measure will cost it £740,000 in the first year. Multiplied across the country, it becomes clear that local authorities, which are already squeezed, will face difficulties—although I am sure they will use their ingenuity to implement the measure.

I want to refer, secondly, to the point of principle in amendment No. 5. The Government, and all political parties that believe in environmental taxation, must make it clear to the public that measures such as these are not just another wheeze for getting money out of people, but represent a genuine desire to shift habits. The money that is raised should be repaid immediately in tax cuts elsewhere. I am therefore slightly worried about the Government implementing the tax this year while making a great song about benefits that will not accrue until next year.

I might also point out that there will have been a general election in the interval, so the Government might not be in a position to deliver on their promise—leaving them exposed to the charge that they are more interested in introducing a tax than in providing the offsetting benefits.

That partly explains why my party voted against the Government's proposals to extend VAT to fuel, which was claimed afterwards to be an environmental move, but the revenue generated was used only to boost the Exchequer. An important matter of principle is at stake, and the Opposition amendment neatly encapsulated it. I suspect that that is why we shall vote together to ensure that our point is well made.

**Ms Primarolo:** The Government have not answered a number of points to do with clause 36, which deals with the charge to tax and the date for the national insurance contributions rebate. We debated the latter fully earlier this afternoon. Local authorities and landfill site operators will be greatly disadvantaged by the six-month delay that the Government have introduced—despite the undertakings given by the Chancellor in 1994 and 1995.

I want to make a few clear points about our objections, which are not to the existence of the tax but to the way in which the Government propose to implement it. It is crucial to encourage the development of alternative waste management options if we are to achieve the full potential of the tax.

We have heard about the Manchester ship canal and British Sugar, and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) spoke about Tioxide UK, which will be penalised. Although that company takes highly toxic waste and puts it through an environmental process, recycling a great deal of it, there remains inert waste which it will have to pay to landfill. Presumably, one of its options is to put all its toxic waste into landfill and simply pay a slightly higher charge. It is vital that we have support systems in place to develop alternatives.

Despite the assurances that were given by the Paymaster General today—frankly, he is on a wing and a prayer—it is clear that he does not understand the cost of recycling or the investment that is necessary to introduce such processes. Changing people's behaviour is vital. He did not deal with the likely encouragement of disposal by less environmentally desirable options than landfill. He certainly did not say how we will ensure that fly tipping is not the by-product of the tax, which would defeat the very purpose of introducing it. He did not explain the interim measures that will ensure that waste producers are not able to avoid payment. He did not deal with current illegal sites, which will remain outside the landfill tax. Finally, he did not say how local authorities that are already under severe financial containment by the Government will be able to deal with new strategies to encourage recycling when they do not have the financial resources. The landfill tax will increase their costs for the disposal of waste.

For all those reasons, we shall vote against the clause and continue to press the Government to convert the landfill tax into a true environmental tax instead of a bit of window dressing.

7 pm

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The clause is an important element in the introduction of a landfill tax, about which we have consulted widely. I am grateful for the expressions of support for the principle of the tax from hon. Members on both sides of the House. It will encourage good environmental practice. By taxing landfill, we will encourage the development of alternative ways of dealing with waste. Indeed, it will lead to less waste being produced in the first place.

That justification for the tax is valid even if the landfill site is well engineered, as obviously is the case in the example described by the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott). My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) put the other side of the argument and showed that, even if a landfill site is well run and managed, there are still substantial nuisance problems to surrounding residents—smell, noise, litter, dust and traffic movements, for example. It is right, therefore, to try to capture those external costs and attribute them to the producers and handlers of waste.

The revenue raised from the tax will be some £450 million in a full year, and rather more than that—some £500 million in a full year—will be used to cut further the main rate of national insurance contributions to 10 per cent. The UK is leading the way in lightening the burden of employment taxation. That is one reason why our employment record is better than that of any other major economy in Europe.

Bafflingly, the Opposition now say that they will vote against the clause. Having supported the landfill tax, and having failed to indicate anything in the clause with which they disagree, they will, for reasons best known to themselves, vote against a key clause in bringing into effect the landfill tax. My right hon. and hon. Friends know better. I urge them and as many other hon. Members as possible to vote for the clause.

*Question put,* That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 283, Noes 260.

**Division No. 32]** **[7.05 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James

Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Roger Knapman and Mr. Timothy Wood.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex

Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Jon Owen Jones and**
**Mr. Eric Martlew.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Clause 36 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. Have Northern Ireland Office Ministers asked you to adjourn the Committee so that a statement can be made about the closure of Fokkers, and the impact of that closure on Shorts? Some 1,500 jobs could be threatened.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** I have received no such request.

## Clause 105

REQUIREMENTS TO BE SATISFIED BY APPROVED SCHEMES

**Mr. Alistair Darling** (Edinburgh, Central): I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 69, line 37, leave out

'subsections (2) and (3) below'

and insert

'subsections (1A), (2) and (3) below'.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss also amendment No. 6, in page 69, line 38, at end insert—

'(1A) After paragraph 27 there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

"27A(1) Subject to paragraph 8 above, the following shall apply:

(a) Every person eligible to participate in the scheme must be able to do so on similar terms;

(b) Every person who meets the following conditions must be eligible to participate;

(i) The person must be an employee or a director of the company, or in the case of group scheme, of a participating company, and

(ii) The person must be chargeable to tax in respect of his office or employment under Case 1 of Schedule E.

(2) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (1) above the following shall apply;

(a) A person participating in a scheme is a person who obtains and exercises rights under the rules of the scheme.

(b) The fact that the rights obtained and exercised by a person participating in the scheme vary according to the levels of their remuneration, the length of their service or similar factors shall not be regarded as meaning that they are not eligible to participate in the scheme on similar terms.".'.

**Mr. Darling:** Amendment No. 7 is a drafting amendment: it is necessary for the incorporation of amendment No. 6.

The purpose of clause 105 is to allow the Government to implement their new company share option plans, which we broadly welcome. The plans replace the existing share option schemes introduced in the mid-1980s. The new relief involves two essential conditions. The first is the placing of a £20,000 limit on the value of shares that may be held by an employee at any one time. Secondly—perhaps I could attract the Financial Secretary's attention for a moment as I wish to press him on this—the options must be granted at an exercise price

"not manifestly less than the market value"

of the shares at the date of grant. In other words, they must not be granted at a discount, which contrasts with the present position. That second condition appears in clause 105(3).

It would help both the Committee and those who will have to interpret the provision if the Financial Secretary would tell us exactly what "manifestly" means in this context, and what measure we are to apply to it. "Manifestly less" clearly implies more than "slightly less" or "marginally less". Paragraph 29 of schedule 9 of the present scheme provides for a discount of up to 15 per cent. It might be useful if, speaking in percentage or similar terms, the Financial Secretary could tell us whether "manifestly less" means less than 15 per cent. Presumably it does; otherwise, the Government's argument that they are restricting the scope for discount would fall apart.

I assume that that point will need to be the subject of a guidance note from the Inland Revenue. Otherwise, it will be left to the interpretation of the courts. That is very unsatisfactory. Companies will want to get new schemes under way fairly early, but they might have to wait two to five years, if not longer, for a judicial interpretation. When I saw the words "not manifestly less", it occurred to me that the Government might be saying that they were going to close a door while using a form of words which would result in that door being left as wide open as it is now.

Before I come to the central issue, I should like the Financial Secretary to deal with a point which arises in the Inland Revenue notes on clauses circulated to members of the Committee. It relates to the old discount of up to 15 per cent. Those who have read the notes, and those who are familiar with the legislation, will know that that discount was available if the company scheme was available to all employees, but if the company subsequently restricted share availability to certain employees, the discount could still be applied.

Two questions arise from that. First, am I correct in assuming that, along with the 15 per cent. discount, all those arrangements will go? Secondly—here I return to my point about the phrase "manifestly less"—are we to understand that some variability is involved? The position is extremely uncertain.

*[Mr. Darling]*

Lest the Committee think that I am spending undue time on what might be considered a comparatively small point, let me add that it is necessary to examine the Government's track record on share option schemes to understand our concern. We were told in the Budget statement that the Chancellor wanted to end abuses of the present scheme, as we have pressed the Government to do for many months. Far from closing an avenue for abuse, however, it seems that such an avenue is being opened. Given that many people have ruthlessly exploited and, I believe, abused the present scheme, it would be wrong for us to allow further opportunities for such exploitation and abuse.

I have raised that issue at the outset because the Financial Secretary's reply will influence our judgment of what the Government have to say about the rest of the legislation. The Government have said that they do not just want to simplify legislation; they want clarity as well. If one is interested in clarity, one should avoid putting into legislation words that are open to 57 different interpretations. The Financial Secretary seems to agree with the spirit of what I have said, as he is nodding vigorously, although he may be doing that simply to pass the time.

Amendment No. 6 is designed to ensure that the new company share option schemes are open to all employees, from the board room to the shop floor. That is essential if we are to encourage workers to have a stake in the company that employs them. Everyone must be motivated and feel that they are part of the enterprise in which they are employed. All the evidence suggests that companies have recognised the essential truth that the employees who are motivated and intimately involved with their place of work are the ones who will succeed, while those who insist on relying on the old "them and us" approach to industry are likely to fail.

I have referred to the notes issued by the Inland Revenue in regard to the end of the present discount. I am relying on the information contained there that the discount was available only where there was an all-employee share ownership scheme on offer and that that apparently is to end. The assumption that I and, I believe, many people therefore make is that the new company share option scheme need not be offered to all employees at the workplace. For the reasons that I have stated, it is essential that it should be.

7.30 pm

I have been told on numerous occasions that people in senior management and in the boardroom need to receive incentives to make them perform. I am usually told that by the same boardroom members who stand to benefit from these schemes, but I have always believed that, if incentives are good for some people, they are probably good for everyone, and that it is good if people think that by working hard and doing something different—a restructuring in a company, perhaps—they, too, stand to gain. Hon. Members should encourage that.

Mr. Lofthouse, the history of this matter is relevant to the debate. It entitles us to consider the Government's proposals with a degree of scepticism, although everyone is entitled to take a different view and to change their mind, as the Government did after vehemently opposing any idea that the existing share option scheme was being abused, especially by people in the boardrooms of the privatised utilities. The Prime Minister had a sudden change of heart, which took many of his colleagues by surprise. When one considers the abuses that have taken place, especially by people who sit on the boards of the privatised utilities, we are entitled to ask whether the Government have indeed changed their mind and ensured that such abuses will end.

It upset many people that the same people, doing the same job, received hugely increased salaries only a few weeks after their enterprise had been privatised. They saw those individuals being granted huge amounts of share options. Share prices increased in the privatised utilities, not because of improved performance by people in the boardroom, but because of the way in which those utilities were privatised. Bluntly, they were sold off at knock-down prices. It would have been difficult for anyone appointed to the boardroom of a privatised utility not to receive a substantial windfall gain, not because of anything they did, but as a result of sheer chance.

Those people did not stop there. Many of them, using current tax laws, as they are entitled to do, ensured that their wives also benefited indirectly from the scheme. That is grossly unfair, when most people have had to face 21 different tax rises since 1992. The burden of taxation for most people has increased. It seemed that there was no limit to the greed of some members of the privatised utilities. As I have said, the Government and the Prime Minister in particular did absolutely nothing until the pressure on them became so great that they had to go along with the Confederation of British Industry's decision to set up the Greenbury committee.

It has always seemed to me, Mr. Lofthouse, that, in relation to the privatised utilities and sell-offs, the Government were never really bothered about Sid, but were far more bothered about looking after Cedric, which is exactly what the Government did. It was only after pressure that they forced to set up the Greenbury committee.

Clause 105 resulted from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's reaction to the Greenbury report. It was, as ever, a bungled reaction. On 17 July, the Government announced that they were going to shut down executive share option schemes immediately, but 10 days later the Chancellor had to change his mind as he realised that, in addition to shutting down schemes that many of us would criticise, he was also shutting down schemes that had been used to benefit a majority of employees, which the Government may not have intended.

At Asda, for example, the executive share option scheme was used to benefit most of the work force. Of course, if the Chancellor's original announcement had been implemented, those people, who were wholly innocent and were simply taking advantage of a scheme that they had been offered—certainly it was small-scale stuff—would have been hit, so the Chancellor had to change his mind.

I assume that the clause was introduced by the Government in an effort at least to get rid of some of the abuses that Greenbury had identified. If that ending of abuses is to proceed hand in hand with a genuine move to extend opportunities to acquire shares in an enterprise, however, amendments Nos. 7 and 6 must be accepted by the Government. Otherwise, options will be offered only

to a small class of people—probably those sitting in the boardrooms, whose behaviour has so incensed people, not just in the House, but throughout the country.

The amendment provides that the option under clause 105 must be made available to all people who are employed in an enterprise and on similar terms—not identical terms, because that is clearly inappropriate. That would ensure that people would see that they too had an opportunity to benefit from whatever option schemes were available in the company. They too would know that any success in the company would be shared. On this point, it is important that all schemes should ensure that there is reward after success, rather than reward in anticipation of success, which is where British Gas went badly wrong.

Despite our amendment and clause 105, the abuses in the system will continue and are continuing, not only because powerful voices are determined to block the full implementation of Greenbury, but because—unless the Financial Secretary tells us that we are wrong—the present schemes will continue to operate as unapproved rather than approved schemes. If a company wants to fund a scheme, it can do so. If the Financial Secretary can tell us that we are wrong on that, it will be interesting to hear what he says. Unapproved schemes will be able to continue. In a private company, that does not matter—that is its concern—but in the privatised utilities, it does matter. Concerns will remain about that.

Mr. Lofthouse, we are dealing here with one clause. When the Committee sits upstairs, we shall have an opportunity to consider other aspects of the Government's reform—profit-related pay, and so on. This clause, however, implements the new company share option plan, which most people would broadly welcome, but only if it is a genuine attempt to expand share ownership and participation to the whole work force. In many companies, the opportunity will be taken to offer schemes across the board because many employers are keen to do that. I am concerned, however, that unless this amendment is accepted the people who took part in the abuses that the public, Labour Members and perhaps a smattering of Conservative Members want to stop, will drive a coach and horses through any attempt to reform the system.

Sir Geoffrey, I have just realised that I have been guilty of a great insult to you for the past 20 minutes: I have overlooked the fact that you are now Sir Geoffrey rather than Mr. Lofthouse. I hope that that is why you were glaring at me, and not because I was straying out of order. Having apologised so fulsomely, I trust that you will not mind if I do stray, although I will do my best not to.

It is important that we have a new culture in this country and encourage companies genuinely to involve the work force in the enterprise. There are some encouraging signs in many regions, where companies are ensuring that their employees receive genuine share ownership. As I said, I should like those options to be open to everyone from the boardroom to the shop floor. That is what our amendment would achieve.

I hope that making shares available to more employees will encourage a long-term outlook within a company and therefore a long-term culture, which is something that far too many companies do not have. If that encourages savings, in addition to a pensions scheme and other savings options, it should be welcomed. Shares should reward success, but we must ensure that the success comes before the reward. We should avoid the problems that have bedevilled parts of British industry where the reward has been paid willy-nilly and has had nothing to do with success.

I hope that the Government will accept the amendment. If they do not, that will show people that yet again the Government are concerned with the few in the boardroom and not the many who work in British industry. It will be a touchstone of where the Government stand on the wider case for spreading share ownership to as many people as possible. We believe that it is important to involve people and to change the culture of British industry because that is where future success will lie.

If the amendment is technically deficient, I am sure that the civil service or the newly privatised draftsmen will be able to produce something better for us. However, if the Government object to the amendment in principle, many people following these proceedings and listening to what the Government have to say will reach the view that although the Government say that they want to end the abuses, in fact they are just continuing them under another name.

I hope that at the end of the debate the majority in the House will see the merit of ensuring that share ownership schemes are spread to as many people as possible, so that there is genuine participation. We must stop the abuses which benefit a tiny, greedy minority.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** I hope that the Government accept the amendment, which would widen the meaning of the clause. It is a genuine attempt to be helpful. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) might even have said that the Labour party believes that all those working in an enterprise should have a stake in it. That is important throughout industry. We support employee share ownership in all sectors and commend those where such schemes have been developed.

The Central Statistical Office share register survey at the end of 1992 clearly shows that, although individuals held about 20 per cent. of all shares—80 per cent. are held by large institutional shareholders—the figure for shares in privatised utilities was 24 per cent. At the time it was said that, after all the publicity given to privatisations, it was surprising that the differential between the two was only 4 per cent. Nevertheless, 4 per cent. represents about 7 million shareholders.

A National Opinion Poll survey the following year of individual shareholdings in privatised utilities—including those held by lower-grade employees in those utilities—showed a number of token holdings of just one or two shares. However, those token shareholdings gave those employees a stake in their company and allowed them to say their bit at the annual general meeting, which is important. In fact, only a quarter of individual shareholders in the utilities held more than a token number of shares.

7.45 pm

I stress that it is not just the major shareholders who need to be encouraged to take a full interest in an enterprise, especially in the privatised utilities. With public service utilities such as the water industry, it is important that all those involved in the business feel that they are playing their part in delivering a quality service to the public. Employees and members of the public are

*[Mrs. Helen Jackson]*

entitled to hold token shareholdings, and that should be welcomed. The Opposition recognise that shareholding is not simply about money-making; it is about someone participating in the enterprise where he works.

There has been a significant increase in individual shareholders in Yorkshire following the water problems in the summer. People saw it as a means to enable them to make their point about what happened. We support any Government measures to increase shareholding and to limit the excesses of industry's fat cats and the executives of the privatised utilities. However, it is still not clear that the Government really want to extend the rights and responsibilities of individual shareholders in those companies.

I draw the Government's attention to a recent example of where their intentions might have seemed to be good, but in reality they were not interested in listening to individual shareholders. A major public inquiry held on 14 November was attended by individual shareholders, many of them employee shareholders, in Yorkshire Water. The inquiry lasted three days. It is only tonight that the report of that inquiry has been published, even though it was on the desk of the Secretary of State for the Environment on 23 November.

Individual, including employee, shareholders in Yorkshire Water were concerned about the running of their enterprise. The Government need to ask themselves whether they are hypocritical—a word already used tonight—because they obviously did not recognise those shareholders as important people in that company. They refused to recognise their real concerns, even though they gave evidence to the inquiry over three days. That is unforgivable.

While the Minister is not responsible for that matter, I am sure that he will take note of this as a good get-out clause. The report went out with a covering letter, in which one must be aware of the double negatives. The letter states:

"If the Secretary of State had not decided, in the light of Yorkshire Water's request, to defer taking a decision on the application and the report, it would have been necessary to address the many points raised in that report. Since the applications have now been withdrawn, it would now serve no useful purpose to go further into those questions."

It is disgraceful and arrogant to say to the employees and shareholders in Yorkshire Water who spent three days in Dewsbury giving their evidence that that evidence is not even worthy of consideration. In order to rescue the Government from such hypocrisy, I am sure that the Minister will be keen to accept the amendment. The Government will then make it clear that the measures that they want to put in the Bill will benefit all employees and all shareholders, whatever their position in a company. I look forward to the Minister's response.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** I call Mr. Quentin Davies.

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Stamford and Spalding): Thank you, Sir Geoffrey—it is a great pleasure to use those last two words.

I have listened with great interest to the hon. Members for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) and for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). There is no doubt that, at first sight, the notion of all share options schemes being automatically available on the same terms to all employees is attractive and appealing. All employees like to feel that they are part of a firm and that they are committed to that firm's success, and such morale is essential if a company is to be successful. But I fear that that appeal—while very obvious—is a little superficial.

Once again, Labour has not thought through what the consequences would be of implementing a populist policy—in this case, a policy using taxation to achieve certain political purposes relating to the way that industry is run. It is clear that, if share options are ultimately exercised, the existing shareholders will be diluted. In a sense, the whole object of the scheme is that employees and directors who benefit from share option schemes will share in the profits, all of which would otherwise be attributable to the shareholders alone.

It may be in the interests of the shareholders to make sure that those who contribute specifically to increasing the share price—thereby increasing the value available to the shareholders—do share in that benefit. It is therefore essential that there should be an element of selectivity in the application of the schemes, which are not appropriate as a firm-wide or universal way of remunerating employees. There are many other ways of doing that, including tax-efficient ways provided for by the Government, such as the company employees share scheme, which has been in operation for 10 years or more.

When one gives employees an option, by definition one is giving them an incentive to increase the value of the shares of the company concerned. The shareholders are saying that they believe that the employees have it in them to make a real contribution. If they increase the value of the shares, the shareholders will give them some benefit or allow them to share in the equity interests of the firm. Such an incentive must be selected and targeted on those employees or directors who are in a position to contribute directly in that way.

While in some cases it would be quite right to have several different schemes with different rules and amounts for the options in the same company, it would be inappropriate to have share options as a universal scheme. The amendment does not make much sense in terms of achieving the management and motivating objectives of a good share option scheme.

**Mr. Darling:** The hon. Member is falling into the old ways of the Conservative party, which hold that the only people who need incentives and to be encouraged and handed out largesse are those at the top, while those at the bottom do not really matter. While it is okay to hand baubles to those at the bottom, it is only those at the top who need tax breaks and other such benefits.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the amendment specifies that schemes have to be made available on similar—not identical—terms? The amendment would make sure that, if the tax system is to be used—in other words, if taxpayers' money in terms of tax forgone is to be used—the maximum number of people should benefit. If company shareholders want to provide benefit to certain individuals over and above that, there is nothing to stop them from doing so, but not through a system subsidised by the taxpayer.

**Mr. Davies:** The object of a share option scheme is not that the maximum number of people should benefit but

that the maximum benefit should be achieved for the shareholders of a company by those who are being asked for their share equity interest. The hon. Gentleman may find some difficulty in following that distinction, but it is a real one. If he had any experience of running a company, I am sure that he would accept it.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central used the word "top"—no doubt demagogically. I was not suggesting at all that only the top people or top management should benefit from a share option scheme. Far from it. In many cases, a quite disproportionate contribution to the success of an enterprise can be made by someone who is not particularly highly ranked in the hierarchy of a company. For example, someone employed in a research-based or hi-tech company might make a fundamental contribution to the future prosperity of that enterprise by inventing a new product or substantially improving an existing one. Perhaps an employee may find some new technique of manufacturing.

Such people have made a quite exceptional contribution, and it is right that there should be a mechanism available to reward them proportionately. It would not make sense to extend that benefit to every other employee in the company. The same applies to a salesman, who may be quite junior in the hierarchy of a company but who may produce a major contract that may have an enormous impact on the company's prosperity, on the value created for shareholders and—in a case such as that—on the job security of all of his fellow employees.

The hon. Gentleman has introduced an extraneous element—a total red herring. He may have done so to try to throw sand in the eyes of Conservative Members, but he must know us well enough to know that that would not succeed. He may, on the other hand, be genuinely confused about the matter, in which case I hope that the debate will give him an opportunity to reflect on it.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** I have been listening carefully to the hon. Member. Does he acknowledge that the wording of the amendment takes care of his argument? The hon. Gentleman suggests that, because people have different levels of remuneration, we need a mechanism that provides them with the ability to take greater benefits and share options according to earnings or seniority. That matter seems to be built into the amendment. Is not a lot of what the hon. Gentleman says already accounted for? Does he accept that the motivation behind the measure is the degree of public anger at the totally disproportionate amounts of share option benefits that have been given to top management out of all proportion to any reasonable incentive, while people further down in companies are being shut out altogether?

**Mr. Davies:** The hon. Member makes two points, which I shall deal with in reverse order. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer very much accepts the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about the general public outcry at the excessive benefits achieved through share option schemes. In fact, he accepted it some six months or more ago. That is exactly why clause 105 is in the Bill, and why we now have the £20,000 or £30,000 limitation.

On the hon. Gentleman's first comment, I am afraid that he rather forces me to repeat some of what I have already said. My point was precisely that it was not right that share options should necessarily be allocated in proportion to the salary levels of those who benefit from them. Still less would it be right that one should qualify only because one has a high salary or wage. On the contrary, I am saying that it is important that those schemes be so structured that they provide benefits for those who make a disproportionately large individual contribution to the firm—by definition, therefore, a compulsory universality.

The Labour party always likes to think in terms of compulsion. Everything has to be compulsory and imposed from on high by the Government—one cannot leave companies to run themselves and determine how they run the schemes because Government or civil servants know better. That is the old, old Labour party, and it does not change. That has come through just as strongly in this debate as in so many different contexts in the House.

8 pm

**Mr. Darling:** Does it strike the hon. Gentleman as curious that he is happy to support a Government who impose tax increases on most people, but at the same time support the tax breaks that he wants to focus on the very few? If a tax system is going to be used, it should benefit everyone in the work force. If companies want to give people incentives over and above that, there is nothing in this world to stop them from doing so, but they are not going to be able to receive their current tax break. Is not what we are hearing tonight that the Tory party is up to its old tricks? It is more concerned with Cedric and does not care much about the Sids of the work force.

**Mr. Davies:** The hon. Gentleman obviously has not read clause 105, on which his amendment is based, if he thinks that no one cares about the Sids, because the point of the clause is to deal with precisely that point. I am gratified at the way in which the discussion is moving. The hon. Gentleman started off by proposing a certain regime for share options; I criticised it; and, far from tackling my criticism, he has shifted the argument on to the general matter of whether I am in favour of a Government who have greatly increased taxation and so forth. He knows my response to that perfectly well, but I should think, Sir Geoffrey, that you would not want me to deliver it this evening.

I do not intend to be thrown off my stride. Another important point arose from the speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, and it would be a great mistake to let the debate go by without drawing the attention of the Committee to it. At the outset of the debate on this amendment, perhaps reluctantly or inadvertently—it was in the nature of a Freudian slip—he said that he was concerned that the Government have not taken into account the possibility of firms coming up with an unauthorised scheme that could be very different from the sort to which the tax benefits foreseen in this paragraph have now been more narrowly directed.

He contradicted that in his subsequent intervention on my remarks, when he said that there is no reason why companies should not do that. He then caught himself. He obviously thought that new Labour should not be in the business of saying that companies cannot do what they like with their own money, even when there is no tax implication. He said, "But, of course, for the private companies"—I think I am quoting him accurately; but *Hansard* will confirm this—"that might be all right. But for the newly privatised companies, that would not be all right at all."

*[Mr. Davies]*

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central—this is characteristic of Labour party thinking, and it has come out well in this debate—is trying to distinguish between private sector companies in general and those private sector companies that were once nationalised. That is an extremely damaging road to go down for a sector of British industry that now has a worldwide reputation.

The great success of our privatisation programme has not merely been the creation of a new class of small shareholders, but that we have achieved efficiency and productivity gains and turned loss-making nationalised industries into profit-making privatised ones, from which the Exchequer has gained a considerable revenue stream. Those are all enormously important, but there has also been a major development in the structure of British industry. We now have a number of major multi-nationals of global importance in their sectors—some are leaders in their sectors, for example, British Airways, British Telecom, British Steel and British Gas.

The consequence of the thinking of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, if ever it were allowed to influence policy formation in this country, would be to stymie those companies—those great success stories—with a regime that is different from that of the rest—

**Mr. Darling:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Davies:** I have given way a great deal to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that he will forgive me for not doing so at the moment. I am sure that he will be able to catch your eye again, Sir Geoffrey, if he feels that he needs to do so.

As a result, it would be extremely difficult for those companies to compete equally with other private sector companies. On executive or directors' share options and the tax treatment of directors or employees of those companies generally, one can envisage exactly what such a differential regime would lead to. Able and successful executives in the newly privatised companies—not so newly privatised in some cases, but almost all extremely successful, with some major multinationals—would be poached by rival companies which could offer more attractive executive share options. It would be a one-way street. No one would want to go from the rest of the private sector into the privatised sector, and that would handicap extremely successful companies—the generators of a great deal of national wealth and employment—with a burden that was unjustified in economic theory, or more importantly, in pure equity, fair play and justice.

I am sorry to have seen that tendency revealed—we all know that it is there—in such a stark and slightly shocking way in that intervention from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. Perhaps it was a slightly involuntary remark.

**Mr. Darling:** The hon. Gentleman says that it is only the Opposition who distinguish between the privatised utilities and the generality of private industries. Does he not accept that the public make a distinction in what they regard as unacceptable behaviour in the privatised utilities—not all private companies—and so do the Government, because they regulate those utilities? So everyone except for the hon. Gentleman distinguishes between the privatised utilities and other industries in general.

**Mr. Davies:** I do not think that that distinction stands. There is indeed a necessity to regulate natural monopolies, but as we have discovered—we have been path-breakers in the area of privatisation and it is not surprising that the world has come to our door to see how we have done it—many sectors of activity within the utilities are not natural monopolies. Competition can be and is being generated there—competition that could not have been foreseen 10 or more years ago.

One thinks of the great competition within the telecoms sector, first from Mercury and now from the cable companies. One thinks of the tremendous competition that has come into electricity generation and distribution, and gas extraction and distribution. Only the pipeline, the intermediate part of the gas industry, is in any sense a natural monopoly. Similarly, we have found that it is feasible to generate genuine competition in the running of trains. The natural monopoly that may need to be regulated is the ownership of the track. The distinction drawn by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central is naive and perhaps a little misinformed.

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Opposition's campaign was largely based on share options that involved perhaps 40 or 100 people, that the total number of share options at stake was relatively small compared with the fact that in an average electricity company or privatised utility there may be 4,000 or 5,000 relatively junior staff who have share options, and that the opportunity for those people to have share options has been greatly damaged by the way in which the Labour party conducted its campaign?

**Mr. Davies:** I agree strongly with my hon. Friend. The Labour party's cynical, demagogic campaign did much damage to those companies, which was unjustifiable, given their record of creating value, exports and employment for our country. I also agree with his remarks about the share option scheme. After the controversies of the past six or nine months, in clause 105—and in my hon. Friend's amendment, which we may have an opportunity to discuss later—we have reached a considered and sensible solution.

**Mr. Pearson:** I take issue with the comments of the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). Not only were the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) about the different regulatory regime that the Government adopt towards the privatised utilities correct, but the Greenbury report was exercised by the abuses of the privatised monopolies.

The Greenbury report states:

"There is little doubt that the remuneration committees of a number of companies in the privatised water and energy sectors have developed, perhaps unintentionally, remuneration packages that are richer than is required to recruit, retain and motivate quality managers."

That strikes me as meaning that remuneration committees have not followed their fiduciary duties to provide sufficient—and no more than that—incentives for managers.

The Greenbury report continues:

"Utility directors should command a greater pay premium where there is substantial competition and risk, where there is a wide diversity of activities or an international spread of operations or where significant technological or structural change is under way".

That, I freely admit, applies to former public companies such as BT, but it does not apply to the water and electricity companies unless we include some of the expensive mistakes that they have made as a result of their diversification programmes.

The Greenbury report concludes:

"We strongly recommend that all the privatised utilities in the water and energy sectors should undertake a comprehensive review of their remuneration packages in the light of this report and, if necessary, voluntarily adjust them accordingly."

The report disagrees with the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding and says that there is a case for remuneration committees to answer—and quickly.

8.15 pm

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** Does the hon. Gentleman concede that there is all the difference in the world between share options, or other remuneration packages, that were decided upon before flotation and those that may be decided on now or subsequently? In the latter case, there is no justification for considering those companies differently from other private sector plcs.

**Mr. Pearson:** There is a clear case for considering such companies differently, because water and electricity companies are still not subject to the full rigours of international and market competition in the way that ordinary private sector companies, and some other privatised companies, are. The hon. Gentleman's argument does not solve the problem. The public are still angry about the abuses of executive pay and share option schemes in the privatised utilities. He misreads public opinion if he thinks that doing nothing about that is acceptable.

I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central about the importance of everyone in the work force benefiting from the legislation. Rather unusually, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who has done much sterling work in persuading the Government to change their mind. I suspect that the chief executive of Asda was probably more influential in achieving that volte-face. The fact is that both Greenbury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer botched it, and finally, we are starting to get legislation that looks sensible. Certainly, no hon. Member would begrudge providing a few shares for shelf stackers, the odd cheque for check-out girls and a little bunce for the boys who push the trolleys round at Asda.

I remain concerned about two principal issues. First, there is the balance between executive share option schemes and other forms of option schemes such as savings-related option schemes and profit-sharing schemes. Secondly, there is still built into the system an unfairness that our amendment would partially, but not fully, solve. Share option schemes are inevitably geared towards publicly owned, publicly quoted companies.

In Inland Revenue-approved schemes, the market value of shares in unquoted companies can be negotiated between a private company and the shares valuation division of the Capital Taxes Office. Will the Minister say how many times that takes place? According to Inland Revenue statistics, there are about 4,000 schemes at the moment. My best guess is that the majority of those are schemes with publicly quoted companies.

I suggest that those private companies that have executive share option schemes run them not for the whole work force but for the few private wealthy individuals who own the companies and use the scheme as an extra measure of tax planning. I remain concerned that we are providing tax incentives to individuals simply because they happen to work for publicly quoted companies, whereas people who happen to work for unquoted companies, which is still a large proportion of the work force, do not have such tax breaks. We need to examine that.

I remain to be convinced that share option schemes are encouraging long-term share ownership. They have some benefits as part of an employer's recruitment, retention and motivation strategy. Asda thinks that its share option scheme has been beneficial for staff retention. However, 95 per cent. of people who exercise share options sell them immediately and the average sum involved for individuals who were granted share options, which was given by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in a debate on 25 October, was £45,000 in 1994-95. When the Asda employees and other shop-floor workers are stripped out of that calculation—averages can be misleading—we find that a limited number of individuals receive substantial options.

Many quoted companies are now thinking about moving away from traditional option schemes, and I welcome Greenbury's injunction on them to do so. Traditional share option schemes must be weighed against other kinds of long-term incentive schemes. I welcome the fact that companies are now beginning to introduce more relative performance criteria. I also welcome moves by many major companies to ensure that, if share options are to be granted, they will be granted for five years or more, even if they are part of approved option schemes.

I welcome the Government's change of heart in terms of not completely excluding share option schemes and introducing a £20,000 limit. It is important, however, that the amendment is adopted on grounds of fairness, because everyone in the work force should be allowed to benefit from such a tax break.

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack):** This has been a quiet but interesting debate. As the Opposition are now willing to embrace the whole ethic and philosophy of matters associated with share ownership, I now understand why they have played first consideration of this matter, in the context of the Finance Bill, in the svelte tones of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling).

**Mr. Darling:** Svelte?

**Mr. Jack:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is not aware of the meaning of svelte. He gave a smooth, quiet, well-mannered and thoughtful presentation of his party's case. He may have done that so that the outside world would not be reminded of the history of how we reached this position.

**Mr. Darling:** I remember it very well.

**Mr. Jack:** The hon. Gentleman says that he remembers it very well. Let me take him on a little voyage of all our yesterdays, because it is important to put the amendment into some context.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) made a telling intervention, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding

*[Mr. Jack]*

(Mr. Davies) reminded us of her words. I am delighted that Opposition Members welcome what we are about this evening.

However, this is the same party that objected to the British Aerospace work force having a stake in their enterprise. Some 89 per cent. of the work force acquired shares in that company because of the special terms offered. The Labour party also opposed the privatisation of British Telecom, yet this evening they advocate all-employee share option schemes. A staggering 95 per cent. of British Telecom's work force bought a stake in the company after its privatisation had been opposed by the Opposition. Indeed, 99 per cent. of British Gas's employees bought a stake in their company after the Labour party opposed its privatisation.

I suppose that I must welcome the fact that the sinners are repenting and are now endorsing a policy that has enabled shareholding to rise from some 3 million when we came into office to some 10 million today.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** I am anxious that my hon. Friend should always be just in his observations about the Labour party. Has not the Labour party always opposed the idea of directors acquiring options or shares before a company is floated? Did my hon. Friend see the article in the *Financial Times* of 18 January last year, which said:

"Mr. Peter Snape, MP for West Bromwich, East and Opposition spokesman on transport, admitted that he had accepted options on 40,000 shares in his capacity as non-executive director of West Midlands Travel. The Birmingham-based bus company was taken out of local authority hands in a management-led workers buy out in December 1991. Preparations are being made for flotation, possibly in the autumn."

Is it not nice to know that at least some Labour Members are enterprising when it comes to opportunities for acquiring shares on a pre-flotation and no doubt private sweetheart deal basis?

**The First Deputy Chairman:** Order. That was a long intervention.

**Mr. Jack:** I hope that my reply will be shorter, Sir Geoffrey.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) is not in his place this evening, because he should have an opportunity to explain to the House why he made a principled attack against the proposal for privatising bus services but was prepared to put that to one side and enjoy the benefits of share options, which the policy that he opposed enabled him to have. He may have been ahead of his time, judging by the events referred to only a few hours ago at Prime Minister's Question Time. It is interesting to see the juxtaposition between the principled stand in public and the private change for private gain. My hon. Friend is right, and I congratulate him on his forensic skills in digging that article out.

The amendment has been tabled by the same party that voted against the save-as-you-earn scheme during the Committee stage of the Finance Bill in 1980. In a relatively short time, our policies have woven their magic and Labour Members are now coming round to our way of thinking. If a sinner repenteth, it must be applauded.

**Mr. Darling:** We are all concerned that this debate should be accurate, and the Minister will no doubt recall that the last Labour Government first introduced employee share ownership schemes before he and I were in the House. I do not see much advantage in going into these matters in the context of the amendment. Will the Minister simply tell us whether he supports the amendment, or is he happy to side with his hon. Friends in ensuring that the privileged few will benefit from the Government's measures?

**Mr. Jack:** I shall come to that in due course. I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman's point about history, but something clearly happened around 1980 to change Labour Members' minds on this matter. In fairness, the hon. Gentleman welcomed the company share option plan and attempted to make a fist of amending it. However, people must be reminded where the Opposition are coming from because, in recent times, they have made much of the virtues of owning some kind of stake in something but have done little to acknowledge that we are the true pioneers in that area.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a straight question: do we support his amendment? Before explaining why we do not, I wish to pick him up on one point. It is typical of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen to get into their minds a sound nibble such as, "The Tories only want this scheme for the benefit of a few rich, well-heeled people", and to keep repeating it.

I remind the hon. Gentleman of events that occurred on 17 July when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, having acquired the knowledge of what was in the Greenbury report, moved very quickly to address those concerns and deal with the question at the heart of the hon. Gentleman's probing. As a result of a healthy debate, we now have a scheme on the stocks—the company share option plan in the Finance Bill—that addresses precisely the issue that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I am sure that he would not disagree that the proposal in the Bill is moderate in terms of who may benefit from share option plans. I believe that the measure addresses his concern, and I hope that we are at one on that. I think that the facts speak for themselves.

One interesting point that we have forgotten is that other all-employee schemes exist. I shall develop that point later, but I first wish to mention a couple of technical points about which the hon. Gentleman asked me. I do not want them to be lost in my general remarks—I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said. He spent some time asking me about the definition of the term "manifestly less". I shall try to deal with the subject carefully as I should hate to mislead the hon. Gentleman or for somebody to read what I say in *Hansard* and get the wrong impression.

8.30 pm

The set of words repeats the definition used in the old executive share option scheme which the hon. Gentleman, as a lawyer, may have studied carefully. The phrase "manifestly less" has become well known in law since 1984. It means: not less by any amount that can be measured—in practice, not less at all. I hope that that clarifies the position—[*Laughter.*] I have to give the explanation in language that lawyers understand. The hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) may sometimes have difficulty with lawyers' language, but the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central is a lawyer and I

would expect him to understand it. I also expect him to have studied what happened in 1984. Having defined "manifestly less" in legal terms, I will say more simply that shares should not be granted under option at below the market price. That can be understood in everyday language.

**Mr. Darling:** I appreciate the Minister's reference to 1984. If it is the Government's intention that the price should not be less at all, and as we are all in favour of plain English, why do not the Government break new ground and simply put "less than at all"? Then everyone in the House and, more importantly, outside it, would fully understand. The problem of relying on legal decisions is that lawyers have historically made a lot of money arguing about what is meant. If what is meant is "not less at all", why not say it?

**Mr. Jack:** For the sake of precision, I perhaps embroidered the words a little. To put the matter beyond misadventure, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and spell out the precise terms. I shall place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House, so that we can all study it for our greater benefit.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the 15 per cent. discount. In practice, very few companies use the 15 per cent. discount provisions, and the new company share option plan does not, as the hon. Gentleman's first question suggested, allow a discount to be available. The previous facility was available only if a company also had an all-employee scheme. I hope that I have dealt with the two specific points that the hon. Gentleman raised.

Having welcomed what the hon. Gentleman said in his opening remarks about the proposal of a company share option plan, I should remind him that we already have two existing tax-relieved all-employee schemes: the profit-sharing and the savings-related plans. They were introduced on an all-employee basis to stimulate wider employee share ownership across the board at an affordable Exchequer cost. The objective of the executive option relief introduced in 1984 was different: it was specifically designed to enable companies to reward key employees with options over shares that would increase in value prospectively in response to their hard work and commitment.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor explained in July last year, we believe that companies that wish to give incentives to key employees in that way no longer need a tax relief. A variety of option schemes and other long-term incentive arrangements offer alterative ways of linking executive rewards to corporate performance, and none of them qualifies for special tax treatment.

The spirited and constructive debate that started in July last year as a result of my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement that he was going to withdraw tax relief on the existing executive share option scheme revealed that there was a demand for a third type of employee share ownership scheme in addition to the two existing all-employee schemes to provide a more flexible way of granting options to lower-paid employees. That explanation addresses one of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central when he spoke about who would benefit.

The debate stirred up the issue—the hon. Gentleman exemplified that by mentioning Asda, but that company was not alone. Many other retailers also expressed a wish to sustain such a scheme. They wanted to target their schemes at the more modestly paid of their employees, such as middle managers and even those on the shop floor. We listened carefully, but the companies that made those representations made it clear that they did not want a compulsory all-employee scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding adverted to that in his telling contribution when he said that there was a difference in every respect between the Government and the Opposition because the Opposition always want to seek compulsion whereas we seek an element of choice.

Those self-same companies wanted to be free to design their schemes as they wished, and to structure them so that they could reward loyalty. If every employee who was with the company on the day that the options were granted had to receive some options—as the amendment suggests—it would be impossible for company share option plans to be used to reward loyalty. That is the first reason why I am unable to accept the amendment.

**Mr. Darling:** The option is always open to companies.

**Mr. Jack:** If the hon. Gentleman wants to tell me what it is, he can always intervene. The sedentary debate is perhaps not entertaining the House. I see that the hon. Gentleman is not pushing his point, so I shall continue.

There is an important point to make in relation to smaller companies. The share capital of small companies is a valuable and limited asset. It would simply not be appropriate for such a company to have to grant options to all its employees when it wanted to grant options. In that context, where would the Opposition draw the line? I do not think that they have thought through the effect of the amendment in reality as it shows a clear lack of understanding about small companies.

Today I received a further, supporting piece of evidence that I feel duty bound to put before the House. It came in a letter from the director general of the Institute of Directors, Mr. Tim Melville-Ross, dated 23 January. He said:

> "Specifically, we do not support the proposal that all employees should be eligible for share options rather than the allocation being at the discretion of management (which is the current position). Replacing management's discretion to provide share options as incentives by the principle of universality represents, in our view, another restriction and inflexibility on business."

Those are telling words. The letter continued:

> "Moreover, the amendment ignores the particular problems in the unquoted company . . . It is common in a private company to have to offer share options to attract and motivate one or two key people."

I saw that fact for myself when I visited a fibre optics company called Coe in Leeds. Representations were made to me by the company asking whether the Government could restore a share option scheme—similar to the one that we have introduced—precisely because it had problems attracting a top-quality sales director when it could afford only a limited salary. I believe that the scheme that we have now entirely meets that company's wishes, since the company wanted to focus its scheme on that specific need.

For the reasons that I have given, we should have respect for the difficulties of the small company share structure.

*[Mr. Jack]*

I remind Opposition Members that the new company share option plan tax relief is part of a wider package, which includes substantial improvements to both the existing all-employee share schemes.

The hon. Member for Dudley, West asked about the scope and scale of those schemes. It is interesting to note that about 80 per cent. of listed companies have one or more approved schemes, about 55 per cent. of the companies that have one or more approved schemes are unlisted and about 40 per cent. of companies that have one or more approved schemes have an all-employee scheme. It is interesting that it is in the profit-sharing and save-as-you-earn schemes, in which about 2 million people are involved, that all-employee activity is very widely spread.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, very properly, asked whether we had considered the scope of who was able to benefit from share participation—whether participation was restricted to a narrow group. I hope that he is now aware, as a result of that exemplification of the numbers involved in the save-as-you-earn and the profit-sharing schemes, that those benefits are very widely available to all employees. I say that because it demonstrates clearly why companies wish to have one other scheme that they can tailor to meet the individual needs of their business. As the Institute of Directors rightly guides us, companies want some flexibility in how they will go about that, especially bearing in mind the special position of the smaller company and its share structure.

For those very good reasons, I believe that we should respect the right of choice. That is what fundamentally separates the Government and the Labour party. Conservative Members believe passionately in the fact that people should have an opportunity to participate in the equity of their company. We have two schemes, which are available already, on an all-employee basis, so it is right that we, as the party of choice, recognise that companies should be free to choose a scheme to meet their needs.

I say to the hon. Gentleman, there is nothing in the way in which that scheme is specified that prevents any company, if it so wishes, from making the scheme an all-employee scheme.

**Mr. Darling:** Does not the Minister, by his own words, admit that he has certainly given the choice to companies, but it is also choice to deny their work force the chance to participate in share ownership schemes? In other words, it is not giving a choice to the many. Labour Members believe that everyone should have choices in this world, not only the few.

**Mr. Jack:** We believe in choice by persuasion. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I must return to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. Perhaps he can help me with a word or two of reassurance. He is interested in all employees having an opportunity to participate in the company. I shall give him an opportunity to show the truth of his credentials.

There is a privatisation scheduled for a few months—that of Railtrack. Railtrack has said that it will not have an executive share option scheme but it does want its employees to participate fully in the company by holding shares. I will give way to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central if he wants. Will he now commit himself? It might be difficult to bring your party with you, but take a personal view. I give you the opportunity to say, "I welcome the commitment to the privatisation of Railtrack and the opportunity for the staff to own shares in the company." Will you interrupt me and tell me—

**The First Deputy Chairman:** Order. On several occasions, the Minister used the word "you". I am not responsible.

**Mr. Jack:** The enthusiasm of my argument has led me again to cause you to interrupt, Sir Geoffrey; thank you for correcting me.

I ask the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, through the Chair, is he able to tell me—having had a little extra thinking time—that he would like the employees of a privatised Railtrack to have that opportunity, or does he wish, by opposing that privatisation, to deny those employees that opportunity to own shares?

**Mr. Darling** *rose—*

**Mr. Jack:** I give way. This could be historic.

**Mr. Darling:** I am grateful to the Financial Secretary. He must realise that we are arguing about the opportunity to ensure that, in companies throughout the country, there is the widest opportunity for many to participate in those companies' success. The argument about the privatisation of Railtrack and rest of the railway network has nothing to do with that, as well he knows. I suspect that I speak, not only for Opposition Members, but for a majority in the country, who want nothing whatever to do with breaking up the rail network. That process is purely designed to satisfy a tiny minority in the country, and the vast majority of the public would suffer as a result. It has nothing to do with the amendment, as well the Financial Secretary knows.

**Mr. Jack:** I think—

**The First Deputy Chairman:** Order. The Minister would be wise not to go down that track. The privatisation of the railways has nothing to do with the debate.

8.45 pm

**Mr. Jack:** I entirely take your guidance, Sir Geoffrey, but that answer is another example of Labour hypocrisy, because, as I said earlier in response to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding, when the Opposition choose to deny something, they will follow that, but when it comes to personal gain, as we saw with reference to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East, we know what the answer is. The hon. Gentleman was unable to give me the satisfaction that I sought.

On the basis of the amendment, which has been—

**Mr. Darling:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Jack:** I wish to—

**Mr. Darling:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the Minister did not mean it, but, as I

understand it, one is not supposed to accuse hon. Members of hypocrisy in the House and I deeply resent the suggestion that I am guilty of hypocrisy about Railtrack. I think it might be better—

**Mr. Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): Hypocrisy is a sensitive subject today!

**Mr. Darling:** The Whip speaks from a sedentary position.

Privatisation of Railtrack is a matter of concern to this country. The Financial Secretary might be better dealing with the merits of his argument—which, I am bound to say, I struggle to see—instead of indulging in this silly sort of thing, which might go down well in the Conservative party bar room but is not terribly suitable for debate.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** Order. I did not understand that the Minister was using the word "hypocrisy" regarding an individual. If he was, I am sure that he would wish to withdraw it.

**Mr. Jack:** I would never wish to insult any hon. Member on a personal basis, and if the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central thought that that is what I said, let me say to him that I unreservedly withdraw any smear on him as an individual. As you rightly said, Sir Geoffrey, my use of the word "hypocrisy" was in the context of the Labour party as a collective, not the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. I would not want in any way to go beyond that.

There is another technical hitch in the amendment. I was surprised to see that it would require part-time directors to participate in the scheme. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central may have overlooked the fact that the guidelines for institutional investors, which are produced by the Association of British Insurers, state very clearly that part-time directors should not participate in share option schemes. That is an important factor, and another reason why I am unable to accept the hon. Gentleman's amendment.

We have had a very thorough debate. The Conservative party is the party of wider share ownership. I welcome the Opposition's endorsement of the company share option scheme, but I hope, for the reasons given, that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central will understand why, at this stage, I am unable to accept his amendment.

**Mr. Tipping:** I am pleased to have had the opportunity to listen to the Financial Secretary's remarks. I generally welcome the changes to executive share options that are set out in the Finance Bill. The Financial Secretary made some historical references early in his speech, and perhaps it is worth remembering how the clause came to be a part of the Finance Bill.

We should remember that the Government vacillated over the Greenbury report, which formed the basis of the clause. Some of us argued that the Government should have done the work themselves. The Government's response to Greenbury can only be described as erratic. The Chancellor reacted quickly on 17 July, but he lived to rue that day. Archie Norman and the employees of Asda forced him to change his mind by pointing out that the Chancellor's actions did not fit the bill.

The amendment is important because it seeks to extend the share option scheme, as laid down in the Finance Bill, to all employees. It requires that, in order for a scheme to be approved, all employees and directors must be able to participate on equal terms. I was interested to hear the Financial Secretary's remarks about choice: he argued that our amendment should be rejected because it forbids choice.

The Asda episode shows—as the amendment does—that we want choice for all. We want all employees to have the opportunity to participate in a scheme of that kind. That is fundamentally important. If we were to follow the track laid down by the Financial Secretary, we could return very quickly to the bad old days of perks for a few and a handicap for the majority of the work force. I believe that "choice" means that everyone should be able to choose: all employees should have the right to participate in share option schemes. That is why the amendment is so important.

It is also important to recognise that the share option issue has generated real public concern. People come to my surgery and talk about the benefits and the perks that the fat cats, as they call them, have enjoyed under share option schemes in the past. They find it hard to understand why the newly privatised gas, electricity and water industries offer such perks. I believe that the public's view resonates very strongly: everyone who is involved in those industries should have the same right to choose.

As I am talking about those who attend my surgeries, I shall mention two firms about which people have relayed their concerns. I refer first to East Midlands Electricity. I know the company well and I have a great deal of respect for it. I remind the Financial Secretary that the company's former chairman and chief executive, John Harris—whom I hold in high regard—left the company with a very good pay-off of reportedly £1 million, partly in share options. The second company that local people raise with me is Severn Trent. Its former chairman, John Billock—whom I know and admire—also left that company with a big pay-off.

The Financial Secretary talked at length about the need to reward success. In both the cases that I mentioned, the gentlemen involved left their respective companies in rather unfortunate circumstances. Their pay-offs were not so much a measure of success and a reward for that success as a way of getting them out of the way quickly. In the case of East Midlands Electricity, it is clear that the company diversified, bought into electricity contracting and then caught a cold. It was forced to refocus on the core business under new management.

I know the new management of East Midlands Electricity well, and I am pleased to hear it say that it is sceptical about the value of share options. It takes the view that they have given the company and the entire industry a bad name. The former chairman of Severn Trent, Mr. Billock, also left partly because of difficulties with the company's performance. It is okay to reward success; I agree with that fundamentally.

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that point emphasises the merits of a different recommendation of the Greenbury committee regarding the length of service contracts? If we were to reduce the length of such contracts to one year, many large pay-offs would not occur. It has more to do with the length of service contracts than with share options.

**Mr. Tipping:** The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. The length of service issue is important. Like him, I would

*[Mr. Tipping]*

like to see more short-term contracts of about one year's duration. At Severn Trent, the diversification into waste disposal and the acquisition of Biffa led to problems within the company.

The public find it hard to believe that the chief executives at East Midlands Electricity and Severn Trent did the same job in the privatised industry as when the companies were under public ownership. They also find it hard to accept the monopoly position that put the companies into such advantageous positions. They do recognise that, at the end of the day, the whole company is underwritten—there is a safety net—by its ability to raise prices. If things go wrong, the consumer will pay.

The employees of the newly privatised utilities will also be affected. The Financial Secretary was rather dismissive of the scare stories—as he put it—about executive share options and the perks that the top men in such companies enjoy. We must remember that many employees of the water and electricity companies, in particular, have lost their jobs. The companies have achieved success through efficiency measures, and the most basic efficiency measure is to reduce the number of staff.

I have a lot to do with National Power. Its officers have been extremely generous in their willingness to show me around the company and to talk with me. I do not have any financial interest in the company—I can see that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is listening to me very closely. The management of National Power has allowed me the latitude to walk around the company and to discuss the past and the future. About two thirds of the company's employees have lost their jobs. At the same time, the executives of the company have seen their pay explode. I look forward to watching the share options, the salaries and the pensions of people in the generating industry.

Only the other day, I was looking closely at the share prices of electricity companies. The prices have fallen, for reasons that are not entirely in the companies' control, but on which they have some input. I look forward to seeing whether the executives' benefits fall as well.

If the amendment were implemented, it would lead to some fundamental changes in the way that companies operate in the United Kingdom. There would be more transparency, because all employees would be involved. I and others find it hard to discover the real benefits being given to directors and chief executives of newly privatised industries. If all employees had the right to be members of a share option scheme, that would lead to greater transparency.

**Mr. Jack:** I agree with the hon. Member that it is a good idea to have employee participation in companies. However, there is some evidence that, if there were to be a scheme such as that to which the amendment refers, some companies might decide that they did not want to run a company share option scheme. Does the hon. Member think that that is a risk worth running?

9 pm

**Mr. Tipping:** That may be a risk, but it is a choice for the company. I feel strongly that the benefits of such schemes would outweigh the disadvantages enormously. The first benefit would be transparency. The second benefit would be that everyone in the company would have a sense of stakeholding and shareholding. The schemes would be a recognition that people were companies' greatest assets and they would make companies realise that they should invest in and add value to people. The amendment clearly would do that.

If people had a shareholding or stakeholding in the company, it would lead to a long-term view. People who work for major companies are committed to their success. For example, the coal miners who work for Coal Investments Ltd. gave up their holidays when the company was in trouble over Christmas and went in to work. The schemes suggested in the amendment would reinforce that view.

Companies should be open, transparent and fair to everybody, not just to the few, and they should take a long-term rather than a short-term view. That is why I support the amendment.

**Mr. David Shaw:** May I extend my apologies to the House? On the flight back from the European Parliament, where I was today attending the Labour and Social Affairs Committee, I was delayed at a border control at Brussels airport which, according to everything we are told, does not exist. It was very real.

I am speaking in the debate because I have long had an interest, although not a personal, pecuniary interest, in how employees should be rewarded and share in the success of their companies. I have never had share options myself, but over the years I have sat on the boards of one or two companies and awarded share options to certain individuals. The decision-making process has been interesting, as has seeing the way in which share options can reward people.

I have always made a practice of looking not just at directors or managers as recipients of share options but at secretaries and middle and lower management, to encourage a broad spectrum of employees. We did not necessarily award share options to every member of the company. There were often good reasons for not awarding the options to some individuals. Sometimes, sadly, it might have been better if individuals had got a job elsewhere, and sometimes people were relatively new to the company and were still untried and untested.

I also have a long-standing interest in share options from a constituency point of view. During the 1987 election—the one that got me into the House—we were shown around the Buckland paper mill, which was lucky enough to be visited also by someone called Kenneth Clarke, now known to the House as the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Kenneth went around the paper mill and met the secretaries and typists, who were fully aware of the success of their company. They were interested in the share price and in how the mill was performing as part of a larger group.

The thing that impressed the current Chancellor was that those people's share options gave them an added interest in the company—they felt that they were part-owners of it. That feeling extended down to the shop floor, where the mill produced Conqueror paper, which is famous not just because it is used in the House of Commons but because it is unquestionably one of the best papers in the world.

The people in the company took great pride in owning part of the manufacturing process. They were thoroughly involved at every stage and, because of their share

options, were keen on the success of the company. That is why I have a passion for share options as a way of motivating company employees.

The employees of P and O in my constituency—hundreds of them—also own share options. Junior onshore staff and more senior officers on board the ferries that make Dover a successful part of the country participate in share option schemes, which are clearly beneficial to many people in my constituency.

Within a month of his appointment as Financial Secretary, the Minister rapidly apprised himself of an enormous amount of information once the debate on share options got under way, and I thank him for that. We were both shocked by how complex some of the details of the argument can be, but we discovered that fundamental misconceptions surround share options and share option schemes. All the focus on fat cats and directors diverted attention from the hundreds of thousands of employees who were benefiting and who had benefited from share options. We should not forget that just under 1 million people are in this category; I hope that that number will be exceeded under a Conservative Government in the near future.

Another key misconception concerns the fact that people forget that these are approved discretionary share options. They became known as executive share options, however. Although it was often envisaged in the early stages that senior management and top people would be the main beneficiaries, it was soon discovered that junior employees—secretaries, typists, bank clerks—would also be significant beneficiaries, and rapidly became so. We found, in short, that the social spectrum was much more widely covered by share options than many people expected. They rapidly became another element in the expansion of democratic capitalism.

I was delighted to read all the research showing just how wide and deep the ownership of share options had become—just like the ownership of shares.

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): The hon. Gentleman will have read today that Mr. Archie Norman, a wannabe Tory Member, has just cashed in £3 million in share options—a modest addition to his private fortune. The problem was that the Asda share price dropped by 3p, thereby wiping out a considerable part of the value of the shares of ordinary investors in Asda. Which is more important—the immense gain that Mr. Norman has pocketed, or maintaining the value of the Asda shares in which many ordinary investors, through their personal equity plans and unit trusts, may have placed their faith?

**Mr. Shaw:** When Archie Norman went into Asda, the company was flat on its back; it was suffering badly from competition from supermarket chains that were much more successful, and 37,000 of its employees faced the possibility of losing their jobs during the recessionary period if it had gone under. It was very close. It was within a whisker of going under. Archie Norman rescued the company. I have spoken to a number of his junior employees and not one of them begrudges him his share option profits. They are happy that he rescued their jobs and the company.

It also benefits consumers because it is one of the most competitive companies in terms of getting price reductions. It has forced the abolition of the net book agreement, and many books are much cheaper than before. It is putting pressure on a number of other restrictive practice agreements or other price arrangements that exist, and it is forcing down quite successfully the price of a number of products.

Asda's chief executive should benefit not just because he has benefited the employees but because he has benefited consumers and others in this country enormously. The Treasury has also benefited because Asda is paying quite a few millions in corporation tax, which, if it had gone bankrupt, it would not have paid.

**Mr. John Marshall** *rose—*

**Mr. Shaw:** I give way to my hon. Friend.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** Order. Before the hon. Gentleman gives way, I am afraid that he has allowed himself to stray from the amendment, probably because of the question from the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane). He should now relate his remarks to the amendment before us.

**Mr. Marshall:** On Asda and share options, will my hon. Friend confirm—to answer those who are concerned about Asda shareholders—that, under the guidance of Mr. Norman, Asda shareholders have seen the share price treble, which is quite a good achievement? Even the hon. Member for Rotherham might give an alpha double plus.

**Mr. Shaw:** There is no doubt that, if "stakeholder" has any meaning whatever, one can truly say that all the stakeholders in Asda have truly benefited under Archie Norman and the Conservative Government who have made the environment right for them to benefit.

I now return to some of the key points. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary was kind enough earlier in the summer to see me to discuss share options and to listen to some of my concerns and those of a number of organisations and others. I realised that he had considerable experience of option, incentive and share schemes from his involvement in companies—in the years before he came into Parliament—and that he had observed the benefits that tying in staff, in a way that gives them an interest in the company, can produce. I was grateful to him for the sympathetic way in which he listened.

When a Minister moves to a new Department, especially the Treasury, it is always interesting to see the extent of his commitment to some of our fundamental policies, and whether perhaps the Treasury atmosphere rapidly gets the better of him. I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary was able to assure me of his commitment to a shareholding democracy. He was able to assure me that he, like me, is proud of the fact that there are 11 million shareholders compared with 3 million when we got into office, and that 16 million people have life assurance policies and pension policies. I was also pleased that the Prime Minister is committed to widening share ownership. I felt, therefore, that there was a chink of light, that it was possible to push open the door, not only in relation to keeping share schemes but to seeing whether they could be better targeted at the very people whom we want to help.

*[Mr. Shaw]*

It was apparent from discussions with my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary that he wanted to look after the thin cats and even, perhaps, one or two of the thinner cats who were putting on just a modicum of weight but were well short of becoming fat cats. I am delighted that his work during the summer and the work on the Budget have produced this share option scheme. It is important that my hon. Friend has recognised that share options are about giving people the incentive to create jobs. It was apparent that he had some knowledge in that area.

Let me recap some of the benefits of share option schemes and their purpose. The fat cat/thin cat debate has sometimes taken us off the main track.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** Order. This is not a clause stand part debate but a debate on the amendment. The hon. Gentleman should confine his remarks to that.

9.15 pm

**Mr. Shaw:** I shall try to ensure that I keep to the point. The implications of the amendment are in danger of not being fully understood unless one focuses on the purpose of share option schemes.

One of the key purposes of share option schemes is to help lower and middle income employees. Another is as a source of equity finance. I am not saying that the amendment would necessarily damage those, but it would begin to move the share option schemes away from some of their original purposes.

As well as encouraging a share-owning democracy, the number of share option schemes demonstrates how effective they are. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary said that the amendment could damage the number of share option schemes that people might want to set up in the future, so we should not support it.

Loyalty is regarded as a key issue in the awarding of share options, but the amendment would remove the loyalty incentive. It would mean that everyone could have share options regardless of their loyalty to the company and regardless of how management and directors saw that loyalty helping the company's performance.

In addition, there must be flexibility within high technology companies. The amendment might remove such flexibility, because high-technology companies will have to reserve the share options with a little bit extra for some of the high-tech and skilled staff that they need to retain.

We also need to consider whether the amendment would encourage the development of the common interest between employees and shareholders. If employees feel that they will get something automatically as of right simply because they work in the company, it is not quite the same as if they are given an incentive to produce the extra value in the company which will benefit its shareholders and employees. The amendment is not in line with the basic philosophy behind share option schemes, so I cannot support it.

Share option schemes are often used as a substitute for pension schemes in small companies that cannot afford conventional pension schemes. That may not be contrary to the amendment, but the amendment will not necessarily assist.

As I discovered, share option schemes are often used to help inward investment. American companies are keen on United Kingdom employees benefiting from the share option schemes of the parent company in America, and that is possible under the law. I am not certain that the amendment would work in favour of such an arrangement. My hon. Friend might wish to consider that when he replies.

The amendment might make life difficult for such American companies, many of which want to put their British employees on parallel employee remuneration and incentive packages as the American companies' employees in the United States. All those arguments show why the Government are right to bring in the new scheme and why the amendment is not quite right.

Sir Richard Greenbury was mentioned earlier. I remind the House that his report concerned directors. When I spoke to him, he told me that he did not intend his proposals to affect arrangements for share options further down the income scale and further down the hierarchy within companies: he did not intend them to have any impact on shop girls, supervisors or even junior managers. The amendment is rather dangerous. Some companies will want to make share options available to all employees; others will want to make them available to only a small number, which I do not think is necessarily wrong.

I am delighted with the way in which the Government have approached the matter so far, and I hope that I can express further delight when we debate a later amendment tabled in my name. Amendment No. 6 would make share option schemes too rigid, and might damage some of them. As my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has suggested, some companies might even not implement schemes as a result. If the amendment were passed, people might be entitled to share options regardless of their performance. Schemes should operate with some flexibility, allowing the benefit of share options to be earned only by employees whose performance makes their companies successful. I shall vote against the amendment if it is put to a vote.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien** (North Warwickshire): As the Financial Secretary said, this has been a good and thorough debate.

The Government's main objection to the amendment seems to be that it would benefit too many people. So much for their idea of a shareholding democracy. After 16 years of Tory government, only 17 per cent. of shares are owned by individual shareholders; that is the lowest percentage for a very long time, perhaps the lowest percentage ever.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) welcomed clause 105 as far as it went, but Opposition Members feel that it does not go far enough—hence the amendment. In an effective speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) pointed out that the Labour party approved not only of employee share ownership, but of the granting of share options. She also said that most employee shareholdings were small or even token. She pointed out that Asda, for instance, has 36,000 shareholding employees, which is welcome, but none of those employees is in the same league as the fat cats in the privatised utilities. As the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) observed, a distinction must be drawn between the fat cats and those whom he described as the thin cats. I shall return to the hon. Gentleman's speech when he is less busy than he appears to be at present.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough also spoke of her experience of the hypocrisy issue, as she described it, at the Yorkshire Water annual general meeting. Our agenda deals with the points that she raised: it seeks to help all shareholders, not just employee shareholders. The amendment fits well within that overall agenda.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) suggested that Labour's policy was "populistic". I suspect that it will indeed be popular, just as I suspect that his and the Financial Secretary's appeal for selectivity in granting share options will have much less popular appeal.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding condemned the Labour party for distinguishing between privatised utilities and other plcs. I noticed that the Financial Secretary seemed to squirm at that because, as he knows, the Government make that distinction in terms of the regulatory regime that they impose.

A highlight of the debate occurred when my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) paid tribute to the hon. Member for Dover, who, during the great debate on these matters last year, helped to expose the Government's inadequacies in terms of their share options policy. Perhaps I may discomfit him still more by echoing that praise from the Labour Front Bench. I know that he takes a genuine and, it seems from his speech, informed interest in these matters. He went so far as to bring "Ken", as he described him, to talk about these matters to his constituents, who I am sure were greatly thrilled by that visit.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** Order. I hesitate to intervene, but the word "Ken" has now been used twice. I am sure that both hon. Members know that we do not refer in the Chamber to people's names—the hon. Gentleman should say,"the right hon. and learned Member" or "the Chancellor of the Exchequer".

**Mr. O'Brien:** You are right, Sir Geoffrey. I put the name in quotes, but you are right to correct the hon. Member for Dover and me.

Mr. Christopher Whitehouse's text book, "Revenue Law: Principles and Practices," says of executive share options:

"The reason that many more of these schemes have been established than all employee schemes is precisely because they are not all employee schemes and benefits under them can be granted to selected employees and because the value of the benefits they can be given is much higher. Those company directors who granted share options saw great advantages to themselves in the schemes. They could be selective about who they gave the benefits to and so"—

all too often—

"they gave the benefits to themselves. For the directors of the newly privatised utilities, they became great milch cows, providing perks, pensions, pay rises"

and all sorts of other wonderful benefits.

The Financial Secretary asked us to go into a history of what he called "all our yesterdays". The fact that I understand that phrase may date us both, but I remind him that it was Labour that initiated proposals for increased employee shareholding. Labour's 1978 profit-sharing scheme provided favourable tax treatment only if all employees with at least five years' experience benefited on similar terms.

The 1980 "save as you earn" scheme introduced by the Conservatives continued the principle of benefits on similar terms, but in 1984 Lord Lawson introduced the approved discretionary share option scheme—executive share options. That removed restrictions and allowed the company—in practice, directors of the company—to choose who received the benefits. The 1984 scheme gave a one-way bet: an option to purchase if the share price rose—if it fell, no one would need to buy the shares.

Executive share options were always aimed at a small group. On introducing them, Lord Lawson said that his aim was

"to increase the incentives and motivation of existing executives and key personnel".—[*Official Report*, 13 March 1984; Vol. 56, c. 299.]

Those options were not intended for all. They were a special incentive for the preferred. The taxpayer provided a double largesse to directors in the privatised gas, water and electricity companies. Not only was the taxpayer forced by the Government to sell off the shares at a knockdown price, but the options on shares had a built-in, guaranteed price increase which, coupled with the tax concession, meant that those who had a lot of shares made an awful lot of money.

The schemes allowed massive profits that were unjustified by performance. In British Gas alone, 1,042,141 share options were awarded to its directors, including 268,000 to Cedric Brown, the chief executive. That was on top of his salary rise, following privatisation, of 75 per cent. As privatisation progressed, so the scandals surrounding share options grew.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Why does the Labour party want all those eligible to receive share options to have them on similar terms? Why should not directors give different employees in different areas of the company, who might have contributed different amounts to the company's profitability, different levels of share options?

9.30 pm

**Mr. O'Brien:** The hon. Gentleman was not here for the earlier part of the debate, so he does not realise that we have already dealt with that point, which was raised by the Financial Secretary. Indeed, I intend to deal with it again later in my remarks. If the hon. Gentleman had watched our debate on television or attended the Chamber he would be a little better informed about what has been said.

I was outlining the ways in which the various privatised utilities had benefited. In all, they issued more than £100 million in share options. Many of those options have yet to be exercised and the benefits realised. Coupled with that, we have seen directors earning massive amounts through Government policies on share options. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) said, 40,000 jobs were lost in the electricity industry, 9,000 in the water industry, 26,000 in British Gas and 90,000 in British Telecom.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those massive job losses show that those industries were heavily overmanned when they were in the public sector, which is a further justification for their privatisation?

**Mr. O'Brien:** It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman justify unemployment. Is that his policy?

*[Mr. O'Brien]*

Is that what he wants? Does he want to justify an increase in unemployment? That is the record of the Conservative Government.

**Mr. Marshall:** The hon. Gentleman asked whether it was my policy to increase unemployment. Is he not aware that unemployment in Britain is lower than anywhere else in the European Union? Is he not aware that the level of employment in Britain is higher than in almost any other European country? That is job creation. The hon. Gentleman supports job destruction through the social chapter and a minimum wage.

**Mr. O'Brien:** The hon. Gentleman tried to justify job destruction in the privatised utilities and then tried to suggest that in some way he was responsible for lowering unemployment. In fact, since the Conservative party took office, unemployment has doubled.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** Have not the job losses in the privatised utilities occurred partly as a result of the huge practice of outsourcing and contracting out core operations such as sewerage and water pipe maintenance, which should be done by the employees who then—

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. We are debating share options, and we should get back to that subject.

**Mr. O'Brien:** My hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough is right, but I heed your words, Mr. Morris.

Even the Prime Minister said:

"I do not agree with the excessive and unjustified salary increases. I have made that perfectly clear. But for companies within the private sector that must be a matter for shareholders and not for the Government."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 464.]

The Government refused to intervene and deal with the abuses in the privatised utilities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood said, they vacillated and abdicated their responsibility to end the abuse. In contrast, Labour has always believed that the Government must undertake the minimum amount of intervention necessary to correct market failures and inadequacies and to enable the economy to work fairly for all society. Labour wants competition and success in industry. We recognise that the market can sometimes fail, so minimal intervention by Government is right to create the circumstances for fairness. That is why we put forward the amendment.

Eventually, the Government were forced to do something, due to the anger of the public and the campaigns of Labour Front Benchers. The Government appointed a committee of directors to look at salaries and share options for directors—again, an example of double standards. Here I should refer to the amendment, because the debate at that time is the reason why we tabled the amendment. The Government decided to deal with the abuses by appointing a committee of directors to consider their own salaries and conditions. When have the Government ever suggested that, if nurses want a pay rise, they should set up a committee of nurses to determine how much that rise should be? That was an abdication of leadership on the part of the Government.

The amendment takes further Labour's campaign to create a stakeholding economy, and clearly delineates the difference between the parties. While the Conservatives created perks for the privileged in 1984, Labour wants to give all employees a stake in their companies. The amendment helps to crystallise the distinction between the Conservatives and Labour. Workers already have a limited stake in their companies through their jobs and through their dependence on those jobs for an income for their families, but we want to give them a greater stake in the future of the business and allow them to identify even more with the success of the enterprise.

Many firms already recognise the importance of employee stakeholding, which provides motivation and incentives for people at work. Labour believes that shareholding by employees is a key way forward as we try to create a British stakeholding economy, and it can also bring massive benefits to British industry. One of the great failures of the Tory Government is that, for all their rhetoric, they have not provided the shareholding democracy that they have advocated. The Government schemes to increase employee share ownership have all too often been open to the sort of abuse that has taken place in the privatised utilities.

**Mr. Jack:** Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that 2 million people are involved in the profit-sharing and save-as-you-earn schemes? Does he further acknowledge that, since we came to power—as my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) said—the number of shareholders in this country has risen from 3 million to 11 million?

**Mr. O'Brien:** Labour's policy of introducing a profit-sharing mechanism in 1978 led to the similar save-as-you-earn scheme, which enabled a number of employees to get involved in their companies. The Financial Secretary praises our scheme—it is a scheme that the Government copied from Labour—but he tries to justify restricting the availability of shares, although he claims to advocate that they be made available to all employees in the company. If he was in the House at time, there can be no doubt that he voted in 1980 to ensure that all employees should be involved, so why does he now want to deny them that involvement? Why does he say now that those employees should not participate in their own companies?

We need a change of culture in British companies. There must be an end to the conflicts between management and workers and a realisation that all have a vested interest in the long-term success of the company. Employee shareholding can help to do that. Many employee shareholders will work for a company for many years, so they will have a vested interest in looking to the long-term success of the business. They will see the benefits of investing now to secure jobs and prosperity for the future, rather than seeking short-term high dividends because their money can flit from one share to another.

Because of that long-term perspective, employee shareholders can help to put right the weaknesses in our financial institutions, particularly their short-sightedness and their under-investment in industry. Employee shareholding will be beneficial to the public, as it will help the economy and encourage a long-term perspective that will help investment in industry. Therefore, it is in

the public interest, the taxpayer's interest and the Government's interest to use the tax system to promote employee shareholding.

Where the scheme can benefit all, so all should contribute through incentives in the tax system to encourage it. We want the amendment to be carried because it will benefit each and every employee, and benefit the nation also—something that can never be said of the Government's executive share option scheme. Whatever the Government hoped in 1984, the lax wording and the opportunities for abuse resulted in the scheme disproportionately benefiting an elite of directors. It is the failure of the 1984 scheme and the inadequacy of the Government's attempts to amend it to which the amendment is addressed.

During the controversy last year, the Conservatives never fully understood the anger and outrage of the British people at the abuses of share options. The amendment and clause 105 are the results of that anger. At a time when taxpayers were being told that they had to shoulder the burden of the highest tax increase ever imposed on the British people, when Britain was in the midst of a recession, and when unemployment stood at appalling levels—more than double the level when the Conservatives took office—a privileged elite of directors, mainly in the privatised utilities, abused a legal power to grant themselves excessive pay rises and share options in a tax-efficient way, thanks to the Government. The Tories saw nothing wrong with that, so out of touch were they with the British people. They never understood the anger about executive share options, any more than they understood the anger over VAT on fuel.

The British people objected to the simple unfairness of it all. Our people have an innate sense that things should be fair, and the executive perks in the privatised utilities breached that British sense of fairness. The Government are not in touch with that basic instinct of the British people because they do not share it. In this amendment, Labour has moved a policy which is fair, which will ensure that share options are open to all employees and which is based on all employees having a stake in a company rather than serving only the interests of the elite who control the company.

Our amendment to clause 105 speaks for the many in Britain. We want everyone to have a stake in their company, their future and their country. That is the real distinction. While the Government speak for the few, Labour speaks for the many. That is why the amendment deserves support.

*Question put*, That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided*: Ayes 255, Noes 276.

**Division No. 33]** **[9.40 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George

Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wkshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warsing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Eric Martlew and**
**Mr. Jon Owen Jones.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian

Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Gary Streeter and**
**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.**

*Question accordingly negatived.* nil

**Mr. Peter Snape** (West Bromwich, East): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I understand that, during the last debate, my involvement with a west midlands bus company was mentioned. I further understand that the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) was even less kind to me about my involvement with the bus company than he was to his sheep a couple of years ago. Will you, Mr. Morris, tell Conservative Members that the tradition of this House is that, if one hon. Member wishes to make a personal attack on another, he or she must notify that hon. Member first? Will you also pass that advice on to the Financial Secretary, who indulged in the same attack? I have no intention of going through the explanations that I have already given the House, and I have nothing to feel guilty about.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means:** I can confirm that any hon. Member who wishes to refer to another hon. Member should forewarn him that he wishes to do so.

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 69, line 44, leave out '£20,000' and insert '£30,000'.

**The Chairman:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 4, in schedule 15, page 269, line 44, leave out '£20,000' and insert '£30,000'.

**Mr. Shaw:** The purpose behind the amendment is to raise the limit on approved share option schemes from the £20,000 that was originally proposed to £30,000. The figure of £20,000 is too low to operate a wide-ranging share option scheme that brings in not just very low income earners, but some of the people who are just above very low income levels.

The House should bear in mind that the share options are held over a three-year period. We are not talking about something that can be allocated at a rate of £20,000 per annum, but a fixed sum for at least a three-year period. The £30,000 limit would include people who are above very low income levels, but fall well short of fat cats. I would describe some of the beneficiaries as young, hard-working, aspiring, low and middle-income cats rather than fat cats. Those who are working in early-stage and developing companies would also benefit. There has been a cross-party view in the House that high-technology companies should be encouraged.

I shall give three brief examples of the pressure that I have received from a number of people outside the House to raise the limit from £20,000 to £30,000. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has received many representations. In the retail trade, the figure of £30,000 would cover both store supervisors and junior managers. In high-tech companies such as an Internet service company, where many American companies are often bidding for staff, the figure would cover the highly skilled junior staff.

Among the many letters that I have received on share options was one from a research scientist in a small biotechnology company in Kent. Such people would benefit from a raised limit. They are not big income earners, but they hold the United Kingdom's future in their hands. They will help to create and maintain the jobs of the future.

I hope that my hon. Friend can accept this minor amendment.

**Mr. Jack:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) for the way in which he moved his amendment. He knows that our overall objective is to encourage companies to introduce schemes from which as many of their employees as possible can benefit and to encourage employees to participate in them.

The new tax relief for company share option plans must be seen in that context. The representations that we have received in response to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's invitation made it clear that there was demand for a third sort of scheme aimed at providing a more flexible way of granting options to modestly paid employees. That is what the new scheme is intended to do and that is why we initially pitched the limit on the value of options that could be granted at £20,000.

On the basis of what my hon. Friend said and the representations that we have received, I accept that it is sometimes difficult to set the right limit. We initially felt that the balance was about right but, like my hon. Friend, I received representations. The British Retail Consortium, the ESOPs Centre and the Society of Share Scheme Lawyers were among those who asked us to review the subject to see whether £20,000 was right. We did so and I have thought carefully about the representations.

I recognise the force of the broad range of arguments that have been advanced. As those who have made representations to us suggested, the limit might have been a shade too tight to allow middle managers to receive a significant quantity of options. The limit was aimed at middle managers. There was no attempt to push it higher, into the stratosphere, as Opposition Members suggested earlier.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and I have concluded that it would be right to provide greater flexibility, which my hon. Friend the Member for Dover

*[Mr. Jack]*

adverted to, for the companies that want it, so that they might tailor the scheme to meet their needs and those of their employees. On that basis, I am prepared to recommend to the House that we accept my hon. Friend's—

**Mr. Vivian Bendall** (Ilford, North): As a signatory of the amendment, may I thank my hon. Friend for making the opportunities open to a greater part of middle management?

**Mr. Jack:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's endorsement of the line on which I was about to conclude by saying that I am prepared to recommend to the House that we accept the amendment.

10 pm

**Mr. Darling:** I wonder whether the Financial Secretary—as we are in Committee, he has an opportunity to do so—would tell us whether the Treasury has made an estimate of the cost of agreeing to amendment No. 3.

Does not the support for the amendment emphasise the truth of what we said earlier—that not only do the Conservatives oppose making schemes available to the many but, given the opportunity, they are prepared, inch by inch, bit by bit, to open all the doors that they said that they would close? What they are about is benefiting—

**Mr. William Cash** (Stafford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Darling:** No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman has not been in the Chamber all night, and he need not expect to get in on the debate like that.

The Conservative party says that it intends to shut off loopholes and close down abuses, but the minute that it is subjected to pressure, it is prepared to start opening up the scheme. What is worse, when we table an amendment that is designed to ensure that the many are able to participate in schemes, Conservative Members vote it down. Given any opportunity, the Conservatives will choose to benefit as small a group of people as possible and deny opportunities to the many.

**Mr. Jack:** Sir Michael, let it be—[HON. MEMBERS: "Mr. Morris."] Mr. Morris, let it be known to every middle manager in the country that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) would not accept a modest change to the upper limit of the scheme—a change advocated by a broad range of outside interests and companies that have made representations to us. We listened carefully to what they said, and I have announced that I recommend that the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover be accepted.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central asked me two questions. First, he asked about the cost of the scheme. *[Interruption.]* Would the hon. Gentleman care to listen to the answer, as he asked the question? The answer, in this public expenditure survey, is zero. When the scheme comes in, we estimate that the costs will be about £10 million.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central misleads the House when he says that we do not want the employee share option plan to be available to all employees. The difference between the hon. Gentleman and Conservative Members is that we believe that companies should have the choice to tailor the scheme to meet their needs. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, if some companies were confronted with the regime that he has advocated, they would not even contemplate having any schemes, which denies the object of his remarks.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Clause 105, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Schedule 15

SHARE OPTION SCHEMES APPROVED BEFORE PASSING OF THIS ACT

*Amendment made:* No. 4, in schedule 15, page 269, line 44, leave out '£20,000' and insert '£30,000'.—*[Mr. David Shaw.]*

*Schedule 15, as amended, agreed to.*

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

*Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.*

## Asylum Seekers

*[Relevant documents: the First Report from the Social Security Committee, on benefits for Asylum Seekers (House of Commons Paper No. 81), and the Report of the Social Security Advisory Committee with the Statement by the Secretary of State for Social Security (Cm. 3062).]*

10.4 pm

**Mr. Chris Smith** (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 30), dated 11th January 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be annulled.

I fear that we have a ridiculously short amount of time in which to debate a measure that will affect the life and livelihood of thousands of people. I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to contribute to the debate, so I shall be brief.

I shall be urging my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote strongly against the regulations, primarily because they are simply inhumane. They will ensure that people who are in this country legitimately—many of whom have fled repression and torture—will receive no benefit whatsoever unless they submit their applications for asylum at the port of entry and prior to the first determination. The Government are seeking to introduce powers in the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is also before the House, to remove child benefit as well. That will leave asylum seekers with no means of sustenance or support. Every time that we have asked how those people, who are legitimately in this country, will survive without any means of support, the Government have provided no answer. The Government are simply driving people—including children and the sick and disabled—into destitution.

We welcome the changes that the Government have made to the transitional arrangements, but that fundamental point about the regulations has not altered. I believe that, in bringing forward the regulations, the Government are forgetting the duties and decencies expected of a Government in a civilised country.

Government Members will say that most of those who seek asylum are bogus claimants; that is the case that the Government have made. That may be true of many claimants, but many more cases are not bogus and the genuine will suffer along with the rest. That is the problem with the Government's proposals. I suspect that the Secretary of State will refer tonight to the 90 per cent. of people, or more, who are refused refugee status.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster): It is 96 per cent.

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Lady is wrong, because the figure varies from year to year.

We should also remember that, every year, 25 per cent. of asylum applicants are granted refugee status or exceptional leave to remain because it is found that they have a genuine and legitimate reason to remain in the United Kingdom. For example, a Bosnian Muslim, who does not fear his Government but is nonetheless genuinely afraid to remain in his own country, would be likely to be granted exceptional leave to remain in this country. I believe that his legitimate reason to remain in this country is every bit as strong as that of someone who is granted refugee status.

I am sure that we will hear another great untruth from Conservative Members tonight.

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): The hon. Gentleman has given the example of a Bosnian Muslim who is in genuine fear of his life. Surely that person will not turn up at the port of entry and say that he is on holiday or that he is visiting relatives and does not plan to stay for an extended period. As he is in fear of his life, he will state his problem at the port of entry and he will receive social security benefits because he has made that declaration.

**Mr. Smith:** I shall leave aside the obvious point that such a person might have been a student in this country or been here on holiday before circumstances in his country changed and forced him to apply for asylum. I shall turn to the issue of port of entry applications in a moment, because it is an important point. I accept that the hon. Gentleman may genuinely believe that people should make their applications at the port of entry, but I believe that he is wrong to do so. I will specifically address his point shortly, but I shall first address the other great untruth that the Government will doubtless tell us tonight—that the measure will somehow save the taxpayer some £200 million.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) allowed to use the word "untruth"? I thought that it was unparliamentary.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I did not hear the word.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** He used it twice.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The word is not one that parliamentarians usually use. It is occasionally appropriate to a political party, but it is not usually acceptable in the Chamber.

**Mr. Smith:** I make no imprecation against the honour of Conservative Members, but I do against the honour of their argument, and that is what I am talking about. The Government tell us that the measure will save the taxpayer £200 million. It will not.

In 1994, 33,000 people lodged asylum applications, and among those were nearly 5,000 dependent children. If families are left with no livelihood, they will have to depend on emergency support from social services or on the local authority taking their children into care. It costs £45,000 a year to keep a child in local authority care. If fewer than 5,000 children are taken into care, that would wipe out entirely the supposed savings that the Government claim from the measure.

**Mr. Michael Stephen** (Shoreham): Is not the hon. Gentleman aware that, when the people he is talking about present themselves at the port of entry, they are questioned on their reasons for coming here? They have to satisfy the immigration authorities that they have means of support while they are in the country, either because

*[Mr. Michael Stephen]*

they have money themselves or have friends and relations here. Is he not being alarmist when he suggests that such people and their dependants will become destitute?

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman completely mistakes the whole process of paying income support to someone. People are not entitled to receive income support if they have other means of income and livelihood, and that is the point at issue.

The Government have said that they are discussing with local authorities the level of the burden that the measure would place on them. But the Government have not told us whether they are going to pay the local authorities in full for the cost of taking children into care and making emergency social services payments. If the Government cover the local authorities' costs in full, they will not make any savings. If, however, they do not pay the local authorities in full, they will simply transfer expenditure from the Department of Social Security to the local authorities. That is, perhaps, why Westminster and Wandsworth, those great bastions of socialism, are still pursuing their application for judicial review of the Government's intentions.

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Social Security Select Committee took a lot of evidence on that issue of cost to local authorities? We heard many alarmist people who had all sorts of allegations about how little the measure would save and how children would be treated. But does the hon. Gentleman accept that no one suggested that local authorities were likely to take the children away from their parents and put the children into care at a cost of £45,000 a year each? Even the most alarmist local authorities—and they were going over the top—only suggested that they would keep the children with their parents and that any additional costs, at current prices, would be for housing the families.

**Mr. Smith:** Clearly, the hon. Gentleman was not awake during the proceedings of the Social Security Select Committee. If he looks at page xvii of its report, he will read:

"The Association of London Government indicated a range of costs from £20,000 to £40,000 for looking after a child".

That association is a cross-party body, and it tackled the very point that the hon. Gentleman has raised. He speaks of alarmist organisations, but the list of bodies that gave a great deal of very good evidence to the Committee included: the Board of Deputies of British Jews, The British Medical Association, the chief adjudicator for immigration appeals, the Disability Alliance, the family service units, the Immigration Law Practitioners Association, and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. I am just saddened that the hon. Gentleman seems not to recognise the validity of what they said.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West) *rose—*

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman chaired the Committee and wrote the report, so I will give way to him—but this is the last time.

**Mr. Hughes:** If everything is so ghastly, and if the Select Committee has it all wrong, why did an equal number of Labour and Conservative Members vote in favour of the report?

**Mr. Smith:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the vote in the Committee when it was proposed that it be recommended that the Government withdraw these regulations. The Labour Members voted in favour, the Conservative Members against.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Where does the report say that?

**Mr. Smith:** In the minutes.

There are, however, other arguments against these regulations. First, they fundamentally undermine the concept of appeal. There is a long and noble tradition in this country that an appeal gives a person the right to a further hearing. The first decision is not endorsed, and hence not fully valid, until the appeal has run its course. Yet the Secretary of State tells us in these regulations that an appeal effectively means nothing. Any case after the first determination will be assumed to be bogus. That, I believe, throws every judicial principle on its head and is deeply damaging to our notion of justice.

**The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley):** Can the hon. Gentleman explain why successive Labour Governments have applied exactly the principle which he holds to be against natural justice to all British claimants who, on being refused a benefit, appeal against that rejection and are not given the benefit during the period of appeal?

**Mr. Smith:** The right hon. Gentleman has used that argument before: it is bogus. He is not comparing like with like. It is a fallacy to claim that an appeal against an asylum refusal and an appeal against a benefit decision are precisely the same.

Secondly, there is an assumption—this answers the point made by the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce)—on the part of the Government that an application made at the port of entry is more likely to be valid than one made afterwards. Common sense should tell the Secretary of State that that is not true. People fleeing from injustice, repression and torture, often after the trauma of a long and difficult journey and fearful of authority in the countries from which they come, have as the last thing on their minds when they first arrive here the idea that they must fill out forms and make their applications for asylum. They will be fearful of figures in authority, and it is very likely that they will be in great difficulty in terms of knowing where to go or who to consult.

I shall give Conservative Members, who seem to think that we are not talking about human beings but about statistics, an example. It was given to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), who wrote to a Minister at the Home Office about a particular case just a few days ago. My hon. Friend wrote:

"The above is a Kurdish refugee, who applied for asylum on 24th October 1995, three days after his arrival at Heathrow. He arrived at the weekend, and he speaks no English. He contacted the Kurdish Centre at the beginning of the next week, and they made an application for asylum on his behalf.

He has been imprisoned and tortured by the Iraqi regime. He is disabled, having suffered injuries as well as torture. He was arrested and tortured on two separate occasions, and fled because he was warned by his uncle that the Iraqi police were coming to arrest him again. He has had to leave his wife and children in Iraq. He is certain that if he is forced to go back he will be killed."

Under the Secretary of State's new proposals, if that applicant were to arrive after 5 February, he would not qualify for benefit payments. That is wrong. That is why we oppose the regulations.

**Mr. Lilley:** The case that the hon. Gentleman just mentioned—if the circumstances are as he says—evokes natural sympathy throughout the House. If someone in those circumstances arrives at a British port and is asked the purpose of his visit, what answer would he give? Surely it would be, "I've come here to seek refuge from persecution." It would not be to invent a story that he was here to visit someone, to substantiate that to the immigration officer and then demonstrate that he had the means to sustain himself while here.

**Mr. Smith:** But the Secretary of State completely misunderstands the sense of fear and desperation that is often felt by those who come here fleeing from repression. The last thing that they are likely to do, seeing a figure in authority, is immediately to reveal their entire life history. Very often they want to seek help and advice from others in their community. That is precisely what happened in this case. It is clearly a case where there is genuine need and where there is genuine fear of repression, but because of difficulties, which inevitably occur when someone arrives at a port of entry in this country, he made his application three days later. The Secretary of State should take that into account.

If common sense and plain ordinary decency do not move the Secretary of State, perhaps the figures will, because he told us a week or two ago that the approval rate for asylum applications from people who applied at the port of entry was greater than that for people who applied subsequently. The figures show that that is not the case.

**Dame Jill Knight** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) *rose—*

**Mr. Smith:** I shall not give way, because I have given way many times and time is pressing on.

For the first 10 months of 1995, 4.8 per cent. of in-country applicants were approved for asylum. The figure for port applicants approved for asylum was 3.5 per cent. The pattern is exactly the same for each of the previous three years. The percentage who applied after they arrived at the port of entry but were approved for asylum—accepted by the Government as being genuine refugees—was higher than that for people who applied at the port of entry.

So when the Government tell us, as the regulations seek to do, that an application at the port of entry is somehow more genuine than one that is received after someone has arrived at the port of entry, they are wrong, and the figures show that they are wrong.

The Government also need to understand that the Social Security Advisory Committee, the body that they have established to advise them formally on social security matters, gave an unprecedented report rejecting wholesale the Government's proposed regulations. The Committee makes one further and telling point. It says:

"We fully understand the Secretary of State's view that it is unreasonable to expect the UK taxpayer to support people whose reasons for coming to this country are purely economic."

That point I do not think anyone would dispute. But the Committee goes on to say:

"However, it is clear to us from the evidence we have received that fair and expeditious immigration and asylum procedures are the best means of providing comprehensive and long-term arrangements to deal with these matters."

The Secretary of State is effectively making the social security system do the Home Office's job for it. If the Secretary of State really wants to reduce his expenditure, if he wants the taxpayer to spend less money supporting non-genuine claimants, he should not bring in regulations which harm the genuine claimants; he should speed up the assessment procedures. That is what we have been arguing for many months now. In fact, the Home Office is doing precisely the reverse at the moment. It is getting worse at it, rather than better.

Instead, the Secretary of State, no doubt anxious for a cheer at Tory party conference, has brought forward these deeply damaging proposals that will harm the good and the bad alike, that ultimately will not save money for the public purse, that fly in the face of reason and justice and that ought to be rejected by the House tonight.

10.25 pm

**The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley):** The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) began by saying that this was a ridiculously short debate. I am not aware of any representations from the Opposition for a longer debate or one earlier in the day—for the obvious reason that we all know that they are anxious to prove their credentials with readers of *The Guardian* and show that they are against these changes, but they do not want people in the country to know that they are against them. That is why they have let the debate go through late at night.

I, by contrast, am happy to have a debate at any time, and chose to make a public statement before the House rather than by written answer as would be normal. The Opposition are strong on hypocrisy today, and we are strong on the causes of hypocrisy, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said.

As I said in my statement in the House, the regulations, together with the changes that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is bringing in the Asylum and Immigration Bill, have three aims. The first is to ensure that the United Kingdom remains a safe haven for those genuinely fleeing persecution. The reason genuine refugees come to the United Kingdom is to share our freedoms, not to obtain our benefits. Their rights to asylum will not be altered in any way, and anyone arriving as a refugee and claiming asylum at the port of entry will continue to have access to benefits while the Home Office determines the claim.

The second objective is to deal more speedily with genuine claimants so that they can get on with their lives. The Home Office has already increased the number of caseworkers sevenfold since 1988, and an extra £37 million is being transferred from my budget to the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department to expand their asylum work further over three years.

**Mr. Keith Bradley** (Manchester, Withington): The situation has got worse.

**Mr. Lilley:** Of course it has got worse, because the number of claimants has continued to rise inexorably.

*[Mr. Lilley]*

That is why we have to act on the attractions of asylum through the benefit system as well as through the procedures in the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

The only other way of acting on the number of claimants is through taking measures to adjust the benefit arrangements and discourage the growing number of unfounded benefit and asylum claims which clog up the system to the disadvantage of genuine claimants. That is our third objective. The benefit reform contained in the regulations is essential to achieve that end.

**Mr. Max Madden** (Bradford, West): There can be no doubt that the regulations will ensure that, in February rather than January, large number of asylum seekers will be left destitute and homeless. Leaving that aside, however, may I ask what justification there is, when benefit is being denied, for continuing to prohibit asylum seekers from seeking or obtaining employment for at least six months after they have submitted their asylum claims? If the main purpose of the regulations is to reduce public expenditure, surely it would be best to enable asylum seekers to seek employment immediately after the submission of the claims.

**Mr. Lilley:** Under all Governments, the practice has been not to let asylum seekers work during the first six months. One of the reasons why people come to this country pretending to be asylum seekers when they are, in fact, economic migrants is that they want to work here. Most countries do not allow asylum seekers to work at all; we give them that right after six months.

The rising tide of asylum seekers represents a major problem that no responsible Government could possibly ignore. Last year, the total number of people claiming asylum in the United Kingdom, including dependants, exceeded 57,000. In the previous year, the figure was 42,000. That, in turn, was a tenfold increase over the past 10 years. Yet, in the same period, the increase in the number of asylum seekers on the continent was less than threefold. Britain's share of all the asylum seekers coming to Europe has trebled over the last decade. Moreover, since 1994 the number of claims has fallen by a third on the continent, whereas in 1994 it rose by 45 per cent., and there was a further 35 per cent. increase last year.

Amnesty International agrees with us, saying:

"The truth of the matter is that, since 1992, immigration controls and asylum procedures—particularly those applied at the border—have been tightened far more in some European countries than in the UK . . . This . . . no doubt works to make the UK a more attractive destination to would-be asylum-seekers than some other European countries."

France and Belgium, for example, offer no benefits to any asylum seeker after 12 months. Italy offers no benefits to any asylum seeker at all, and as a result only 1,800 people have bothered to claim asylum there. Germany and Holland accommodate asylum seekers in camps, giving benefits mainly in kind rather than cash.

The simple fact is that the growth in the number of claims reflects a huge increase in economic migration, rather than an increase in the number of people fleeing from genuine persecution. The overwhelming majority of claims for asylum turn out, on examination, to be unfounded. Fewer than 7 per cent. of claimants are eventually given refugee status, including those who are successful on appeal. We are, in effect, spending £200 million a year—that sum is rising rapidly—over 90 per cent. of which goes to people who are not political refugees at all.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is it not misleading to talk of 7 per cent., or 4 per cent., of people eventually being given refugee status? Another 14 or 15 per cent. are given exceptional leave to remain, and those of us who have dealt with refugee cases know that it is almost as hard to obtain exceptional leave to remain as it is to be recognised as a refugee.

**Mr. Lilley:** I shall deal with the question of exceptional leave to remain in a moment. *[Interruption.]* I shall give my speech in my own way, and without further interruptions.

None the less, under the regulations, those who arrive in this country claiming to be refugees will remain entitled to benefit while the Home Office assesses their claim.

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Lilley:** I shall make a little progress, if I may, if only to please the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

We must recognise, however, that 70 per cent. of claims in this country are made by people who entered the country claiming to be students, tourists, visitors or business people. They had to convince the immigration officers that that was so, and that they had the means to support themselves when in this country. They accepted that they could not be a burden on public funds. Subsequently, they change their story and claim asylum. Under the present system, they are then entitled to receive benefits. In future, those who change their story will not be entitled to benefits. We will hold them to their original assurances, unless there has been an upheaval in the country from which they have come since they left it.

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although people may use all sorts of devious ways to get out of countries where they fear persecution, there is no need for them to lie at the port of entry when they come here? If they throw themselves at the mercy of people at the port of entry and tell the truth, they are much more likely to be believed to be genuine asylum seekers.

**Mr. Lilley:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The reason that genuine claimants come to this country and flee a country in which they are being persecuted is that they know that we are a haven of freedom. They come here because they trust our authorities, not because they distrust us. If they did distrust them, they would go somewhere else.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Lilley:** If the hon. Gentleman will permit, I will make some further progress.

We shall change the rules affecting asylum seekers to put them on the same basis as British citizens who are not entitled to benefits while appealing against rejection of a

benefits claim. As I said in my intervention on the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, successive Governments, including Labour Governments, have treated benefit claimants in this country in that way, and he did not come up with any specific reasons for distinguishing between British claimants appealing against rejection of benefit, and asylum claimants appealing against rejection of their asylum claim and against not being allowed to receive benefits during that period.

**Ms Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): May I give the Secretary of State two specific areas where a marked difference exists between an asylum seeker being denied benefits and a British national being denied them? I do not want to get into the ethical difference between seeking asylum and claiming benefits, but surely the most salient differences are, first, that an asylum seeker probably does not speak English and, secondly, that he or she will have no family, friends or support to assist while waiting for the application to be processed.

**Mr. Lilley:** That is not the case. The vast majority have contacts over here and, of course, by the time the question of appeal comes up, they have been found not to be genuine refugees. If they choose to pursue that claim, fair enough, but the present system encourages virtually everyone to appeal. If we had such a system internally, virtually everyone would appeal. As it is, only a small minority of British claimants whose application for a benefit is rejected, appeal. A large majority of their appeals are upheld by the tribunals because only those with a good case bother to appeal. The vast majority of asylum claimants appeal and 96 per cent. of those appeals are found to be unfounded. It cannot be right to continue virtually to pay people to make appeals, the large majority of which are bogus.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Secretary of State will recall that, in his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) highlighted a case, in which I have been involved, of a refugee who suffered torture and horrendous experiences in Iraq. On arrival in the United Kingdom, speaking no English, confused and unaware of the procedures, he did not make an immediate claim for asylum, but he did so three days later when advised by the friends with whom he had come to stay to seek safety from persecution. If the right hon. Gentleman has any humanity, how can he claim that that person is a bogus refugee?

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear my earlier intervention. He has failed to answer the question why, if all the circumstances he cited are correct, the person concerned—we all sympathise with that person—answered dishonestly the questions put to him by the immigration official.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Because he does not speak English.

**Mr. Lilley:** But the Home Office makes available translation and interpretation services in more than 100 languages, including Arabic. There is no question but that the person concerned could have made himself understood. He would have had to do so to convince the immigration officer that he was here as a student, if he said that he was a student; as a visitor, if he said that he was a visitor; as a business man, if he said that he was a business man. He would have had to be able to convince the immigration officer that he had the means to support himself while in this country. Did the hon. Gentleman even ask the person those questions?

**Mr. Raynsford:** Of course I asked those questions when the man came to my surgery with an interpreter. He explained, through an interpreter because he spoke no English, how he arrived in a foreign country in a state of terror, fleeing from persecution, and said that he had come to stay with his relatives and friends. He made an application for asylum later. It is a genuine case, and he should not be penalised by the regulations.

**Mr. Lilley:** It has emerged that the man had friends and relatives to support him, and that he convinced the immigration officer that that was so. That is satisfactory for him—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to deal with the general point about claims made in-country versus those made at the port.

It is nonsense to suggest that people fail to claim at the port because they do not know the rules. No one needs to know the rules; nor do people need to know English. There are interpretation facilities at the port. All they have to do is tell the truth when asked by the immigration officials at the port to give their reasons for coming to this country. If they say that they are fleeing persecution and they want asylum, they will subsequently be allowed to claim benefit while pursuing that claim.

If, however, they say that they are here to study, to visit relatives, as tourists or on business, they will have to convince the immigration authorities of that. They will be asked to show that they will be able to support themselves, and they will have to convince the immigration officials of that. They will probably be asked where they will stay, and they will have to provide information about that. They will probably be asked to show that they have a return ticket or the means to buy one.

People do not accidentally give the wrong answers to those questions. Of course, most of them answer honestly, and at the time they entered the country they did intend to come for those reasons, perhaps with the thought also of seeking asylum. On the other hand, that might not have been in their minds, but subsequently it was put into their minds. Quite a substantial number do not make the asylum claim until the end of their period of entitlement to stay or until they have overstayed.

**Mr. Chris Smith:** If that is the case, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us why, year after year after year, a higher proportion of applicants for asylum who apply after they came into the country are awarded refugee status than applicants who applied at the port of entry?

**Mr. Lilley:** That is not invariably the case. The numbers are small—

**Mr. Jack Straw** (Blackburn): In every year?

**Mr. Lilley:** No, not in every year.

**Mr. Smith** *rose—*

**Mr. Lilley:** I am answering the previous point.

*[Mr. Lilley]*

The numbers accepted as refugees are small indeed, whether the claim is made afterwards or at the port. We are talking about the difference between very small percentages. If my recollection is correct, in 1994—the last full year for which we have figures—the proportion claiming in-country who were eventually given refugee status was smaller than that at the port.

**Mr. Smith:** I have to say that the Secretary of State is incorrect for the years 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995. He says that we are talking about very small numbers of people. There were 670 last year, 530 the year before that, 1,260 the year before that and 705 the year before that. The Secretary of State's figures are incorrect.

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Gentleman is confusing percentages and absolute numbers. The fact is that the majority of people at present do claim in-country, and the majority of people who are eventually accepted claim in-country.

**Mr. Smith:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Lilley:** I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who cannot tell the difference between percentages and numbers.

**Mr. Smith** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) can see when the Secretary of State is giving way and when he is not.

**Mr. Lilley:** The—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Did I hear the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) suggest that an hon. Member was bogus? If so, I hope very much that he will withdraw that comment.

**Mr. Bernie Grant** (Tottenham): I said that the Secretary of State's arguments were bogus.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I am most grateful.

**Mr. Lilley:** The simple fact is that, since we announced the changes, the proportion of people choosing to claim at port rather than in-country has suddenly risen. One of the reasons people previously claimed in-country is that such a claim makes it more difficult subsequently to remove a person, as he will have to be subject to deportation procedures. Those claiming at port are easier to remove, as they are subject only to removal procedures. There was a positive advantage for people to claim in-country, apart from any desire to get benefit.

The change that we have made—even if people have to some extent circumvented it for benefits—will bring about greater honesty and clarity at ports, and will mean that people will not claim an artificial advantage by entering the country before they subsequently make their claim.

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Ms Abbott:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Lilley:** I have given way to a great number of hon. Members and I shall make some progress, if I may.

A number of critics of the changes that we have made have tried to suggest that the bulk of asylum seekers whose claims are rejected are not really bogus. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and his party's spokesman in another place, Lord Russell, have said that we are dealing not with bogus claims but with bogus refusals. They have claimed that the Home Office has in some way tightened up the definition of asylum seekers. That is simply and palpably untrue.

The definition used to define a refugee is laid down in international law by the Geneva convention and has not changed. Decisions made by Home Office officials are justiciable and can be taken to a further stage of appeal, and that is to a legal body and not a Home Office body. A case can be taken to a further judicial review if it is felt that the law is not being applied correctly. In 96 per cent. of cases where there is an appeal to a higher authority, the Home Office decision is upheld. There is no evidence that the Home Office is not interpreting the rules properly or correctly.

**Mr. David Alton** (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The Secretary of State will accept that Canada is not entirely parallel to the UK for these purposes, but will he reflect that only 4 per cent. of cases in this country are judged to be convention refugees, whereas in Canada 70 per cent. of those who apply are accepted for convention purposes? Does that—and the even more significant comparisons that can be made with other EC countries—not demonstrate that we receive far fewer people as convention refugees because of the way in which we choose to interpret the rules?

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Gentleman has chosen an exceptional country for an example, and he will know that the position in most other European countries is rather similar to that in this country—the rates of refusal and rejection are fairly similar.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury suggested that the bulk of asylum seekers should be considered as refugees. Another body, Asylum Aid, wrote to the *Evening Standard* to suggest that most refugees have

"fled imprisonment or the threat of death at a moment's notice, often with only the clothes they stand up in."

That is scarcely ever the case. To get to this country, it is usually necessary for people to get a visa in the first place. Hon. Members will know that that is not a speedy or an easy process. It often involves more than one visit to the British entry clearance officer in the country of origin and obtaining information from here before they arrive in this country. To suggest that people are arriving suddenly and unexpectedly, because of a knock on their door in the night, and that they have only the clothes they stand up in is untrue.

In this country, as in most other countries, we face a major problem because of the rising flow of economic migrants using the asylum procedures, which were set up for quite different purposes. We have to cope with that problem—any Government would have to try to cope with it—and there are only two ways to do so.

One way is to speed up the procedures, by using the improvements in the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is going through the House. The other is to reduce the

attraction of benefits. The Opposition have opposed both measures, as they have opposed every attempt by the House to update immigration and asylum procedures. Their approach is fundamentally irresponsible. It does not even meet the needs of genuine asylum seekers, who are the principal sufferers from a system that puts them in the long queue that is created by tens of thousands of bogus asylum seekers.

We have to take action; we have taken action. The measures that we have taken are sensible, well judged and, in the case of appeals, they parallel the treatment that we already give to British citizens. The changes are in the ultimate interests of genuine refugees and of good race relations in this country, and I commend them to the House.

10.51 pm

**Ms Liz Lynne** (Rochdale): I am pleased that we have had a chance to debate these regulations. That was due to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). Without him they would already have been put into practice.

I am glad that the proposed changes were examined in detail by the Social Security Advisory Committee, which took evidence from 225 individuals and organisations, from Shelter to the British Medical Association, Disability Alliance, Maternity Alliance, church groups and local councils—of all political persuasions, I hasten to add.

The SSAC concluded that the Government's proposals should not proceed, and stated:

"We do not believe that it is acceptable that a solution should be sought by putting at risk of destitution"—

"destitution" is the word the committee used—

"many people who are genuinely seeking refuge in this country, amongst whom may be numbered some of the most vulnerable and defenceless in our society".

**Mr. Stephen:** Does the hon. Lady recall that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that, to get into the country in the first place, the persons to whom she refers would have to satisfy the immigration officer that they have the means to support themselves while they are here? No question of destitution can arise.

**Ms Lynne:** I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can have heard me. I was quoting the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee, which is hardly an anti-Government body—the chairman and members were appointed by the Secretary of State. Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that? But still the Government will not listen—even though that committee's main function is to advise on social security regulations.

The people who support the regulations falsely claim that anyone who applies in-country is bogus. That claim is based on ignorance of the difficulties and the real trauma that asylum seekers have gone through before they get to this country. Many asylum seekers are ignorant of immigration law and the benefit rules. It is hardly surprising that they turn to friends, relatives and organisations for advice before going to Government officials. Often they were frightened of such officials in their own countries.

Most asylum seekers apply within a few days. Some come in on false passports because they cannot get genuine papers in their countries. A study by the Refugee Council showed that 42 per cent. of those who apply for asylum in this country applied on the same day; 8 per cent. within one day; and 31 per cent. within one week. Those are not people who have come to Britain on visitors' visas, stayed for six months, decided that they like the country and applied for political asylum; they are genuine refugees. I do not doubt that there are some people who do that sort of thing. They have to be dealt with quickly and, if they are bogus, they must be dealt with accordingly and sent back to their countries.

We are talking about genuine asylum seekers. The Home Office granted large numbers of genuine asylum seekers permission to come into the country. Between 1992 and 1994, there were 2,495 cases of refugees who applied for asylum in-country, compared with 1,040 who applied at the port of entry. It is more common for genuine asylum seekers to apply in-country.

If the regulations were in place, those 2,495 people could not have had income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit. They would have been destitute. The regulations will, in time, lead to thousands of asylum seekers sleeping rough without any means of support. Think of the human costs—they will hit families with children, disabled people, torture victims and elderly people.

**Mr. Alan Howarth** (Stratford-on-Avon): Does the hon. Lady recall that Ministers spent a lot of time last year explaining how much they deplore discrimination against disabled people? Is she surprised that they now plan to discriminate in the benefit system against disabled people who happen to be asylum seekers? Does she agree that the Government's xenophobia will not be tolerated by the British people, who will not accept the destitution and suffering that this policy will cause?

**Ms Lynne:** I could not agree more. Disabled people will suffer along with the elderly and children. Many of those children will be taken into care because they have to be under the Children Act 1989. What will be the cost? How much more money will the Government give local councils to help them with the bill for taking those children into care? If they are not taken into care, what will happen to them? They will be on the streets. *[Interruption.]* There are beggars on the streets now, but once the regulations come into force, there will be more of them, and families, disabled people and children will be on the streets.

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** Clearly, Conservative Members are not prepared to listen to the hon. Lady's argument, which is based on fact. Perhaps they will take the word of Oxfam, which is preparing to set aside 47,000 sq ft of its ubiquitous black plastic and emergency food rations to assist refugee organisations and the Churches to provide the most meagre shelter for those people, who, under the regulations, will become absolutely destitute and be put on to our streets. Is it likely that Oxfam, an organisation that is overstretched dealing with major human disasters around the world, would be playing games if there were not a real need for such assistance?

**Ms Lynne:** It is not likely at all, and nor is it likely in respect of all the other organisations that are playing their part, or the Churches that have warned that there will be destitute families. They are not anti-Government organisations or people out to get the Government. They

*[Ms Lynne]*

are genuinely concerned about children and families who will become destitute. Ultimately, it will lead to many unjust refusals and a breach of the convention on refugees.

Last year, 95 men and women had their initial refusal overturned. Under these regulations, they will have no right to benefit while waiting to appeal. It takes on average 18.4 months for a case to be fully resolved; the initial decision takes on average 8.7 months. What are those people supposed to do? How are they supposed to live? What are the 3,333 people who have been waiting for five years and the 23,000 who have been waiting since 1993 supposed to do? The Government should be speeding up the appeals procedure if they want to cut the social security bill. Had those people not been entitled to benefit, they, too, would have been out on the streets. Do the Government expect local authorities to pick up the tab?

Perhaps the Secretary of State will tell us when replying to the debate where the appeal papers will be delivered. Will they turn up in a box somewhere underneath the arches? How will the people concerned be found? It will be an administrative nightmare. Even if somebody is granted leave to enter this country and the Home Office appeals against it, he or she will still receive no benefit until the appeal is heard.

We need a fair refugee procedure, which must include appeal and a means to support those people during the appeal procedure. I hope that the Secretary of State will change his mind before it is too late, in the name of humanity.

11.1 pm

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): The speech by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) had all the authenticity and voracity that one would expect from a Focus newsletter, which is not saying much.

The Social Security Select Committee's report on benefits says:

"The Committee shares the widespread view that the growth in the number of unfounded asylum claims, and their cost to the taxpayer, is a serious problem that the Government is right to tackle."

There must be a starting point. Some of the Opposition's comments so far would lead us to believe that they did not understand that. Outside this Chamber and its hothouse atmosphere, however, many people of all parties understand it. The general public also understand it, which is why they will welcome the regulations that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has tabled.

**Mrs. Maria Fyfe** (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Hughes:** I shall give way just a couple of times.

**Mrs. Fyfe:** I count myself fortunate.

Is not the hon. Gentleman embarrassed that the Churches must now revert to the role that they fulfilled before the introduction of the welfare state—ensuring that people do not go hungry and have some kind of shelter?

**Mr. Hughes:** If that were true, I would. We heard all the evidence presented by the hon. Member for Rochdale. We heard the destitution arguments, but they did not stand up to proper examination. Had my right hon. Friend not made the changes that he announced in his statement of 11 January, the 13,000 people who had been on benefit and whose benefit would have been cut off would have been in a difficult position. I recognise that and assume that it is why my right hon. Friend took that correct step.

But let us be clear: none of those people will be in a position that is different from what they expected, or the position that they declared themselves to be in, because they have declared that they will not be a burden on the state and that they recognise that they will not be eligible for social security benefits. That will continue to be the position.

I have no doubt that, when the regulations are introduced, we shall see some of the typical shroud waving that we have come to expect. We shall see some hard cases paraded, but the question that people have to ask is whether they needed to be hard cases at all, or whether they are being paraded as a gimmick to try to discredit what the Government are doing.

**Ms Abbott:** Clearly, the hon. Gentleman is unmoved by what he describes as the destitution argument. Is he interested at all in our obligations under international law? We are obliged to give such people rights of appeal. What sort of right of appeal is it if, for the 18 months or perhaps two years that people have to wait for their appeal, they have no means of support? The Opposition believe that the proposals may be within the letter of our international obligations, but they are clearly outside the spirit of our obligations under international law.

**Mr. Hughes:** I believe that to be complete nonsense. There is no justification for the very wide-ranging point that the hon. Lady has made. As my right hon. Friend stated in his opening speech, people need not be in that position.

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** The fourth paragraph of the summary of conclusions of the Select Committee's report provides an endorsement of the Government's view that they are acting in accordance with their obligations under international law. But will the hon. Gentleman make it absolutely clear to the House that it was the Tory majority on the Select Committee that ensured that its report goes so far to endorse the Government's policy?

The proceedings of the Select Committee record a series of far-reaching amendments, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) but defeated in Divisions. As a member of the Select Committee, I concur completely with my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North and I greatly regret that the Select Committee's report fails to acknowledge the Government's betrayal of our liberal and humane tradition. The Government's policy will create fear and destitution; it will break up families and be racially divisive, and I abhor it.

**Mr. Hughes:** I say two things in response to that intervention. I do not wish to ruin the career of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), but I have the highest regard for his integrity. He tabled the amendments entirely in line with the policies that he has always espoused. It is perfectly right for him to do that.

The views of the newly arrived Labour Member would carry more credibility if he had bothered to stay until the end of the proceedings and vote against publication of the report.

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** The hon. Gentleman is well aware that I made it entirely clear during the proceedings that I utterly deplored the tenor and thrust of the report. He well knows that I had to be in the Chamber at the end of the proceedings and could not be available to record my vote.

**Mr. Hughes:** I think that the hon. Gentleman has an argument with the *Hansard* reporters, because the point of order that he told us that he was leaving the Committee to make does not appear in the copy of *Hansard* for that day—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. It would be appropriate if hon. Members addressed the subject matter in hand.

**Mr. Hughes:** I turn to the point that has been raised about presenting oneself honestly at the port of entry. In the sixth paragraph of the Select Committee report we recommend that there

"should be access to appropriate and independent legal advice for all asylum applicants."

That is important. There is a project looking into work at ports of entry and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider the work carried out there to find out whether anything can be done to ensure that the advice is correct, appropriate and available.

One of the differences between the Select Committee and the Social Security Advisory Committee is that Members of Parliament have constituencies and see the cases that come before them. That is bound to make a difference to the way in which they view the subject. Of course, we see the cases where someone has come to this under one guise, stayed on under another guise and then sought asylum—not necessarily with a good reason for doing so, but merely to prolong his or her stay in this country. As a bonus, they are doing so at the expense of the taxpayer. It is time that that stopped, and that is one of the reasons why I welcome the new regulations.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton) *rose*—

**Mr. Stephen** *rose*—

**Mr. Hughes:** I give way to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence).

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** My hon. Friend would notice another difference between the conclusions of the Social Security Select Committee and the conclusions of the Social Security Advisory Committee. The SSAC, having said that the position presents a

"serious and very difficult problem for the Government",

recognises that

"under the current system benefits may be paid, sometimes for years, to people without foundation"

and that

"it is unreasonable to expect the UK taxpayer to support people whose reasons for coming to this country are purely economic",

provides no solution to the problem that confronts the Government.

**Mr. Hughes:** That indeed is one of the differences.

In previous debates, we were asked to believe that people who fled from the dreadful tyranny of the old regime in South Africa or of Nazi Germany, having found it necessary to use forged passports and documents and to lie to get into this country, would never have been admitted into this country if the regulations before us had been implemented. That is nonsense, and it is insulting to the people who are spoken of.

It is talking nonsense to say that someone fleeing from Nazi Germany, or one of the leaders of the African National Congress, having gone to all that trouble, having obtained the papers and come to this country, would lie on arrival at the port of entry. Those people would declare themselves honestly, and everyone knows it in their heart.

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Hughes:** I have given way enough, and other hon. Members want to take part.

**Ms Jackson:** It is very short.

**Mr. Hughes:** I have heard that from the hon. Lady before, and it has not been true. The fact is— *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The House knows the rules full well. If the hon. Member who has the Floor does not give way, other hon. Members must resume their seats.

**Mr. Hughes:** The message will travel back to people who intend to come to this country correctly and appropriately seeking asylum, that to seek asylum in the United Kingdom, it is now necessary to do so at the port of entry. Those people will understand that, and that is what they will do.

The bloodcurdling speech by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was designed to ride two horses. The Labour party knows that it cannot control its left wing unless it makes bloodcurdling speeches against this measure, but it knows that the bulk of its support, and most people in the country, support the measures that my right hon. Friend proposes.

Once again, it is middle-class left wingers, espousing one policy but believing in another. It is the type of "Harmanising" that we have come to expect from the Labour party.

11.12 pm

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): I shall be brief, as many hon. Members have constituency interests in this subject.

The Secretary of State is no doubt seething with anger tonight. He has every reason to feel that way. He knows that he has been stitched up by his Cabinet colleagues, because the Government have slowly woken up to a fact that the country has known for some time—the Home Office is in a shambles. The Home Office is unable to

*[Mr. Frank Field]*

protect our borders—one of its most important duties. Because of its inability to carry out that function, the Secretary of State has been cornered and forced to introduce those regulations and use the social security system as a means of controlling entry to the country because the Home Office has failed.

**Mr. Lilley:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, and the Social Security Select Committee that he chairs, for joining me in being stitched up and approving of the measures that I have just introduced.

**Mr. Field:** It is a pity, given that the Secretary of State thinks that the Committee gave a great deal of support to him, that he did not bother to comment on, agree with and support one of its recommendations—that those authorities at the point of entry, such as Dover and others in London, should not be obliged to foot the cost of the changes that central Government are introducing tonight. The Select Committee report recommended that local authorities be reimbursed fully for the additional costs associated with the changes that we are debating. I shall willingly give way to the Secretary of State to allow him to confirm that that is Government policy.

**Mr. Lilley:** I announced in my statement that we are discussing with local authorities ways in which we can make a substantial contribution to the unavoidable costs that they will incur as a result of the changes. There will be a meeting with local authorities later this week to discuss the matter. That seems a sensible course of action. The House has made representations that the Government should not cover 100 per cent. of the cost, as there should be some incentive for local authorities to economise in the measures that they introduce. Even Westminster has recognised that it should not be 100 per cent. cost recovery.

**Mr. Field:** As to my first point, the House will note that the Secretary of State has peeled himself away from the recommendations in the Select Committee report.

I repeat that we have crossed a threshold tonight. Even if we disagree with the policy, the Secretary of State has a reputation for running his Department. This is the first time that he has had to come to the Dispatch Box and introduce changes which prove that he has been overwhelmed by his colleagues. The DSS must now bring forward policies because the Home Office cannot manage it.

During the debate, the Secretary of State and his hon Friends have said repeatedly that, if we could control the point of entry more effectively, we would not need the regulations. He knows that the Government cannot deliver on that score: hence we have the regulations.

I refer also to the question of fraud. The Secretary of State did not comment on that. My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) said that many of the figures on which the Secretary of State based his argument tonight are bogus. He will know that the Select Committee is conducting a major inquiry into benefit fraud, including housing benefit fraud and the way that landlords rip off taxpayers. Thankfully, we have almost reached the point where we have only to announce that we are undertaking a fraud inquiry for the Secretary of State to introduce tightening-up measures.

During our inquiry into housing benefit fraud, some of the most effective anti-fraud officers gave evidence before the Select Committee. They pointed out that the Government are so slipshod in administering the national insurance system that there are about 10 million or 20 million more numbers than people in this country. They said that many of those national insurance numbers are being used by people who profess to be asylum seekers in order to register false claims for benefit.

In our report, we suggest that the Secretary of State should respond to that serious abuse by setting up a task force so that we can determine quickly and with some certainty whether the figures showing an increase in the number of asylum seekers—from which the Secretary of State made such capital tonight—are real or bogus. We must determine whether the figures are based on the gangs that are operating in this country and milking the social security system of vast sums of money. Although the Secretary of State claims that the report lent him much support, it is significant that he was not anxious to comment upon that recommendation.

In conclusion, we have crossed a threshold tonight. For the first time that I can remember in his present stewardship, the Secretary of State has sold out his Department. He has put the requirements of the Home Office before his responsibility for running a social security system which meets need. Although he talks bravely and he sometimes acts effectively against fraud, he has done very little to follow up our recommendation. He should look carefully at the way in which gangs of people are claiming to be asylum seekers and boosting the figures, when they are simply ripping off the social security budget and the taxpayers.

11.19 pm

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (City of London and Westminster, South): It is always a pleasure and a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I always seek to be brief, and on this occasion I shall, perforce, need to be. I do not think that a 90-minute debate does justice to this subject, but that must be laid at the door of the usual channels.

First, I must express my appreciation to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the personal trouble he went to in explaining the Government's policy to me. Secondly, in the light of the concerns that caused the delay in the laying of the regulations, I believe that the Departments involved could have paid a greater compliment to this House if they had agreed the transitional compensation arrangements before this debate, rather than opening negotiations on them three days after the debate has taken place, which is asking quite a lot of the faith of hon. Members whose constituencies are directly affected.

Thirdly, events have moved on since the Social Security Advisory Committee report, but to use language at its most neutral, it was a deeply sceptical document. The comparative lack of preparedness for the difficult questions in December leaves me continuing to be sceptical about how things will turn out on the night. In particular, I remind the House of what happened in 1988, when withdrawal of benefits from 16 to 17-year-olds occurred. That we eventually pulled back the number of rough sleepers which that created was partly due to the special hardship provisions, which do not apply in this case, and partly due to the rough sleepers initiative.

Much has been made of the parallel that benefits are denied to citizens of this country while appeals are being heard on the benefits decisions that went against them. But if they are later successful, their claims are backdated. No such relief will be available to voluntary agencies or friends who help an asylum seeker during his appeal. Of course I understand that only 4 per cent. of appeals succeed, and much is made of the fact that 96 per cent. fail, but are the 4 per cent. to be penalised because others, with whom they have no connection save that of category, are expected to fail? The fact that, even if successful in their appeals, they continue to lose benefit if the Home Office appeals against the appeal determination has a touch of Kafka about it.

My right hon. Friends assure me in essence that my fears are groundless, but if they are not, it is on the streets of my constituency, not on the streets of theirs, that this tragedy will be played out. One of my favourite military quotations comes from a British brigadier in Korea, who I believe died last year. He said of his Korean allies:

"I'm not going to have them executing people on my doorstep."

Mutatis mutandis, those are my views, too.

Thus, given that the preparations have not instilled confidence that everything is going to turn out precisely as the Government intend, I cannot give my vote to the Government tonight. What I can do is to give them the benefit of the doubt and not go into the Lobby against them. The benefit of the doubt is afforded to the Government in part because of the cack-handedness of the Opposition: not just because they have settled for a 90-minute debate, though if I were an asylum seeker I would regard that as casual, nor simply because the present arrangements cause genuine problems for race relations—many of my constituents in all honour believe that they are less well treated than the asylum seekers themselves—but most of all, if the Government do not attach sufficient importance to the 4 per cent. who win their appeals, the Opposition seem to see no problem at all in the significance of the 96 per cent. who do not.

11.22 pm

**Mr. Keith Bradley** (Manchester, Withington): This important but all too short debate has raised fundamental issues regarding the rights of genuine asylum seekers coming to this country. The Opposition recognise that there is a problem in dealing with large numbers of asylum applications, but we do not accept that the measures in these regulations are the correct way of dealing with the problem.

In particular, as a first step, we strongly believe that attention must be focused on the administrative procedures for dealing with applications in order to reduce the unacceptably long delays, many of which appear to be due entirely to gross inefficiency on the part of the Home Office, and the Government's general failure to implement fully the provisions of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993.

As the DSS explanatory memorandum on the regulations confirms, it currently takes an average of 18.4 months fully to resolve an asylum application, including any appeal to the immigration authority—in stark contrast with the 1993 Act's target of a maximum of three months. When the Minister replies, will he tell us what action will be taken to increase the efficiency of those procedures? Increased efficiency in itself would reduce the burden on the social security budget.

The Government highlighted the fact that many so-called "bogus" asylum seekers make an application after entry into the United Kingdom. Again, the DSS explanatory memorandum on the regulations omitted to mention—as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, the regulations make no allowance for this—that those who are genuinely fleeing persecution may have legitimate and wholly understandable reasons other than a change of circumstances for applying for asylum only after entering the country rather than on arrival: for example, to seek the help and support of relatives and friends before putting their fate into the hands of officialdom. It should be noted that people who do not speak English are often not interviewed in detail on arrival, when an interpreter is not available, but are asked to return to the airport after a few days, when an interpreter will be available.

It is apparent that the majority of genuine after-entry asylum seekers make their applications within a few days, for precisely the reasons that I have given. In that context, it is important to note that in the past the Home Office granted asylum to many after-entry asylum seekers. The Secretary of State tried to deny the figures tonight, but between 1992 and 1994 a total of 2,495 or 6.6 per cent. of after-entry applications were granted asylum, compared with a total of 1,040 or 4.9 per cent. of port applicants. It is reasonable to conclude that all the 2,495 applicants had genuine reasons for seeking asylum after entry into the United Kingdom. The figures show that the Secretary of State is quite wrong to claim, as he did today and in the response to the Social Security Advisory Committee, that the proportion of those recognised as refugees is lower for in-country applicants. Will the Minister comment on those figures when he winds up?

It is still unclear what the extra cost and burden will be on local authorities, for example, for taking children into care under the Children Act 1989. We know now that they will not receive a 100 per cent. rebate. What percentage will they get, and will the money be ring-fenced?

Representations against the regulations have been received from local authorities throughout the country and from many organisations representing the welfare and rights of genuine asylum seekers. The fears and concerns of organisations ranging from the Church, Amnesty International, Disability Alliance, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Refugee Council, Shelter, the Law Society and many others have not been satisfactorily addressed by the Government. The Government's own Social Security Advisory Committee told them not to proceed. We accept the arguments of those organisations, and will vote against the regulations tonight.

11.27 pm

**The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt):** Let me briefly remind the House of some of the salient points behind the regulations. First, no one has given proper weight to the fact that the regulations take place against widespread changes in the world which have made economic migration a factor at the end of the 20th century which it never was before. There is ease of communication and travel. I recall *The Economist* predicting at the beginning of the decade that the 1990s might be the decade of economic migration and that it would affect Europe considerably. We have heard no mention of that.

*[Mr. Alistair Burt]*

Secondly, we are dealing with a more than tenfold increase in the number of asylum applications in this country over a 10-year period. In 1984, there were 2,905 applications for asylum. Last year, there were some 40,000. Some 13,000 dependent people were with those asylum seekers. Not only are there £200 million-worth of social security costs, but each asylum seeker is considered to cost about £6,000 a year in other expenditure.

Thirdly, there is a widespread view among groups as diverse as Amnesty International and the Select Committee on Social Security that there is a widespread problem. It is naive to believe that the British benefit and immigration systems have played no part in the rise in numbers that we have seen. At the same time as there have been increases in applications to Britain, there have been decreases in applications to those of our European neighbours who have applied some measure of control to asylum applications.

With regard to benefit, we seek to distinguish not only between those who are genuine and those who are not, but between those who, when they apply at the port, palpably with nothing, who should be supported, and those who apply later. More than 60 per cent. of those applying for asylum apply more than two months after they have come into the United Kingdom. That information has been provided in a parliamentary answer. We seek to make that distinction because, having said that they had the means to look after themselves while they were here, they should be held to that.

The British people wish to see—

*It being half-past Eleven o'clock,* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Delegated Legislation (negative procedures)).*

*The House divided:* Ayes 264, Noes 279.

**Division No. 34]** **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffd, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McCrea, The Reverend William
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*

Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Peter Hain and**
**Mr. Dennis Turner.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*

Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Simon Burns and**
**Mr. Gary Streeter.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

# Mr. Amarjit Singh

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

11.44 pm

**Sir Trevor Skeet** (North Bedfordshire): I want to raise the case of Mr. Amarjit Singh, who wishes to come to this country to see his grandmother who has terminal cancer. He has made three applications—one on 17 August 1993, another on 24 October 1994 and a third on 28 March 1995—all of which have been refused. Many of the reasons that have been given for refusal are, in my judgment, insubstantial.

An example of that with the third application was the allegation that Mr. Singh did not have full knowledge of his grandmother's illness—yet he received his information from the high commission doctor, so that should have been adequate. It was also said that there was no evidence confirming his business in India or that he had lived with his grandmother since the death of his father in 1979.

The sick lady, Mrs. Seso Kaur, wrote to me on 25 April 1995 saying:

"I brought up my grandson from a toddler when his father . . . died. I even gave up my work in a local school so that my daughter-in-law [Amarjit's mother] could take my place to earn some money in order to raise her family."

It is worth observing that the other argument that was advanced related to the paternal uncle. It was suggested that there was no reason why Amarjit Singh should visit his grandmother to the exclusion of the paternal uncle and other, closer, relatives. That argument was adequately answered by the consultant, Dr. K. Farrington, in his letter of 2 November 1994. He said of the sick lady:

"She has a strong desire to see her grandson, Amarjit Singh, whom she brought up from a baby and who lived with her until she came to this country 6 years ago and for whom she naturally feel close ties and affection."

It is apparent that some of the reasons for refusal were thin indeed.

On 5 September 1995, the sick lady wrote:

"It would seem there is no end to the tragedy in my family. You are already aware of Amarjit's father's death. And now his mother, Mrs. Joginder Kaur has also died on the 28/8/1995. I am now extremely worried not only about Amarjit but also about his younger sister Usha Devi who is 17 years old."

It is rather interesting in such a case to have blatant refusals from the high commission in India, which is supposed to be doing a proper job.

I want to refer to the medical condition of Mrs. Kaur. There have been seven communications, three of them to the high commission in New Delhi—the communications by consultant J. H. B. Saunders on 1 December 1992; by Dr. Agrawal, the GP to the high commission, on 5 October 1994 on the lady's medical condition; and from Maria Eckford, social worker to the high commission, on 1 October 1994. The high commission was apprised of the situation and of the lady's deteriorating circumstances as far back as 1992, yet there have been constant refusals.

It may be important for me to bring the House up to date. On 3 January 1996, consultant Ken Farrington BSc MD FRCB wrote:

"Further to my previous letters about this lady, I am writing to advise you of a change in her circumstances. She has now developed a recurrence of her carcinoma of the gall-bladder. I am afraid her

prognosis is now very poor and very limited to weeks. She is still desperate to see her grandson and I would appeal to you to do all you can to ensure that this is possible in the required time-scale."

In his earlier letter of 24 November 1995, Dr. Farrington said that Mrs. Kaur had chronic renal failure and had been receiving haemodialysis programmes since September 1994. An earlier letter gives a good indication of the way Dr. Farrington feels about the matter. In his letter of 19 December 1994, he wrote:

"I was appalled to hear that this man's Visa application to visit his grandmother in the UK has been refused, in spite of my strong support . . . I would urge you most strongly to grant this Visa to allow this humanitarian visit as soon as possible."

I need hardly say that the consultant has responded most positively, and I give him full marks for the attention that he has paid to this case. He wrote me no fewer than six letters—on 2 November 1994, 19 December 1994, 11 January 1995, 19 April 1995, 24 November 1995 and 3 January 1996.

It would seem to be an overwhelming case, and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for coming here tonight to put forward the case for the defence for the entry clearance officer in New Delhi. For humanitarian reasons, we should consider this case much more deeply than it has been considered up to now. Two Ministers have been involved, and I have seen both on the matter. I am grateful to the present Minister for writing to me on 22 January.

I shall put certain specific points to my right hon. Friend, as I want to give him a full opportunity to state his case. There is no need to interview Mr. Singh again, as three rejections have been made on rather insubstantial grounds. There is no proof of guilt—only suspicion. The compassionate case now outweighs any doubts about the attitude of Mr. Singh, which can be explained by family distress. If there is any further delay, the course of the disease is liable to overtake any further consultation. Innocent cases are apt to be sacrificed, while international swindlers manage to foil the most skilful diplomats.

I make my final plea to the Minister. On grounds of pure humanity, it his duty to overrule the entry clearance officer who has found it difficult to see beyond the paper before him. The question is whether my right hon. Friend has the courage to use his discretion.

When we set up an instrument for very good reasons—checking visas at the place of origin to find out whether people are entitled to come for a short stay in the United Kingdom—certain aberrations creep in. The bureaucrats intervene and humanity is disregarded.

In cases such as this—I have tried to settle it with the Minister, but have had to make it public—my right hon. Friend has a way out. He can get assurances from the family, from the temple to which this man is attached and from me that he will return on the date indicated. My right hon. Friend can also lay down conditions for his stay in the United Kingdom. He can say that he is not entitled to come here for three months, but can stay for only one week—or 10 days—and must report to the police every day and return at the end of the stay.

That would make the visit possible and enable my right hon. Friend to meet the interests of a lady who is dying and making her final plea to the state in defence of which he will speak tonight.

11.56 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley):** My hon. Friend the Member for North Bedfordshire (Sir T. Skeet) raises some important issues, and I welcome this opportunity to comment on the operation of our entry clearance system overseas and to make some points about the Singh case, although, as I hope that the House will understand, I am constrained from discussing that in great detail for reasons of confidentiality towards the applicant. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend for the regular courtesy in the way in which he has expressed himself to my predecessor and myself.

First, some general points. Operating cost-effective immigration controls abroad entails facilitating the entry of genuine visitors. We need to facilitate the entry of business people, students and others who qualify under the immigration rules, while preventing the admission of those whose real intention is to work or settle here illegally.

I am conscious of the fact that business and tourist visitors provide a significant proportion of this country's invisible earnings. The United Kingdom is the world's sixth largest tourist destination, with about 20.6 million visits in 1994, and it is the third largest destination for international conferences.

The tourism industry contributes 5.3 per cent. of gross domestic product and creates 1.5 million jobs, so it would clearly be foolhardy to operate a visa-issuing system that was so restrictive or obstructive that it damaged such an important contribution to our national economy. Obviously, we are careful to avoid doing so, as becomes clear from a glance at the figures.

In 1994—the last full year for which figures are available—out of the 20.6 million visits, our embassies and consular posts overseas processed 1.32 million visa applications. More than 1 million of those applications were for short-term entry clearance, either to visit this country or to study here for a period of less than six months. Of that number, just over 900,000—901,560 for the record—visas were issued, mostly on examination of the paperwork or after an interview lasting less than three minutes. I regard that as providing an efficient and professional service to travellers.

Entry clearance is carried out in 159 posts and accounts for 9.3 per cent. of Foreign and Commonwealth Office expenditure overseas. After the introduction of the common visa list later this year, that is likely to rise to 10.13 per cent. Entry clearance work is demand-led but fees for entry clearance work covered 83 per cent. of its cost in 1993-94 and it is Government policy to move eventually to self-sufficiency on a full-cost basis.

The level of entry clearance fees, which is reviewed annually, was last raised in January 1995. The fee for a settlement entry clearance will increase in two further stages to achieve full cost recovery in 1997-98. Work in 1994-95 required 915 man-years of staff time and generated £38 million in entry clearance fees.

At present, nationals of 87 countries require visas to enter the United Kingdom, but that figure will rise to 101 as a result of the common visa list. Our visa operation overseas is managed from the London end by the migration and visa department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which, in conjunction with the immigration service of the Home Office, runs 10 training

*[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]*

courses a year for 120 to 140 prospective entry clearance officers. Each course lasts for three weeks, at the end of which time officers are expected to have a clear understanding of the immigration rules and the necessary knowledge to relate each individual application to those rules. No officer is posted overseas to do entry clearance work unless he or she has successfully completed that course.

Entry clearance officers, although relatively low in rank, are people of integrity, who are fully trained for their work. However, the training of entry clearance officers does not stop with the successful completion of the training course. Once in post, officers receive guidance and on-the-job training from the entry clearance manager and from his or her more experienced colleagues. Most of our larger visa issuing posts also run regular training courses for their staff. A series of regional training conferences has been held over the past two years.

All applications for entry clearance to the United Kingdom are considered in accordance with the statement of changes in immigration rules laid before the House on 23 May 1994. All applications for entry clearance must be made overseas. Applicants are required to complete a visa application form and pay the appropriate fee. After the application and any supporting documents provided by the applicant have been checked, an entry clearance officer can, in straightforward circumstances, issue the visa without further inquiries. In fact, about 68.3 per cent. of all applicants are dealt with in that way.

The balance of applicants are required to attend an interview to establish their intentions. Those who are unable to speak or understand English are interviewed in their own language with the aid of an official interpreter. At the beginning and end of the interview, the applicant is asked whether he or she could understand the interpreter and the questions. If there is no official interpreter, arrangements can be made for interpretation. A personal interview is thus an essential part of the entry clearance process where the application is less than straightforward.

Interviews are conducted according to standard guidelines and are designed not to intimidate or otherwise distress applicants. ECOs endeavour to ask questions in a courteous and tactful way and make allowances for applicants who appear nervous, especially those who have previously been refused entry clearance.

It is regrettable that not all applications are successful, but it is important to keep a sense of proportion about the refusal rate. In 1994, we issued about 1 million visas, and over 90 per cent. of those who applied for entry clearance were granted it. I should add that a decision to refuse entry clearance is never taken lightly. I can assure my hon. Friend that, in reaching their decisions, entry clearance officers take all the relevant factors into account, including information supplied by right hon. and hon. Members and by sponsors. Correspondence is also taken into account. I have seen the files. I have seen files at many posts throughout the world. I make a point of looking at files and the evidence written down by ECOs at interviews. It strikes me that, ultimately, the applicant's motives and intentions decide whether entry clearance is granted. That is so in the case of Mr. Amarjit Singh.

The facts of the case—I repeat that these are the facts that I am prepared to give tonight for privacy reasons—are that Mr. Amarjit Singh has applied three times for entry clearance to visit his seriously ill grandmother. There is no doubt of that. But he has failed to satisfy an entry clearance officer on each occasion that he genuinely seeks entry only for the purpose and period stated, that he is a genuine visitor and will leave the United Kingdom at the end of his visit.

As my hon. Friend said, entry clearance was refused in August 1993, October 1994 and March 1995. At interview, the entry clearance officer learned of the compassionate nature of the case. It also emerged that Mr. Singh is young—he is 25 years old—and earns a modest monthly income. He told the ECO that an aunt living in the UK helped to support the family in India and would pay for his visit. Mrs. Kaur also has closer relatives living in India who have not applied for entry clearance to visit her.

My hon. Friend has been assiduous in pursuing this matter with my Department. No hon. Member could have done more. He has written several times in support of the application and had a meeting with my predecessor on 6 February 1995 to discuss it personally. He had another meeting with me on 4 December 1995. He handed over additional evidence of the deteriorating health of Mr. Singh's grandmother, Mrs. Seso Kaur, which was passed to the ECO. But that does not necessarily say anything about Mr. Singh's intention to return to India.

The ECO was aware of the compassionate circumstances—Mr. Singh's grandmother's illness—and took that into consideration. But he also had to take into account Mr. Singh's personal circumstances in India and other factors that emerged at interview. As in all cases where an application is refused, the decision on Mr. Singh's latest application was referred to the entry clearance manager in New Delhi. He also gave proper consideration to the compassionate circumstances and to my hon. Friend's representations of interest and support, but was satisfied that, on the evidence available, the decision was correct and in accordance with the immigration rules. It is not reasonable to review a case that has already been thoroughly evaluated in the light of my hon. Friend's strong representations since 1993 without fresh evidence.

The judgment of those two officers was applied independently to the question whether, on the balance of probabilities, Mr. Singh was a genuine visitor who would leave the UK at the end of his visit. Using the balance of probabilities as the benchmark means that an ECO must be "satisfied". That is all. He need not be convinced outright or subject to gilt-edged, copper-bottomed assurances or guarantees, but simply satisfied.

The balance of probabilities works like any other balance: if one puts more weight in the form of new evidence on one end of the scales, they will tilt in a different direction. That is the way forward in this case, and my hon. Friend mentioned certain details that could be useful on a further application. A fresh application based on satisfactory evidence that only a visit is intended could be helpful.

**Sir Trevor Skeet:** In his letter to me, my right hon. Friend said:

"As mentioned in my letter of 15 January, the way forward is for Mr. Singh to submit a fresh application which can be considered by an ECO. You will appreciate that I cannot guarantee the outcome in advance. That will be a decision for the Entry Clearance Section at New Delhi."

Time is short. Such cases can go remarkably fast. Is my right hon. Friend prepared to assure me that, if an application is made, Mr. Singh can, if authorised, come to this country within a week?

**Mr. Hanley:** If a fresh application is made, I can assure my hon. Friend that the entry clearance officer will look at the evidence as presented to him. The evidence that my hon. Friend listed in his contribution this evening could well help to tip the balance, but I cannot say that. It is for the entry clearance officer to come to a conclusion and for the entry clearance manager subsequently to consider it.

I sometimes have reason to write to hon. Members expressing disappointment that, despite protestations to the contrary beforehand, an applicant granted a visa in the light of an hon. Member's intervention has subsequently applied to remain here permanently. It pains me to have to embarrass hon. Members in such a way, but it illustrates the fact that hon. Members are as capable as anyone else of being deceived. I do not necessarily believe that in the case of my hon. Friend; I believe in his total sincerity.

If the evidence that my hon. Friend mentioned in tonight's debate is given in writing, perhaps we can look at it again. It is for the ECO to look at that; it would be wrong for me, merely because of pressure from my hon. Friend, to make a decision and to make a statement in the House. It would mean that justice was subject to pressure—perhaps even bullying, although my hon. Friend could never be called a bully, because he makes his points so courteously.

**Sir Trevor Skeet:** Under the rules, the Minister has a discretion. In 32 years in the House I have noticed hard cases, but I think that this is the hardest case. The Minister could exercise his discretion and overrule the ECO. He could decide that the case is now serious; he should consult the consultant; he should take into account what the family think about it; he should pin his researcher down to a briefer period. I should have thought that on that basis he would be adequately covered. Has he any proof over the 30 years of serious mistakes that I have made in evaluating people who come to me?

**Mr. Hanley:** As the Minister responsible for entry clearance matters arising overseas, I am occasionally asked to reverse ECOs' decisions, but I rarely feel able to do so. It is unnecessary, because adequate safeguards already exist to ensure that the decision that is made is fair. ECOs' decisions are subject to review routinely by the next tier of management and randomly through the offices of the independent monitor Dame Elizabeth Anson.

Dame Elizabeth was appointed under the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, with terms of reference that require her to take a sample of about 1,800 refusals a year drawn randomly by an established statistical formula. Only rarely, therefore, will there be any reason for ministerial intervention in the decision-making process. Normally, the immigration rules must be followed. But when new evidence is presented, representations can and do result in the ECO reversing the decision without the need for any ministerial involvement. In her 1995 report, Dame Elizabeth said that she had received a number of letters from right hon. and hon. Members who have been successful in obtaining a favourable decision.

I have visited a number of entry clearance posts and found them to be staffed by well-motivated officers who are anxious to be seen to apply an immigration procedure that is firm but fair. I have visited the entry clearance office in New Delhi; I have met the entry clearance manager and the majority of entry clearance officers. I am impressed with their genuineness and assiduousness—as was my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary when he visited that office in New Delhi. There has been a staggering change in that office in the 10 years since I was last there. We now treat people, not just as humans, but in comfort and compassionately, which is vital if we are to carry out an important service, with people who deserve to be treated properly.

We still have to remember that we are dealing with humans, and human nature being what it is, there will always be those who set out to defeat the system for their own personal ends. If we treated people with suspicion from the outset, the numbers that I have mentioned would show that. The majority of people receive entry clearance, and there is the chance to make another application and, therefore, to succeed in time.

I am convinced that the entry clearance system at present in place is operated fairly.

*The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Twelve midnight.*

# House of Commons

*Wednesday 24 January 1996*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Women in Prison

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

9.34 am

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): Last week, at the very moment that the Home Secretary was announcing small changes to what many of us have described as the inhumane practice of shackling pregnant women prisoners while they are in labour, a woman prisoner suffering from breast cancer was lying in the Middlesex hospital manacled to two prison officers—one of whom was male—right up to the point when her radiotherapy treatment was due to commence.

One does not need much imagination to think of the scene—the woman in her white hospital gown waiting with other NHS patients for a sensitive and personal treatment while being shackled to a man. That is the reality, I suggest, of the policy that the Government now support.

Frances Crook, director of the Howard League, said when giving me information for the debate—information that I have checked out with the Prison Service and the hospital:

"The Home Secretary had given the clear impression that the shackling of women attending hospital would be discouraged."

She added that all hon. Members should question the Minister closely as to exactly who should and who should not be shackled.

**Mrs. Audrey Wise** (Preston): The Home Secretary has given way a little in relation to women who are in hospital to give birth, but does my hon. Friend agree that this half loaf—or one slice of bread—is totally inadequate? The Home Secretary has not addressed the issue of women who are breast-feeding, and has not addressed the issue of antenatal care. During pregnancy, all women are particularly vulnerable to stress and anxiety, and there is proof that that has an effect both on the foetus and on the baby for many years after birth. Does my hon. Friend agree that shackling should be discontinued during pregnancy?

**Mrs. Mahon:** I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend, who puts her case very well. I have some questions in a similar vein from the Maternity Alliance that I shall put to the Minister later in the debate. As joint chairman of the all-party breast cancer group, I have taken a considerable interest in women and how they feel. I have talked to many women who suffer from breast cancer, and I have listened as they described their terror at being told that they were suffering from the disease. I believe that shackling a woman who is awaiting radiotherapy is tantamount to the worst kind of cruelty, and there is no place for such treatment in a civilised society.

If such treatment is cruel, other cases of shackling that have been drawn to my attention border on the farcical or the downright dangerous. A report in the *Daily Mirror* gave details of patients who were chained to officers when attending hospital for treatment for pneumonia, cancer and other serious illnesses. But would you believe, Madam Speaker, that one case which was reported—and which I have pursued—was of a woman suffering from dysentery being shackled? As everybody knows, it is an infectious, notifiable disease. Some poor unsuspecting prison officer had to be shackled to someone suffering from it, so possible cross-infection is obviously considered a price worth paying to support the Government's "prison works" policy.

If the officer went down with dysentery, surely that would not be a price worth paying. The practice is mediaeval. When the woman was not chained to the prison officer, she was chained to the bed. We all know that people suffering from dysentery need to use the toilet frequently, so that woman would have been most uncomfortable hopping in and out of bed with chains on.

Except in the most exceptionally high-risk cases, the practice of manacling smacks more of the Home Secretary's Soviet style and gulag mentality towards the penal system rather than the policy of a Home Secretary in a modern democracy as it approaches the millennium. It is high time to end a shameful and degrading practice. High-risk women prisoners and other women who have simply been imprisoned because of a minor misdemeanour should not be treated in the same way.

The number of women imprisoned is not h[illegible]. According to the latest figures that I received on 18 January, the current prison population stands at 51,584, of whom 2,024 are women. That figure peaked in December, when the highest female prison population, 2,150, was recorded. The latest published Home Office statistics about prison populations relate to 1993, so when we speak about the reasons for women's imprisonment and the percentage of women in gaol, we are working on old statistics.

In 1993, 37 per cent. of those imprisoned were fine defaulters, and 22 per cent. were in for theft and handling stolen goods. Those statistics also reveal that women are sent to prison mainly for minor offences. In June 1993, 39 per cent. of women in prison had no previous convictions. That seems to be the trend.

Women seem to get sentenced more often for first offences than men. During that year, just 26 per cent. of women who were held in prison on remand subsequently received prison sentences. The 74 per cent. released back into the community were either found not guilty or given a non-custodial sentence. I wonder whether any of those women were manacled or treated in an inhumane way.

Those statistics give the lie to the recent statement by the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold)—I am sorry he is not present—in a recent intervention on the Home Secretary:

"every one of those women is either a convicted criminal or has been remanded in custody by a court which considers them to be dangerous or likely to abscond".—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 898.]

*[Mrs. Mahon]*

The figures show that that is nonsense. I do not believe that the 37 per cent. of women prisoners who are fine defaulters are dangerous, liable to abscond, or a threat to anyone. Anyone with an ounce of common sense would recognise that, and not make such a fatuous statement.

Fourteen prison establishments hold women, of which eight are closed prisons. It is current policy for girls as young as 15 to be held in prisons with adult women. The average cost of keeping a woman in prison is £541 a week—again according to the 1993 statistics. That figure does not include the cost of prison headquarters, so the total cost is higher.

**Mr. Paul Boateng** (Brent, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for a Conservative Back Bencher to seek advice from civil servants in the course of a debate? Will that facility be available to all hon. Members?

**Madam Speaker:** It is most unusual for a Back-Bench Member to seek information from civil servants unless, of course, that Member has been asked by a Minister to do so. That is not the case now, and therefore that Back Bencher should not be seeking information from Government civil servants. I had not noticed, and I thank the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) for bringing it to my attention.

**Mr. Boateng:** I am much obliged, Madam Speaker.

**Mrs. Teresa Gorman** (Billericay): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for my action. I was checking the detail of an address with the civil servants, but I accept your reprimand.

**Mrs. Mahon:** A high percentage of women are in prison because they are fine defaulters or have not paid for a television licence. In 1993, 7.5 per cent., or 278 women, were imprisoned for the non-payment of television licence fees or fines related to that. I pay tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who has tabled early-day motion 287 on the imprisonment of television licence fine defaulters. He should be commended on his campaign to argue that it is an absolute waste of time and shocking to imprison such people.

That early-day motion states:

"people prosecuted for TV licence evasion tend to be disproportionately poor, female, unemployed"

and single parents. It is impossible to quantify the harm and distress caused to a family when the mother, often the only parent, is taken away and incarcerated, perhaps for weeks, while the children are taken into care.

The Home Secretary has slickly informed the Tory party conference that prison works, but it does not work for the children of women imprisoned for fine defaulting, and whose only crime is to be poor. It does not work for the taxpayers, either; they might lose £86.50 on the television licence that goes to the Exchequer, but will fork out £541 a week for prison lodgings. That cost does not take into account the thousands of pounds extra that is spent on keeping children in local authority care.

The Home Secretary would be wise to start watching programmes such as "Coronation Street". West Yorkshire probation service has issued a news release noting:

"As Coronation Street's Trish is sent to prison after being caught without a television licence . . . many real life women are in prison for the same reason."

Elly Phillips, the debts and benefits adviser for West Yorkshire probation service, has drawn attention to the absolute outrage revealed in that programme:

"A woman who cannot afford to pay her television licence is no more likely to be able to pay a Court fine. If she is then sent to prison the licence fee and the fine are still unpaid"—

on top of that, it costs the taxpayer money—

"When we are talking about a mother the result is even worse: her children are often taken into care, like Trish's son Jamie, so they become the innocent victims of the system."

The West Yorkshire probation service also notes:

"The Prison Reform Trust has reported that no fewer than 38 per cent. of all women prosecuted for all offences in 1993 were charged with using a television set without a licence."

That is slightly higher than the figure quoted in the Home Office statistics. According to the Home Secretary, that practice shows that prison works.

**Ms Margaret Hodge** (Barking): The population of Holloway prison has doubled in the past five years, but its budget for last year was cut. The Secretary of State is obsessed with the idea that the only thing that matters is to keep people locked up and that security is the issue of prime importance.

Does my hon. Friend agree that, in those circumstances, it is inevitable that the regime for women incarcerated in places like Holloway is bound to be dreadful? That will not make prison work, because we do not just want to lock people up while they are serving their sentence: we want to ensure that, when those people are released, we are secure in the community because they will be active, rehabilitated citizens.

**Mrs. Mahon:** My hon. Friend puts it eloquently. I was coming to that. I want to challenge the notion that prison works, especially for those whose only crime is poverty and civil debt. I want a criminal justice system that is linked with anti-poverty social programmes based on good rehabilitation practice. I want prison really to work.

If someone does end up in prison, the hallmark of success is whether they reoffend. In fact, 40 per cent. of women prisoners are re-convicted within two years of release. If their problem is poverty, that poverty will not go away while they are in prison. The taxpayer's bill goes up, but poverty does not go away. Prison has not worked for the 40 per cent. of women who are re-convicted.

Before there are any hysterical outbursts to the effect that I worry only about the prisoner and not about the victim, I should say that I am not in favour of early release for people who have been violent, such as muggers. I would never again trust a child murderer. I would never plead for someone who had murdered children. I am in favour of a civilised system, because I recognise that people who go to prison remain human beings, whatever crime they may have committed.

**Mrs. Wise:** On the question of rehabilitation, which is so important, does my hon. Friend agree that the time during which a woman is pregnant and gives birth, and immediately after, is a time of renewal? There is the possibility of a fresh start—indeed, it is inevitable—in a new life. If women are degraded and humiliated at that time, it can only harden them and make them less likely to use that opportunity—and impossible for the Prison Service to use it—for rehabilitation, which could be effective at such an important time in a woman's life.

**Mrs. Mahon:** Absolutely. I hope that the Minister took note of that.

I am told by prison reformers, the Prison Officers Association, the probation service and others who take an interest in prisons that conditions in women's prisons are not radically different from or better than those in most men's prisons. Women have little privacy, food is not good, and they have few chances to make decisions about their lives. Many people say that rehabilitation programmes are almost non-existent. The POA in particular is frustrated about prison officers being expected to act only as gaolers rather than doing useful rehabilitation work.

The present and previous chief inspectors of prisons have both made many relevant observations. When he visited Drake Hall in 1994, the previous chief inspector stated:

"The residential units were in a state of dilapidation."

Especially unsatisfactory were the small, dingy recreation areas, which were expected to accommodate about 80 inmates but could seat less than half that number. He went on to describe conditions in the communal wash areas, where there were no plugs in the sinks and most of the rooms were in a bad decorative state. People at the bottom of the pile, who have been subjected to poverty, especially first offenders and women in prison for civil offences, must have their feelings of rejection and hopelessness confirmed when incarcerated in such conditions.

In December 1995, the new chief inspector, Sir David Ramsbotham, took the unprecedented step of withdrawing his inspection team from Holloway. Other hon. Members will deal with that, and I mention it only briefly. According to *The Times* of 19 December, his team walked out of the prison because of

"over-zealous security, prisoners being locked in their cells 23 hours a day"—

the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge)—

"poor health care, bullying, low staff morale, inadequate education and activities, and dirty conditions".

Nearer to home, two women from my constituency were sent to New Hall prison near Wakefield last year for non-payment of television licence fees. I got these statistics from the Library yesterday. Four years ago, that prison was condemned by prison inspectors, who made a total of 102 recommendations. I congratulate the prison on the many improvements that have been made since. I must put that on record, because, in the latest unannounced inspection, the Home Office report found

"notable improvements in facilities and an improved regime".

However, there were still 20 further serious recommendations for New Hall. Although the health care system had improved, the full-time medical officer was male, which is especially distressing for women from ethnic minorities, but seems to be the norm in women's prisons. Health facilities were not good. Prisoners did not get the same facilities that the rest of us get on the NHS. The Minister should address that.

The New Hall report also pointed out that bullying was a serious problem. Girls as young as 15 are held in women's prisons. The report stressed that an increase in bullying coincided with the increased use of class A drugs by prisoners, but there was no recognised anti-bullying strategy. That is desperately needed, and is recommended by the report. There was a high level of self-mutilation among prisoners. While improvements have been made, many more still need to be made.

What I found especially shocking about the report was that 86 of the prisoners in New Hall had been victims of sexual abuse. The probation service's figures are even higher. The majority of women prisoners have constantly been found to be victims of sexual abuse. In spite of that, they still had male medical officers. That is something that could be addressed. There should be counselling for women in that situation. Perhaps there should also be an in-depth study into why they end up in prison.

Women are strip-searched by female officers before going to court, and there are searches for drug testing. Random drug testing procedures involve strict searching, which is done in front of female officers. That has led to something even more disturbing, which I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) will mention. The probation service says that the system of searching and testing for drugs is making heroin more unpopular than cannabis. Drug taking is out of control in most of our prisons.

**Mr. George Howarth** (Knowsley, North): I think that my hon. Friend means more popular.

**Mrs. Mahon:** It is because heroin does not remain in the system for as long as cannabis, and is unlikely to be picked up by urine samples. This degrading process does not seem to have solved the problem that it was meant to address. We should examine that.

The Minister must seriously address the health care problems in prisons. Do we want prisons to stop people reoffending when they get out? That would mean that something must be done about the penal and criminal justice systems. The Home Office should be working on both. We must think of the poor old taxpayer, who has to pay out all that money because someone has not paid for a TV licence. It is, first, an obscenity that someone should be sent to prison for that offence, but the Minister must also consider the fact that our money is being wasted to satisfy some Tory prejudices.

I shall give the last word to Beatrix Campbell, who wrote a good article in *The Guardian* in December. She wrote of the typical offences for which women go to prison. The article is so good that it is worth repeating what she said. She stated that typical offences committed by women involved sex and shopping. The practice of women selling sex is as old as women's desperation. We all know that women end up in prison not for selling sex, but for where they do so and whether they are caught in the system.

Beatrix Campbell states:

"The organised shoplifter is no threat to public tranquillity, unlike the boy burglar whose business is as much about power as it is about poverty. Breaking and entering his neighbours' homes is a personal kind of piracy and the reward is both material and emotional—the pleasure of conquest. The 'shoppie' targets not her neighbours or private property but big business".

Beatrix Campbell suggests that, when women find themselves in such circumstances and are first offenders, the criminal justice system should not be tougher on women, but should try to find alternatives to custody, and should consider the poverty connection—linking crime and the penal system, and the woman's social conditions.

*[Mrs. Mahon]*

We should try to do something to stop women getting into such circumstances, and we should stop locking up women simply because they do not have enough money on which to live.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. There about 35 minutes left for Back-Bench speeches before the Front-Bench teams wind up the debate. Five hon. Members are hoping to catch my eye, and, if everyone co-operates, I think that all those hon. Members may be successful.

10.1 am

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Hastings and Rye): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I shall attempt to be brief.

I am sure that, when the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) applied for the debate, she had in mind principally the repugnant case of shackling women while they give birth. All of us would agree that not only women, but men, had a very emotional reaction to that repugnant spectacle, and none of us could cope with the concept. I therefore welcome the Home Secretary's commitment to bring that practice to an end.

The hon. Lady detailed at length the number of women who go to prison, and many of the offences for which they do so. She said that there are only just over 2,000 women in prison; it is also worth while saying that 59 per cent. of women are cautioned for indictable offences, compared with 36 per cent. of males. Clearly, attempts are made to keep women out of prison where possible.

In addition, the average sentence for women is about half that of men, so the courts clearly recognise that, for most offences, women should be sentenced to prison for only a brief period. It has become fairly clear over many years that, by and large, courts do not like to send women to prison, and do so only when that is the only recourse left to them due to the nature of the offence or because the women themselves—

**Mr. Boateng:** Does not the hon. Lady realise that, on the Home Office's own figures, women are more likely than men to be sent to prison—and for longer—for minor offences? Does that not have implications, not only for her argument, but for sentencing policy generally? Should we not be doing something about it?

**Mrs. Lait:** Having sat in magistrates courts when women have come before them, and having talked to many magistrates about the lengths to which they go to try to avoid sending women to prison, I know that that is the key to the argument. When a court concludes that the only solution is to send a woman to prison, it is for very good and clear reasons, and I support the court's right to do so.

The hon. Lady spoke of the attempts made in prison to rehabilitate women. On the rare occasions on which I have visited women's prisons, I have been impressed by the way in which prison officers work with the prisoners to give them the life skills that so many of them lack. Those skills include how to manage budgets and how to look after children. Many of the women who unfortunately find themselves in prison are not as competent at managing their affairs as many of us would wish.

It is also reasonable to consider the history of escapes from hospitals, which is what prompted the debate. The figures are interesting: in 1991-92, there were 14 escapes by women prisoners; in 1992-93, there were 13 escapes; in 1993-94, there were nine escapes; in 1994-95, there were six escapes; and in 1995-96, there were just two. Escapes from hospitals over those same years are four, eight and five. In 1994-95, there were no escapes, and in 1995-96 there were none.

One of the principal policies of the prison service, whether the Home Office prison service or the agency, should be to prevent escapes—the prison service has clearly succeeded in doing so.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey): Does the hon. Lady think that the brutality—which has been described and at which she expressed horror at the beginning of her speech—of chaining women prisoners is worth the saving in terms of escape figures, which are relatively minor, anyway? Does she think that the brutality and anger are worth that result?

**Mrs. Lait:** The hon. Lady will realise that the Home Secretary has said that women in labour will no longer be chained. Seven prisoners who were either pregnant or who had just given birth have escaped from hospital. It was not our decision or a Home Office decision to chain women: it was an operational decision, and the Home Secretary has now instructed that it should not happen again. Let us sincerely hope that we do not witness the spectacle of women who are pregnant or just about to give birth escaping from hospital. The Prison Service should look for the best way to meet that target.

I have mentioned the difference between operational decisions and Home Office decisions. On the subject of women in hospital, we all know that, while those in the Prison Service are hard-working and have tremendous commitment, they are not known for their imagination. It was probably the lack of imagination that led to the policy of chaining women. Now that that policy has been abandoned, I hope that more sensible and imaginative ways will be found to ensure that women do not escape.

**Mr. Walter Sweeney** (Vale of Glamorgan): Does my hon. Friend accept that it has never been Home Office policy to shackle women in labour?

**Mrs. Lait:** It has never been Home Office policy, but an operational decision was made by the next steps agency to restrain prisoners outside prison from April 1995—I think that that is why many people have accused the Prison Service of lacking imagination, and I suggest that the problem arose there.

That problem has been remedied by an instruction from the Home Secretary, and, I hope, some imagination will now be applied to the issue of restraining prisoners effectively when they are outside prison, so that, while there are no more escapes, we are not faced with the repugnant spectacle of women in labour being chained to their beds. That is the key to ensuring that the Prison Service can make progress and achieve its aims and the targets that it has been set.

The more often there are crises, the more often Ministers intervene in the agency's work. As a result, the agency finds it more difficult to follow the policy that we all wish it to follow—that of working effectively and efficiently, allowing it to deliver an effective service to prisoners, ensuring that the public are not affected by prison escapes, and providing an element of rehabilitation and training during a prison sentence.

10.10 am

**Mr. Chris Davies** (Littleborough and Saddleworth): The debate must be placed in the context of the Government's recent problems concerning the care of pregnant women in prisons, which we all have in mind. What an embarrassment that matter has been for the Government. How costly it has proved. It was obviously a contributory factor in the decision of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) to cross the Floor of the House, giving the very strong impression of a Conservative party that was split and falling apart. That latter impression has not been corrected by the performance of Ministers at the Dispatch Box in recent weeks.

Having for months brazenly bluffed their way through with categoric denials of the allegations made by Opposition Members, Ministers have been exposed and humbled. I do not blame them for not knowing from personal experience what was going on. They were fed inaccurate information by the people on whom they relied. I assume that someone in the Prison Service continues to smart from the fury of the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), when she was forced to carry the can for their mistakes.

The question now is whether we can be sure that the official information that will no doubt be the basis for the Minister's response today is as good, as accurate and as reliable as it should be.

When the issue of pregnant women and new mothers was at its height, I was struck by the number of newspaper commentators who wrote, "What do those women expect? They did not go to prison for a rest cure." Those callous words from poisonous pens were revealed more starkly because, at that very time, the Government were conceding their errors. I should add, however, that those poisonous pens were not all directed at those who were in prison. Some of them were, and have been, directed at the Minister.

On Monday night, my wife telephoned me. She said, "May I read you a letter? I am incensed by an article that I read in the *Manchester Evening News*, attacking the Minister, and I hope that it will not cause you any political problems if I write in, defending her."

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe):** Good.

**Mr. Davies:** I said, "All right. Read me the letter." The attack that was made on the Minister was indeed couched in the most personal terms, ignoring the political arguments entirely—an argument that would not have been presented against a male Minster. I said, "Fine; send it in."

When I spoke to my wife yesterday, she said, "I feel much better. I have sent it off. Sometimes I write these letters and never send them." I said, "That's fine. Are you going to start defending me against some of the attacks made on me in the papers?" She said, "No; you are attacked too often—day in, day out. I can't afford the pen and the paper to defend you."

We can be sure that some of those self-righteous authors will not retract their views, despite the evidence presented today by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

There are more women in prison than ever before—about 1,800—yet, when one considers the reasons that they are there, and especially the enormous proportion, about 47 per cent., who are in prison for defaulting on fines, it is impossible not to question whether there are not more effective ways of ensuring that justice is done and the community served.

Neither I nor the Liberal Democratic party take a soft view toward real criminals. I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Halifax. Hon. Members will understand that, as the representative of Saddleworth, I have no problem with the idea that a woman sentenced to a life sentence for a crime that at other times would have deserved a capital punishment should indeed serve a sentence for life.

However, the obscenity must be ended of many women—many of whom are inadequate or impoverished, driven to extremes, but who have struggled to keep families together, making do on limited resources with no help from a partner, if any worthwhile partner exists—ending up in prison for fine default or for being unable to pay for a television licence.

A sentence in such cases may be only seven days, and to a judge that may seem nothing more than a slap on the wrist, but seven days to the person involved—especially if they have never been in prison—means humiliation and despair beyond belief. It means kids taken into local authority care, and costs to all members of the local community.

The Government may try to wash their hands of that by saying, "It is up to the courts to decide on the sentence," but it is up to the Government to ensure that the courts have a proper range of alternative, non-custodial, options on which they can call. The fact that Britain now has the fastest increasing—and, I believe, the largest—prison population in Europe, clearly demonstrates that it is failing in providing those non-custodial options.

For once, surely money cannot be used as a reason—not when it costs about £25,000 a year, for heaven's sake, to keep a woman in prison. For that money, each individual person sentenced instead to a non-custodial alternative might have a personal supervisor, probably with a chauffeur-driven car, to take them to their job each morning.

**Mr. Sweeney:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the vast majority of people who are ordered by the courts to pay fines pay those fines, that people who default and end up going to prison are volunteers, and that, were the possibility of sending such people to prison to be withdrawn, it would send entirely the wrong signal to people who are fined, and encourage them not to pay their fines?

**Mr. Davies:** I believe that the courts should sentence people when they are obviously in breach of the law, but we are debating what type of sentence it should be. I am

*[Mr. Davies]*

suggesting to the House that non-custodial sentences offer sensible, practical options—and practical options for the courts—which should be explored more often than they are. The very fact that the number of women in prison is increasing so sharply shows that non-custodial options are not being explored properly.

Imprisonment is the right option if society needs protection from an individual. It is the right answer if the crime committed against another human being deserves the most serious punishment. It satisfies society's justifiable desire for retribution in some cases, but no one should pretend for a minute that it helps society.

Prison is a breeding ground for crime. It is an admission of society's failure. It solves nothing. People who have committed crime through poverty, and are imprisoned, return to poverty. Those who have committed crime because of alcohol or drug dependence return to that dependence. If crime in this country is to be reduced effectively, it is time we explored more realistic, practical, sensible ways of ensuring that our means of imposing that justifiable punishment, meeting the court's requirements and reprimanding the people involved does not result in the problem and its consequences for society becoming worse than they are already.

10.18 am

**Mrs. Teresa Gorman** (Billericay): In the past few months, much more heat than light has been expended on the subject of the treatment of women in prisons. Not least, it has caused the hysterical actions on the part of two of my colleagues, who have changed heart over that issue, yet have not even bothered to turn up for this morning's debate. The hysteria appears to have died down almost as quickly as it flared up.

We all have 20:20 vision with the benefit of hindsight. The debate—to which my hon. Friend the Minister of State has responded in a sensible and a responsible manner—has focused entirely on the treatment of women who are allowed out of prison in order to use the public health service. I am sure that most hon. Members would have campaigned at some time to give women prisoners the right to receive the best medical treatment available. However, we must remember that such women are serving custodial sentences, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) pointed out, many are persistent offenders.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) is being a little sentimental when she suggests that there should be different rules for women. Women should not be judged by lower standards than men. It should not be assumed that, because they are women, we expect less of them in terms of obedience to the law. If women offend persistently—it has been pointed out that women are sent to prison not for non-payment of licence fees, but for refusing to obey a court order—they must be answerable to the law like everyone else in the community. Otherwise, what is to stop any woman saying, "I don't want to pay for my television licence, and I know that I can't be imprisoned for it, because I am a mother"?

I have experience in helping female constituents and their families with their problems. They receive an enormous amount of assistance from social services, which often includes financial help to settle immediate monetary problems.

**Mrs. Mahon:** I do not think that women should be treated differently from men—although perhaps women have different problems. Does the hon. Lady believe that it is a good use of taxpayers' money to incarcerate a woman in prison for a week or a fortnight and to take her children into care for default of payment of a television licence fine?

**Mrs. Gorman:** Like the hon. Lady, I deplore the fact that that occurs. However, my annoyance is rooted in the fact that women—who generally have more common sense than men—persist in committing the crimes that put them in that situation. I taught girls in London secondary schools for 10 years, and I know that it is silly to pretend that women cannot behave as badly as men. If they persistently refuse to obey the laws of the land, they must be dealt with accordingly. I stress that point to Labour Members who have sought to make enormous political capital from the issue.

As a Member of Parliament, I have been very interested in the plight of women who are charged with murder and who are unable to plead provocation as a defence—we do not need to go into the details of how provocation occurs. A few years ago, I visited Bullwood Hall prison at my request—unfortunately, my experience is not up to date—where I was permitted to interview 13 women who had been imprisoned for first degree murder. They included Sarah Thornton and Kiranjit Ahluwalia—whose name I can never pronounce, but I am sure that the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) will assist me.

I made an extensive tour of the prison, and what I saw does not match the descriptions of the treatment of female prisoners. I saw a family room equipped with toys which is used by children—who are separated from their mothers in those circumstances—when visiting the prison. I saw a gymnasium in a very large hall, and I was assured that tutors visited the prison to assist women with exercises. I saw the kitchens and the food that the women were served for lunch.

I also talked freely with the prisoners. At one point, I was alone with 13 prisoners, who expressed their grievances to me. I visited Miss Thornton, who was at that time in the prison hospital, in a very clean and neat room to herself. She sat curled up in the middle of a bed that was made up with clean linen. There was no attempt to restrain her, or to prevent me from speaking to her.

One can speak only about what one has seen. Of course, I was intimidated by the banging doors, the chains and the locks and keys, but the conditions in that prison were not offensive.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I worked in the Home Office formulating prison policy in relation to women and young offenders. I assure the hon. Lady that most women prisoners are held in Holloway, not in Bullwood Hall. Is she aware that, when the new chief inspector of prisons visited Holloway, he walked out halfway through the day because he was so disgusted by the conditions there?

**Mrs. Gorman:** I am, of course, aware of those reports, and, like everyone else, I am concerned about them, and await more details. I find it surprising that an institution in which many women are incarcerated is allowed to get into a dilapidated state. In similar circumstances, I would want to clean up the conditions in which I was living.

The cells that I saw—admittedly it was a small prison, but the women had been convicted of very serious crimes—were nothing like what the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) describes. Perhaps female prisoners should be given the opportunity to contribute to the general maintenance of the prison, including the cooking and cleaning. I think that that would be excellent therapy.

That brings me to the amount of time, energy and taxpayers' money that the Government spend on rehabilitating prisoners. The Government have spent a phenomenal amount of money in an attempt to improve conditions for prisoners—who, I repeat, are incarcerated because they have committed offences against society, and society has demanded that they receive a custodial sentence. Government spending on prisons has doubled since 1979; more recently, it has increased from £1.35 billion in 1995-96 to £1.4 billion in 1996-97. The Government are doing their best to improve conditions within the Prison Service, not just for those who are incarcerated but for those who work in our prisons.

Even more important is the amount of time that is being devoted to ensuring that male and female prisoners learn skills that will prove useful upon their release from prison. I hope that that will include courses in simple accounting, which may help some women to balance their budgets.

**Mr. Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): But they are locked up many hours a day.

**Mrs. Gorman:** The hon. Gentleman remarks that female prisoners are locked in their cells for long periods. However, 38 per cent. of all prisoners have their cells unlocked for more than 12 hours a day during the week. That compares with much longer periods spent in their cells 10 years ago. The prison regime is becoming much more humane, and is providing rehabilitation opportunities for male and female prisoners. Prisoners are able to exercise on outdoor pitches, and the prison library provides education opportunities.

**Mr. Corbyn:** While we agree that prisoners should have education opportunities, there is a serious problem in that regard in Holloway prison. Due to a shortage of prison officers, many women spend much time—sometimes up to 23 hours—in their cells every day. That is very wrong. There have also been enormous cuts in the budget of the education department at Holloway prison. Female prisoners' opportunities for education and self-improvement in prison have been wiped out by staff and spending cuts. In her response, perhaps the Minister will tell us how the Government intend to improve the education facilities at Holloway prison.

**Mrs. Gorman:** I am sure that my hon. Friend will do that.

Some 58 prisons run re-employment focusing courses and job clubs which prepare prisoners for a return to the work force, and 113 prisons provide advice on housing and employment issues. I am sure that such advice will prove especially helpful to women, whose problems are rooted in their inability to manage their budgets and pay the rent. It is very upsetting if women are constantly forced out of their homes and must seek new accommodation.

Sentence planning is in place for all prisoners serving 12 months or more, so, while they are in prison, a prison officer can counsel prisoners to plan for the time that they are discharged. The Government's record of improving conditions in prisons, making them more humane and enhancing the chances of prisoners ending their sentences with a better attitude and of being more organised undoubtedly represents an advance on the conditions that once prevailed—and long may they go on improving.

There will inevitably be times when we can find cause for criticism. If we lived in a perfect world, we would not need to be here in the first place.

10.30 am

**Ms Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to hon. Members on both sides of the House, for the fact that, due to a previous commitment, regretfully I will not be present for the wind-up.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on securing this Adjournment debate on an issue of paramount importance.

Conservative Members have argued that women who fall foul of the law should not be treated any less leniently. No Opposition Members would argue against that—if women offend, they must be punished. However, I strongly argue that, as most women prisoners, who number more than 1,000 according to Home Office figures, are imprisoned for minor offences that do not involve harming an individual—such as defaulting on fines—they should not be incarcerated. It is entirely possible for an alternative form of punishment to be applied to women who are in the main mothers, and preponderantly single mothers. We are punishing not only them but their innocent children.

If the Government listen only to the argument that society is protecting the taxpayer by imprisoning such women, I remind Conservative Members that it costs more than £451 a week to keep a woman in prison, and that a child taken into care costs the taxpayer £45,000 a year.

**Ms Jean Corston** (Bristol, East): When I visited Holloway prison nearly two years ago, women were faced with a terrible and stark choice once their babies reached the age of nine months. If a woman wanted to stay in Holloway, because, for example, she had other children in London, the baby was taken into care. If she wanted to keep the baby with her, she had to go to a prison in the north of England, thereby facing separation from her other children. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is an appalling way to treat mothers?

**Ms Jackson:** I agree absolutely. That is an appalling way to treat mothers and a ghastly lesson for their children to learn—that society has no care or feeling for them. The Howard League, for whose information I am most grateful, states that estimates lead it to believe that more than 8,587 children are left without a parent because their mothers are serving prison sentences for, in the main, minor offences. The league deems the true figure to be infinitely higher, as many women sent to prison for minor offences do not reveal that they have children, because they are afraid that they will be taken into care.

The issue of how society punishes mothers who have offended against the law must be reviewed. Currently, society is punishing not only mothers but their essentially innocent children.

10.33 am

**Mr. George Howarth** (Knowsley, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on initiating this debate, with the typical generosity of spirit that we associate with her, and in such a thoughtful way.

We should try to put the issue in the wider context of what has been happening and is happening in the Prison Service. The service has a contracting budget. Governors are expected to lower the unit cost per prisoner over the next two or three years, but there is a rising prison population. It currently numbers 52,000, but that figure varies one way or the other by 500 prisoners each month. Most experts agree that the figure will probably rise to between 56,000 and 57,000 by the end of this year.

That situation must be underwritten by the co-operation of the Prison Service, yet the morale of the people who work in it has never been lower in living memory. They have been confronted with privatisation and market testing, and they feel that the contribution they could make is constantly undermined by the Government, and by Home Office Ministers in particular. Even governors who occasionally get into difficulty, in some cases through no fault of their own, are scapegoated by Ministers.

**Miss Widdecombe** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Howarth:** Well, in that context, the co-operation that the Government need to implement any reasonable prison policy is not there, which cannot be ignored.

The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) must be the only hon. Member who maintains that one can readily define a split between policy, which is the prerogative of Ministers, and operations, which are allegedly the sole province of the Prison Service. I will, for the hon. Lady's further edification, quote directly from *Hansard* the Home Secretary's statement last Thursday:

> "We are confident that the revised policy provides the correct balance without reducing security to unacceptable levels."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 893.]

We have it from the mouth of the Home Secretary himself that handcuffing and chaining women during labour was a matter of policy. He conceded that in his statement.

Most sensible Members in all parts of the House accept that that practice was unnecessary and certainly barbaric, but I wish to distance myself from some of the more personal attacks made on the Minister of State.

**Mr. Boateng:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Howarth:** However, the Minister cannot and must not maintain that she did not know about the practice. The chairwoman of Whittington hospital trust had written to the Prison Service about the practice. I mentioned the matter when I had a private meeting with the Minister and the Director General of the Prison Service, and voiced my concerns in early December.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Does my hon. Friend recall that, when we visited Holloway prison just before his meeting with the Minister, we met some of the women who had been handcuffed in Whittington hospital? It was clear to us both that Whittington had complained about the handcuffing of women entering the hospital for treatment, often for antenatal care, and that the issue had been raised with the board of governors and the prison governor. The concerns were well known by a range of people. I find it surprising that the only individuals who did not know of them were at the Home Office. I find that scarcely believable.

**Mr. Howarth:** I confirm my hon. Friend's observations. He has saved me having to make those points myself. When we visited the prison, I was concerned about the policy and the wider difficulties. I am not at all surprised that the chief inspector's staff walked out of Holloway prison during their visit. That is the sorry pass that we have come to.

On 30 November 1995, 2,072 women were held in prisons, as has been mentioned. Not all had been convicted—about 400 were on remand. The women's prison population has been growing, and we must be honest and admit that the offences for which women are held on remand or convicted are generally in a different class of criminal than those typically associated with men. The figures show that 37.1 per cent. of women are in prison for non-payment of fines, and only 7.6 per cent. are there for violence-related crimes.

**Mr. Sweeney:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Howarth:** I will not give way, because I have only a short time, and the Minister will have only a short time. The hon. Gentleman has intervened often enough.

The pattern of crimes committed by women is wholly different from that associated with men. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), in a typically eccentric contribution—

**Ms Abbott:** She is not eccentric.

**Mr. Howarth:** My hon. Friend is characteristically generous.

There is a difference between women in prison and men in prison, and that has been recognised since Victorian times. I do not know which history of women in prison the hon. Member for Billericay has read, but I am sure that she is a fan of the utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham. Even he accepted that there is a difference between women in prison and men in prison, and that the arrangements for them needed to reflect that.

I would like to say much more, but time forbids. It is necessary sometimes to pause in the operation of public policy, and if the great furore that has taken place over the past few weeks produces anything good, it should be a reassessment of what we want to achieve by putting women in prison.

I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that the Prison Service has three aims. The first is to punish, which is a legitimate step to take on behalf of society. The second is to protect society by removing some people from general circulation to prevent them from creating more mayhem in the community. The third must be—I know that the Minister accepts it, because she has said so before—rehabilitation. Without rehabilitation, the whole process is a waste of time.

We must question whether the Prison Service is achieving those aims. It is not doing so in Holloway or in Styal, which has a high level of drug abuse among its

women. Perhaps it is time to pause and ask what we are achieving for women in the prison system. Are those punishments for non-payment of fines the most appropriate ones?

**Dr. Robert Spink** (Castle Point): What would the hon. Gentleman do?

**Mr. Howarth:** I shall deal with that, if the hon. Gentleman will hold himself in patience.

Are there alternative ways of punishing and rehabilitating women that might be more appropriate and more effective? I wish to make an offer to the Minister. Will she set up an inquiry, not necessarily a high-profile one, to consider what alternatives may be available to punish women for non-payment of fines?

If the Minister was serious about that, and appointed the right people, who were prepared to consider the problem dispassionately and thoughtfully, we would be willing to co-operate—as, I am sure, would other parties in the House. If we could arrive at a formula for punishment that was acceptable to the House, was recognised as sensible by the general public, and, most importantly, was a more effective way to deal with the problem, we would all gain. Public policy, the Minister and the Opposition would all gain, and we would deal with the problem more intelligently.

If we could stop slinging abuse across the Dispatch Box—something I would never do to the Minister—and pause to give some thought to how we are dealing with the problems, we would reap the benefits. I make that offer to the Minister seriously, and I hope that she will take it up. I also hope that, after this debate, we shall start to deal with the problem more effectively and sensibly, instead of trading slogans all the time.

10.46 am

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe):** I wish to start my reply to this debate by paying a tribute to the Prison Service. It has come in for much unfair criticism for some time, and it is right to put on record what it has achieved.

Escapes are now down by 77 per cent. compared with the figure when the Prison Service became an agency. No prisoners are now held three to a cell, and have not been since March 1994, compared with 1,053 in April 1992. At the end of December 1995, 17 per cent. of the prison population were held two to a cell for one, compared with 21 per cent. in April 1992. More than 96 per cent. of prisoners now have 24-hour access to sanitation, compared with 70 per cent. in March 1992. All that has been achieved against a background of a prison population that has risen from 43,400 in April 1993 to 51,300 in mid-January 1996—an increase of 18 per cent.

The Prison Service has provided more than 5,000 new and refurbished cells since it became an agency. Prisoners now spend 7 per cent. more time in purposeful activity than in 1992-93. At the end of December 1995, 36 per cent. of prisoners were unlocked for more than 12 hours per weekday, compared with 24 per cent. at the end of March 1993. All that has been achieved, not just against the rise in prison population, but against a reduction in the cost of a prison place of 2.4 per cent. in real terms.

The combination of the fall in escapes and the rise in purposeful activity, unlocked time and access to decent sanitation points clearly to a lack of any conflict between security and rehabilitation. It is often suggested that there is a natural conflict between the two, but, as the clear statement of purpose outside every prison demonstrates, we are committed to security.

**Mr. Boateng:** The Minister is arguing that there is no conflict between security and rehabilitation. Does she believe that Richard Tilt, the acting Director General of the Prison Service, was wrong when he said:

"The problem for the Prison Service is that we are trying to balance security with treating people humanely. They are often in conflict"?

Who is right, the Minister or Mr. Tilt?

**Miss Widdecombe:** There is no conflict between the two statements. It is clear that Mr. Tilt made that statement about a particular issue. He was explaining, as I myself have had to explain to the House, that sometimes there is a difficulty in balancing security against dignity. There is no conflict between the two purposes of the prison system—to hold people securely in custody and not let them escape, and to rehabilitate them and raise the chances of their being returned to society as law-abiding and useful citizens. The second purpose is also a major contribution to public protection, and there is no such conflict.

Now that I have said that rather fiercely to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), may I thank him for his sedentary intervention in support of his hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr Howarth), when he condemned the attacks on me? I also wish to pay especial tribute to the wife of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies). I hope that he will convey to her my genuine thanks for what she has done.

I have listened with great care to the points that have been raised this morning. I regret that, because of the time constraints, I will not have the opportunity to answer them all. I shall, however, try to deal with some of the points raised in the time available.

I turn first to the opening paragraphs of the speech by the hon. Member for Knowsley, North, in which he said that I should not claim that I did not know what was going on. It is very important to put the record straight. I have never claimed, in the House or outside it, that I did not know what the policy was. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman will remember that, when he came to see me, the acting Director General of the Prison Service gave him, in my presence, a full exposition of what the policy was. I have never claimed not to know it.

What I said was that I did not know that concern had been expressed by the Whittington hospital about Holloway practice. That statement was utterly truthful, according to the knowledge I had at the time. When I came into the knowledge that had not been available to me, I took the earliest possible opportunity to rectify the situation. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that what I have said is a truthful statement?

**Mr. George Howarth:** I would never accuse the hon. Lady of deliberately misleading the House or anyone else, but can she confirm that, when we met on 10 December in her office with the acting Director General of the Prison Service, I raised with her the fact that I was aware that Whittington hospital trust had been in touch, possibly initially with the Department of Health but certainly also

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with her office, to raise its concerns about the medical implications of what was going on? She was aware of that at the time. If I remember rightly, she said that she had had some dialogue with a ministerial colleague at the Department of Health about some of the issues that worried the Whittington hospital trust.

**Miss Widdecombe:** No, there is some confusion here. I had certainly had dialogue with my noble Friend Lady Cumberlege, but that was on the subject of health care throughout the Prison Service, not on this specific topic. That is where the confusion arises. I was assured, I queried the assurance, and I was reassured that there had not been any specific complaints about Holloway practice from the hospital to the prison. I do not think that there is any point in rehearsing the matter much further; I have stated the position as it was.

**Ms Corston:** Will the Minister give way?

**Miss Widdecombe:** No, I am pressed for time. I should like to give way; indeed, I have already given way twice in the course of my summing up. The hon. Member for Knowsley, North did not give way at all.

**Mr. George Howarth:** Yes, I did.

**Miss Widdecombe:** There have been claims by the Opposition throughout this debate that women prisoners and women in general, on being sentenced and convicted, are treated more harshly than men. It is worth recording that, in 1994, the last year for which complete statistics are available, 16 per cent. of adult males were sentenced and cautioned for indictable offences, and were given either an immediate or a suspended prison sentence. The number of adult women similarly treated was 6 per cent.

The use of community sentences for female prisoners has also been mentioned. I regret that we have no published figures later than the year 1993. Nevertheless, those figures show that 6,885 female offenders received probation orders, 2,998 received community service orders, 803 received supervision orders, 696 received combination orders—making a total of 11,382 female offenders who were the subject of community sentences. In the same year, the number of female receptions in prisons for immediate custody was 1,929. I therefore do not think it true to say that there has been a disproportionate use of prison.

We have also heard much from the Opposition about the imprisonment of fine defaulters. When they arrive with us, it is always because the courts have exhausted all other remedies. There has to be a final deterrent, but it is still worth keeping the problem in proportion. On 31 October 1995, there were 414 fine defaulters in the entire prison estate, of whom only 19 were women. So, at any given time, less than 1 per cent. of the female population is in prison for non-payment of fines.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), who initiated this interesting debate this morning—on which I neglected to congratulate her at the beginning—brought up the problem of a Holloway female prisoner with breast cancer. As she has raised the matter, I think it worth pointing out that that prisoner goes to the Middlesex hospital four times a week. There are two officers on escort duty, and as far as operationally possible the prison makes every endeavour to ensure that both are female. I do not claim that they have always been female, but efforts are made to that end. Physical restraints are applied as a result of a risk assessment.

The Home Secretary made very clear our policy with regard to treatment in hospital. It is worth repeating some of it, although I do not intend to go into all of it, because it is important in respect of the essential point that the hon. Member for Halifax has raised: how we treat people who go to hospital for treatment for conditions other than pregnancy.

First, the Home Secretary made it clear that female prisoners who are admitted to hospital to give birth will not have handcuffs or other physical restraints applied to them from the time they arrive at the hospital until the time they leave. So, while a mother is attending to her child after birth, breast-feeding and so on, she will not be subject to restraints.

Secondly, female prisoners attending hospital for antenatal checks will not have restraints applied to them in the public waiting areas of hospitals. Restraints will not be applied at all during antenatal appointments. The hon. Member for Halifax expressed concern about the use of restraints when difficult treatment is being given, and I understand that point. Restraints may be applied if there is a particularly high risk of escape. Indeed, the hon. Lady herself conceded that restraints would be necessary in such cases.

For cases not associated with pregnancy, governors retain their discretion to decide what security measures are necessary. They must do a thorough risk assessment; following that, some female prisoners can go to hospital on temporary licence—in which case, they take themselves and bring themselves back. But in most other cases, physical restraints will be used.

If, following the risk assessment, the governor decides that restraints are unnecessary, they will not be used. In such cases, the prisoner will be accompanied and supervised by Prison Service staff. If there is a medical objection to the use of restraints at any time, the policy remains—it is not new—that restraints must be removed.

In the concluding minutes of this debate, I want to give a breakdown of the population of female offenders. There has been much talk today about the pettiness of the offences for which, allegedly, most female offenders are in prison. The precise statistics are as follows: violence against the person, 11 per cent.; sexual offences, 0.4 per cent.; burglary, 3.8 per cent.; robbery, 2.1 per cent.; theft and handling, 40 per cent.; fraud and forgery, 10.5 per cent.; drugs offences, 10.4 per cent.; other offences, 16 per cent.; offences not recorded, 5.8 per cent.

A specific point about the provision of education at Holloway was mentioned by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). Education in the prison is provided by Kingsway college, and additional money has been put in the education budget for Holloway this year. Far from suffering a cut, therefore, it has attracted additional money.

I should like to say a few words about our overall aims—

**Mr. Corbyn:** And staffing levels.

**Miss Widdecombe:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, even preceding the inspector's report, we recognised

that there were problems and had put in an extra £326,000, with a specific view to provide extra staff. Following the inspector's report, we drafted in some temporary staff to plug the gap before permanent staff were employed. I hope that that provides some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman. If he has worries about this, he is welcome to raise them with me at any time, as I am aware that he has a genuine constituency concern.

In the final minute of the debate, I should like to say something about our overall aims. I am committed, as the hon. Member for Knowsley, North admitted, to a rehabilitative regime in our prisons. I can think of nothing more—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. Time's up.



## Single Currency

11 am

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to debate the consequences of abolishing the pound sterling. I appreciate that the debate is about the implications for the United Kingdom of a single European currency, but in plain language what we are really talking about are the consequences of getting rid of the pound. I hope that the sensibilities of right hon. and hon. Members will not be offended if I continue to express myself in those terms.

The debate takes place against the background of a round-table meeting in Brussels, hosted by the European Commission, to discuss the single currency. It will provide an opportunity for the 400 participants, who represent a wide range of interested parties from throughout the European Union, to discuss their expectations, concerns and ideas about the single currency.

There is absolutely no doubt where the European Commission President, Jacques Santer, stands on these matters. He is reported as having said to the European Parliament last Tuesday that a single currency was crucial in building a dynamic, strong and prosperous Europe. He went on to say that, with some member states devoting 20 per cent. of their budget to servicing their national debts, Europe would have to put its economic house in order anyway, regardless of whether it was introducing the single currency.

Indeed, as Europe's largest-circulation English language newspaper, the *Europa Times*, stated in March 1995:

"A single currency needs uniformly low inflation and stable exchange rates. But with low inflation and stable exchange rates who needs a single currency?"

That view was echoed in the business section of *The Sunday Telegraph* on 12 March 1995, which quoted the European Commission itself as saying:

"Since the empirical research has not found any robust relationship between exchange rate variability and trade it is not possible to estimate the increase in intra-EC trade that might derive from the irrevocable fixing of exchange rates."

I remind the House that both reports that I have just quoted came after 108 of my right hon. and hon. Friends signed early-day motion 581, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) on 8 February 1995, which called on the House to congratulate the Prime Minister on making it clear on 8 January 1995 that it is not in the United Kingdom's interest to join a single currency in 1997, and on his confirmation that there are no proposals for legislation necessary for the purpose or for the United Kingdom to accept any changes at the intergovernmental conference that will impact on the constitution of the United Kingdom, and further noted his rejections of support for the principle of a single currency by the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition and by Mr. Jacques Santer.

It is gratifying to see that the judgment of my colleagues was endorsed by the findings of the Henley Centre for Economic Forecasting, which reported in *EP News*, the newspaper of the European Parliament, in September 1995, that popular support in the United Kingdom for a single currency was only 31 per cent.—a figure which, broadly speaking, was endorsed by the

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findings of the Commission's private polling announced this Monday, which showed support for the abolition of the pound at 36 per cent. Clearly, no popular mandate exists for abolishing the pound. Nor, indeed, has one ever been sought.

It is my intention not to burden the House further with reports and opinions of other people in other places, but rather to turn directly to the facts that should concern us as Members of Parliament, answerable and accountable, as we will shortly be reminded, to the electorate whom we represent. The first fact concerns unemployment. In October 1990, when this country joined the exchange rate mechanism, unemployment totalled 1.67 million. Less than two years later—23 months—when we unceremoniously left the ERM, unemployment had soared to 2.85 million. There will be right hon. and hon. Members who will say, "Well, that was just the way the cookie crumbled on that occasion." Let me remind the House that that was precisely what happened when we were on fixed exchange rates between 1925 and 1931. I shall give the House the figures.

In 1925, when we joined the gold standard, unemployment stood at 1.25 million. By 1931, the figure had risen to 2.9 million. That has been the cost to this country of fixed exchange rates. The cost to my constituents has been the jobs that they lost and the consequential loss to many of them of their homes, because they could not keep up their mortgage repayments. In some cases, they lost their businesses.

**Mrs. Teresa Gorman** (Billericay) *rose—*

**Mr. Gill:** I can see that my hon. Friend wishes to intervene. I must make it clear that I shall not be taking any interventions, because I want to allow maximum opportunity for other colleagues to make their contributions to the debate.

Are the figures that I just quoted on unemployment a price worth paying for what is no more and no less than an economic theory? Even if they are, who in the House will vote for a single currency? Certainly not all hon. Members on the Conservative Benches, and definitely not all hon. Members on the Opposition Benches.

**Mr. Walter Sweeney** (Vale of Glamorgan) *rose—*

**Mr. Gill:** I am not giving way.

Indeed, there is increasing doubt that such a measure would command a majority in the House, even on a free vote. Why can we not simply conclude that a single currency is not in Britain's interest? Why must we keep up the pretence that, in spite of experience and all the political pain along the way, one day—miraculously—it will all come right? What the country needs is certainty. Decision makers in trade, industry and commerce need certainty, as do individuals, families, and—dare I say—politicians, particularly if they are seeking re-election, because in the final analysis there are no votes in equivocation, obfuscation and prevarication.

I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary responds to the debate, she will be able to provide the House with some sound and positive reasons for abolishing the pound. Before she does that, I remind her of yet another fact. Between 1925 and 1931, while the country was on the gold standard, economic activity stagnated, just as it did between 1990 and 1992 during our membership of the ERM. On each occasion, the abandonment of fixed exchange rates resulted in dramatically reduced interest rates—from 6 per cent. in September 1931 to 2 per cent. a mere nine months later, and from 12 per cent. on black Wednesday to 6 per cent. only three months later.

In both instances, the start of economic recovery coincided with the abandonment of fixed exchange rates, the effect of which had been to choke off exports due to an unrealistic and uncompetitive exchange rate, and to choke off investment due to the necessity to keep interest rates high to sustain a totally arbitrary rate of exchange. That was a vicious circle, the inevitable consequences of which were, as I have described, unemployment, economic stagnation and all the consequential effects on Government expenditure and the public sector borrowing requirement.

We should look at the situation today, now we are free of the straitjacket of fixed exchange rates. On 20 June 1995, *The Daily Telegraph*, in an article headed:

"Britain runs ahead of EU rivals"

said:

"Britain outpaced its main European rivals last year, achieving a growth rate of 3.8 per cent. against 2.9 per cent. for Germany, 2.7 per cent. for France and 2.2 per cent. for Italy."

The report then said:

"Norway, which decided to stay out of the EU, experienced a 5.1 per cent. rise in its gross domestic product last year."

Last week, *The Daily Telegraph*, in an article headlined,

"Britain shows the way on jobs"

said:

"On internationally agreed measures, the jobless rate in Britain, has fallen to 8.1 per cent. against a European average of 10.6 per cent. Unemployment has reached 11.4 per cent. in France and 9.9 per cent. in Germany."

If my analysis of the effect of fixed exchange rates on interest rates, unemployment and economic activity in Britain is wrong, I am sure that the House will be quick to correct me.

Another question arises from the proposition to abolish the pound. It is the associated costs of doing so—the costs to the Treasury, to banks and the financial sector, and to trade, industry and commerce, not to mention to the general public. Various bodies have made inspired guesses as to the overall cost, but one thing is for certain—Treasury Ministers, as evidenced by their written answer to me on 6 December 1995, do not know or will not tell. They will only say:

"there will be transitional costs to business and public authorities, associated with the changeover to the single currency. These potential costs would be one of the factors that would need to be taken into account, at the appropriate time, when the Government make their assessment of whether it is in the United Kingdom's interest to join a move to the third stage of economic and monetary union."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. *261*.]

In other words, there will be no cost-benefit analysis because, as is all too plain to see, the decision to abolish the pound will be made, not for economic but for political reasons.

Without a shadow of doubt, the abolition of the pound, and all other national currencies in Europe, and the creation of a single currency, is the keystone to the

completion of political union—the very apogee of the integrationists' dreams. The implication is that, by not ruling out the abolition of the pound, Her Majesty's Government are reconciled to the inevitability of political union. Again, if I am wrong, let my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary say so unequivocally, but I should perhaps warn her that many Conservative Members will need much convincing that political union does not follow monetary union as surely as night follows day.

I say to the House in all sincerity and with all due humility, this is not an enterprise to be entered into lightly. What we are talking about is the ending of 600 years of parliamentary democracy; the ending of the freedom of the British people to make their own laws in their own Parliament and according to their own preferences freely expressed in British ballot boxes.

Abolition of the British pound would be the final curtain call for the independent nation state. The issue cannot be fudged. The party managers cannot hope to finesse the outcome of a vote on a matter of such crucial importance. I call on our Government to dismiss the proposition for what it is—a mischievous and highly dangerous irrelevance which serves only to distract us from all that we might otherwise be more profitably doing.

11.14 am

**Mr. Hugh Dykes** (Harrow, East): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me. I am grateful, as I am sure are other hon. Members, to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) for initiating the debate, although they do not necessarily agree with most of the points that he has made.

If it does not offend anyone, I should like to follow my hon. Friend's excellent principle of not necessarily giving way to interventions because I am sure that that will allow more hon. Members to take part. I hope to be brief.

At the beginning of last November, the European Commissioner in charge of the EMU plans, the French Commissioner, Yves-Thibault de Silguy, confirmed yet again that the European Union is on target to commence the single currency by 1 January 1999, the expected date of commencement in Europe generally—at least in the rest of Europe.

That statement runs contrary to the superficial counter-propaganda that appears in some British newspapers—they have been growing in number slightly recently—that appear to be nervous and timid about the prospect. They constantly seek to undermine the plans, usually because of the reactionary attitudes of their non-British owners and short-sighted editors. The journalists have to follow suit because, after all, everyone is involved in the circulation battle.

The Commissioner's robust reaffirmation was welcome to those who are keen on this most exciting project and was particularly welcomed—it was mentioned specifically by a number of people—in what I would call financial and City circles. It also fits in with the optimistic and realistic expectation of the Commission President, Jacques Santer, who has now on three separate occasions emphatically reaffirmed his expectation that seven to nine countries could be in line to join in the unified currency system at, or close to, the target date without any impairment of the existing convergence criteria.

There is an interesting possibility that one of the best candidates for convergence criteria realisation will be the United Kingdom although, officially, the Government have our reserve on the opt-out, which seems to meet with the support of most of my hon. Friends for the moment. That is a reserve which in no way says that the United Kingdom is against monetary union or Britain joining it; it just says that we will make that crucial decision at a later date depending on the circumstances that are then emerging.

In the same November statement, Mr. Silguy reiterated, with enormous justification, once again the main objectives of the single currency system. The first is to boost growth and job creation in the future throughout the single market. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow is right to point up differences in unemployment figures because the member states' economies have not reached the full real economy convergence, aside from the statistical convergence that is necessary under the programme, that will gradually come as more and more intra-community trade develops. We know already how high our export ratio is to the other European countries.

Secondly, Mr. Silguy reiterated with great emphasis the need to eliminate the unnecessary bilateral and multilateral exchange costs that come from having different currencies in a single market. It is an interesting phenomenon, and a puzzle to me, that Conservative Members, and politicians and others in the United Kingdom generally, who are rightly keen on the single market in all its aspects, which are numerous, from specifications to measurements to trading conditions to standards—the whole edifice of the single market, which is more than just a trading area, as we know—are against the most essential lubricant of the single market; the need for currency harmonisation.

Those extra costs, which exist as a result of having differential currencies, aside from the disutilities of the fluctuations that occur, are estimated conservatively to be a minimum of 0.5 per cent. of combined European Union GDP. That is a vast amount of unnecessary expenditure. I should have thought that it was a good Conservative philosophy not to be in favour of unnecessary expenditure and wasting of money.

Thirdly, the French Commissioner said that one of the crucial objectives was the cutting of costs for companies—the corporate sector is the most important aspect of that—to ensure that they are not burdened unnecessarily. Conservative Members are rightly keen, particularly with our deregulation policies—this is an aspect of that—to cut the unnecessary costs that companies face. During the past six to nine months, virtually all finance directors have probably expressed the view that the single currency is necessary.

Most important, however, is the need for the single currency not merely to satisfy keen pan-European politicians—regardless of the member state to which they belong—or, indeed, the central banking elites, but to be in the interest of consumers, who, under the Maastricht treaty, are now citizens of the European Union as well as of their own countries. European consumers—patriotic British, French, German and Italian consumers—are increasingly mobile: they want to move around the European Union in economic as well as social and holiday terms, and they rightly want the best possible bargain as purchasers of goods and services.

Boosting mass interest of consumers in the prices of consumer durables and all the available services—to be quoted in the same currency denomination or price expression—would be of enormous advantage to the

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public. They are slowly beginning to realise that, although—as has been said—they are understandably apprehensive because of false propaganda in the British papers.

I shall give an example of what I am describing, to calm the excited spirits of some of my colleagues who, as we know, wish to live in the past. It is generally recognised that, for some inexplicable reason, motor car final retail prices in Britain are generally higher than those in Belgium, France, Germany and other European countries. Apart from duty differences, no one really knows the reason for that. About four years ago, the Department of Trade and Industry carried out a wonderful investigation, but reached no conclusion other than blaming the sinister impact of some intermediaries—and even that was not properly explained.

We can imagine how the British public—Mr. and Mrs. John Citizen—would feel if car prices were expressed in the same currency denomination, in terms of the euro or whatever it will be called in the future. They would be able to compare the prices of many other consumer durables as well. That is the magic of the single currency and the single market. It is better to bear that in mind than to theorise about convergence criteria, low inflation rates and all the other matters that—understandably—preoccupy the central bankers.

The Commissioner's November statement was important because it provided the basis for Commission and European Union plans for Ministers' policies, and because it was accepted by member Governments at the time. The Commissioner rightly avoided any partisan comments about what the United Kingdom or Denmark should finally decide to do, equipped as those countries are with their reserve opt-out. However, he felt strongly—and I agree with him—that it would be in the United Kingdom's interest to remain an active participant in the detailed preparations for the commencement of the new currency on 1 January 1999.

I thank the Government wholeheartedly: although, for self-evident reasons, we have that constitutional, legal and political reserve, they have participated fully in all the working groups and other preparations as though we were going to join the single currency in any event. That is, of course, unavoidable; it would be very difficult for the Government not to participate, and no final judgment arrêté arises. The Government are simply being very practical. I believe, however, that their actions will in due course help to reassure the public that a single currency is an attractive proposition.

We are not talking merely of the practitioners in the financial markets, and all those who must deal with the increasingly old-fashioned syndrome of European currencies clashing and bumping against each other without any real rationale. Let me offer a chilling reminder of the behaviour of the United Kingdom's national currency. Since 1950, or the year before, when the deutschmark was established, the pound sterling has fallen by 90 per cent. against the deutschmark, which is the most successful currency in Europe.

The general perception is that, in broad output and production terms, the German economy overtook the British economy—sadly for this country—in 1955. Since then, the pound sterling has depreciated against the deutschmark by 79 per cent. Lest those of us who are consumed—as we all too often are—by huge prejudices against our friends in Italy think that the Italian lira has performed less well, I should point out that the difference is not great: the lira has depreciated by 84 per cent.

The sad reality is that that progressive depreciation of the pound has not built the United Kingdom up into a strong, high-output, dynamic economy. Economists never agree about anything, but if one factor can be singled out as the most important it is the rate of reinvestment in new assets. That must be the characteristic of the future strength of production, and of the balance between manufacturing industry and other services in significant economies.

I only wish that Britain were ahead of Germany now. We would have been if, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, we had pursued different currency and reinvestment policies—but, for numerous reasons, that was not to be. Certainly, the latest devaluation of sterling has led to no long-term, durable improvement in the British economy, although I welcome the short-term cyclical improvement. It is good to see the economy recovering in a short-term statistical sense.

We should note the courage of the French in maintaining a high-currency policy despite the pain being experienced in Paris. The French franc is now higher against the pound than it was in December, despite what the British newspapers have said. That policy is now creating a high-production syndrome in France, similar to that in Germany. It will achieve the desired result in the longer term.

We need to exercise common sense in regard to the single currency. We must wait to see how convergence develops. I think that the United Kingdom will be a prime candidate, but we should show more self-confidence, and feel more excitement about the future and more willingness to explain the issue to the public. I am sadly, but understandably, reluctant to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow.

11.26 am

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Southend, East): Although my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) has been consistent in his views over the years, I think that, as a truthful person, he would accept that the opinions that he has just expressed are now held by a minority in the Conservative party. The party has woken up. I find it a tragedy that the Labour and Liberal Democrat Benches are virtually empty. We simply cannot persuade Labour and Liberal Members that monetary union is not a miracle, and will not bring benefits.

**Mr. Sweeney:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the almost complete absence of Opposition Members demonstrates that Labour is soft on European union, and soft on the causes of European union?

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** The last thing that I want to do is attack the Opposition parties. I want to persuade them that they are supporting a policy that will create unemployment, misery and degradation. I only wish that every Labour and Liberal Democrat Member would read the book by Mr. Connolly, the man who headed the department dealing with economic and monetary union in the Commission. He put at risk an easy, cushy number—

a big job with big pay and big prospects—because he believed passionately that economic and monetary union would create mass unemployment and civil unrest. Unfortunately, however, there is nothing that we can do to persuade people.

Apart from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East, few Conservatives would support monetary union. The Minister—she, too, is a truthful person—could help to involve the public by answering five brief questions. First, what about the tragedy of France today? France is one of the loveliest countries in the world, and contains the most fascinating people, but it is now creating more and more unemployment. It is putting people out of work and creating human misery solely for the sake of a mad policy of artificial exchange rates, which every Conservative wishes to have nothing to do with. Surely the Government must accept that our experience in the exchange rate mechanism, France's current tragedy and Germany's problem of 4 million unemployed demonstrate beyond a shadow of doubt that fixed exchange rates are simply a recipe for mass unemployment.

As for civil unrest, if Britain were involved in monetary union—if we had high unemployment and, for good European reasons, the central bank decided to raise interest rates—people would be outraged. They would protest. They would go to the politicians, and would find that they could do nothing. I wish that the Government—despite the sincere views of the tiny minority in our party who still support the crazy socialist nonsense of fixed exchange rates and monetary union—would just come out and say, "We will have nothing to do with it."

However, I move to my questions. First, is it true that, if we get involved with the euro, all our gold and other reserves must be handed over to the European central bank? People should be told the answer. I hope that the Minister will answer so that, through *Hansard* and through our wonderful press, people can be told the facts.

The second question is: is it true that, if Britain were involved in the euro, no Minister, no individual, no banker, not even my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East would be allowed to make representations to the bank about its policy? We all offer advice to the Bank of England and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is appalling that we are going to have a central bank running a nation's economic affairs and that, under the Maastricht treaty, we will not even be allowed to make representations to it. Of course, that may just be silly Euro-sceptic nonsense, but the Minister knows the facts. Her splendid civil servants, who are running up and down to all these meetings all the time, know the facts. Is that true or not? We must be told everything about that matter.

The third question is important to the Conservative party. I was delighted—because I know that, if anyone can solve this problem, our Prime Minister will—to hear the Prime Minister say that Britain will not re-engage in a fixed exchange rate system such as the exchange rate mechanism. My reading of the Maastricht treaty—this is only as interpreted by the European Court of Justice—is that one cannot join the single currency in the first stage unless one goes through two years of fixed exchange rates.

During those two years, in which lots of money will be splashed around to try and create convergence, there will be lots of misery and unemployment, but is it true that, if one is to be one of the first participants in the single currency, one must go through two years of fixed exchange rates, which, unlike the ERM, will be irrevocable and irreversible? If so, it would seem from what the Prime Minister said that there is no way in which Britain could be one of the first participants in the euro. People should know about that.

**Mr. Barry Legg** (Milton Keynes, South-West): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this important point. I would like to shed a small bit of light on this matter. When he returned from the Madrid summit, the Prime Minister said to the House that the convergence criteria under ERM conditions no longer applied. Does that not reinforce the fact that the decision to move to a single currency will be primarily a political rather than an economic decision?

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** My hon. Friend is expressing the sort of fears and worries that I have. It is exactly because of that that I should like the Minister to say what the truth is. If we are going to be one of the first guys in the euro, do we need two years of fixed exchange rates? If so, does the Prime Minister's statement mean that we will not be one of those chaps? That is a simple question; it is not complicated. It would be helpful if the Government would answer yes or no.

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): I regret breaking into my hon. Friend's speech, but he will know that, subsequent to the statement in the House, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister answered a question on this issue from a prominent friend of ours among the Opposition, and the matter is not as straightforward as it appeared when he made his statement on his return from Madrid. I remind my hon. Friend that the criteria are set out in the Maastricht treaty, which is the law of Europe, and that, to have any change in the Maastricht treaty, there must be a treaty amendment, which would have to be ratified by every country in the European Union.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** I am always grateful to my hon. Friend for explanations. He shows that the situation is confusing, but this is where the Treasury can help us. We want to know the facts. Is it true that we need two years of fixed exchange rates and, if so, does the Prime Minister's statement mean that we will not be involved?

The fourth question we must ask is: what are the conditions for countries that join at a later stage? It would be appalling if what happened under the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Lawson, were to happen again. I well remember how Britain unofficially joined the ERM without anyone knowing about it. This is meant to be a democratic House of Commons and assembly, and we became locked into that business without anyone being aware of it. We did not join officially; we joined unofficially. I hope therefore that the Government will help to clarify those four issues, which are terribly important. In particular, will they say what the conditions would be for joining at the second stage and whether the House of Commons would have an opportunity to express a view?

I have opposed the European Community from the beginning, and have believed passionately that it means misery for poor people, high prices and policies such as the common agricultural policy that cannot be changed. Of course, the Government will be aware that this year

*[Sir Teddy Taylor]*

the CAP budget is £9 billion more than it was two years ago. We are all told that it will be reduced, but we know that all those assurances are absolute rubbish. It is terribly important that the Government answer this simple question: do they believe that, before any decision is made to contemplate joining the European Union, the people of the country must be asked?

Frankly, I do not think that most people are aware of the matter. It is not simply a matter of saying, "Do we have a currency that we can go to France and to Italy with?" Basically, if one accepts the single currency, in effect one is accepting a single European state without democracy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know that I am a well-behaved person, but the one thing that sickens me, and the only time that I feel like punching people—I really mean this—is when I hear a Conservative Minister say, "We are going to fight a federal Europe." There is nothing more sickening or misleading than that statement because a federal Europe would be infinitely better than what we have. It would at least have a democratic base and lay down guidelines on what belongs to the centre and what to member states. With a single currency, we are planning a single European state without democracy and, more important, a socialist state.

The whole principle of the European Union is artificial pricing, which unfortunately creates massive problems. The monstrous CAP policy, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) supports so lustily, has meant that the average family in Britain spends an extra £28 a week in higher food prices and taxes. Nothing can be done to reform it—if only people would wake up to the fact that that simply cannot happen. The average family in Britain will pay an extra £5 a week for the net membership fee this year. Poor people are suffering and jobs are being destroyed.

Sadly, as Mr. Connolly rightly stated, across the whole of Europe, including dear old France, fixed exchange rates, where they are applied, are putting decent people out of work unnecessarily, and creating an appalling mess and misery. Question No. 5, as the Minister is aware, is: do the Government think that big countries or big organisations have a better future than small countries? Around the world today, all conglomerations of states are not doing well; small countries controlling their own affairs and applying Conservative policies are doing very well.

I shall give just two tiny examples. The first involves a little country called Switzerland. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East will have heard of it. How did its exports to the European Community do last year? Strange to say, they increased dramatically more than Britain's did, and that happened by Switzerland not being in the European Union.

Referendums took place in Sweden and Norway. In Norway and Sweden, in which I am interested and which I visit regularly because I am involved in the Ansvar insurance company which promotes temperance, all the people were told that they had to join the European Union to safeguard jobs. The same old Confederation of British Industry blokes we have here told them all that joining was vital. Poor old Sweden voted yes, although I told it not to, and Norway voted no.

What has happened since? Sweden is in an appalling economic mess. I have never heard of such devastating Treasury action taking place in any European country. Norway has never had it so good. If we look around the world—at little countries such as Japan and other countries—we will find that prosperity and growth are occurring in small and independent countries and not in ones that get involved with the big battalions.

**Mrs. Gorman:** What about that little country Great Britain, which is doing more trade with China than it does with any of our European partners?

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** As always, my hon. Friend is right. She showed great courage and determination in saying such things when we were laughed at and harassed in the party.

**Mr. William Cash** (Stafford): Yes.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** Yes, indeed. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) has not had an easy time, but my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) has had a terrible time with people attacking her. Her views are now accepted by the vast majority of the party, and I am obviously glad for her. Still, having said that, I should like to pay tribute to her courage and determination throughout this period.

We must remember that, if we are to survive as a small country off Europe we must go for world trade, low costs and the Conservative policy of getting away from artificial subsidy. I believe that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is a straight and honourable person and I hope that, instead of voicing the usual Treasury nonsense, ambiguous words and things that mean nothing, she will tell people five simple facts. I have asked her for factual information. I know that we will receive that information from her and that it will be a major contribution to this desperately important debate.

In the next election, how great it would be if it was made clear to the people of Britain that the Conservative party will have nothing to do with this undemocratic, socialist job-destroying nonsense, and that the Labour party—sadly for the working class—will be supporting that nonsense, as will the Liberal Democrats, for reasons that I have never understood. If the people had a choice, they could vote for freedom and liberty and the end of all this nonsense. If the people could have a choice, it would be great, but it would require the Government to take a firm stand. I am sure that the Minister would be willing to do that; I hope that the Government will also.

11.40 am

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Mid-Kent): My friends and family sometimes tell me that one of the many reasons why I have never been asked to join the Front-Bench team is that I have an uncanny habit of naively exposing the fact that I am not as sophisticated or well informed as many people, and that I should keep my mouth shut when I do not know what I am talking about. I am not an economist and, unlike many of my hon. Friends, I feel insecure in talking about economic concepts. There is not a great deal of harm, however, in exposing to the House the type of difficulties that the ordinary punter faces in this debate.

I was brought up to believe that devaluation, on the whole, was to be avoided. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) has pointed out, however, we have been engaged in devaluing the pound since the

time I was born, and certainly since the second world war, yet those who most passionately resist any attempts to devalue never seem to talk about any of the costs that are involved therein.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): Everyone is against devaluation or debasement of the currency. It is important to realise that devaluation of the currency occurs when one has economic inflation and then resists the consequential adjustment of exchange rates, leaving an imbalance between the exchange rate and the real value of the currency which causes the economic dislocation. That is what occurred when we were in the exchange rate mechanism, and that is what occurred under the gold standard.

**Mr. Rowe:** I bow to my hon. Friend's superior knowledge, but his contribution does not explain the devaluations that occurred in the years before the European Union was even dreamed of.

National power is one of the main issues in the debate. The truth is that the world was once on the gold standard because it was the currency that the United Kingdom used. Worldwide, people wished to be linked with our currency to give their currencies credibility—a function of the enormous power that was wielded by this country. I have told the House before that we are no longer in a position to dictate to anyone in the world. That has marked consequences, shown most clearly in the Suez crisis when the world decided that it did not wish three sovereign states to continue a war and simply pulled the plug on them.

We are in no position to stand alone. Our armed services are so small that, with the exception of certain fire-fighting activities, there is no way that we can operate alone on the world stage. We require the sort of co-operation that is taking place—one hopes with happy results, eventually—in Bosnia. Except in certain cases, we do not even make our own armaments. We make bits of them because we are entirely dependent on our partnerships with manufacturers in other states. The process of gradually moving towards one another is accelerating.

As an ordinary layman, I become rather confused about why there is the tremendous imperative from above to drive us towards a single currency. A single currency will emerge during the years ahead, as sure as night follows day, as we do more and more business with our European partners. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East said, as more people travel through Europe and find that constant currency adjustments are expensive and tiring, we shall find that businesses increasingly wish to make use of a single currency unit. Big businesses will start the process, small businesses will follow, and tourists will follow that. In my lifetime, I do not expect to be able to buy a loaf of bread in my village bakery—should it manage to resist the supermarkets that long—with a single European currency unit.

**Mr. Dykes:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I did not give way at all, but he has kindly referred to me twice. Is it not interesting that consumers who go to other European countries are increasingly using credit cards rather than getting too much currency? The equivalent, therefore, is that the single currency becomes the credit card without any charges or expenses.

**Mr. Rowe:** That is entirely true.

Having a national currency is no guarantee of independence. I have just returned from Nepal, which is desperate to preserve its national independence and have its own currency. The idea that it is not wholly overshadowed by India, its enormous neighbour, is nonsense. I do not believe that the preservation of our national currency is a guarantee that we will not lose our capacity to act independently. That capacity has been substantially diminished over the years, for the reasons that I have set out.

We are engaged in an extraordinarily acerbic debate about something that has been made more immediate than it should have been by the pressures from the European Union and the central bank. I should much prefer us to evolve towards the single currency which I am sure will follow.

**Mr. Marlow:** My hon. Friend is making a case, albeit not a strong one, for joining a single currency. Given that any single European currency would include Greece and Portugal—that would happen if he were to have his way—would it not be rather better to join with the dollar and the United States?

**Mr. Rowe:** I am reluctant to join any closer to the United States. I am fond of the United States and think that it is a fine country, but I should infinitely prefer to resist a great many of the influences that come from it. I do not wish to be closer to a country whose racial problems, for example, could be imported into this country. I do not want such a divide in the United Kingdom. The American culture seems to be destructive of many of the values that we in the House hold dear.

**Mr. Charles Kennedy** (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I apologise to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), who initiated the debate, for being elsewhere earlier and not hearing his speech. Does not the intervention by the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) tell us something interesting about that section of the parliamentary Tory party? The fact that the Americans have concluded a North American Free Trade Agreement in which, unless I have missed something, they did not expect the United Kingdom to participate speaks volumes. Does the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) think that such an approach has any economic coherence given that we are part of a single market?

**Mr. Rowe:** It is fair to say that my hon. Friends do not stress the fact that we should also join Mexico, although they may prefer Mexico to Greece and Portugal.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the origins of the European Union arose from a passionate desire that Europe should not yet again plunge the world into war, the cost of which would dwarf any costs that might be incurred by joining a single currency. This country was ruined as a consequence of our incapacity to contain German expansionism. We have been provided with a mechanism for containing any possible future threat from such expansionism and I am extremely wary of taking steps to turn our back on that.

**Mr. Legg:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Rowe:** I think that I have given way enough. Other people wish to speak.

*[Mr. Rowe]*

The European Union must make an effort to contain precisely those pressures that have cost the western world enormous amounts of money, resources and anxiety in Bosnia, to take just one example.

We should therefore evolve towards a European currency, which will come about inevitably, without our having to make artificial efforts to create it. Our membership of the European Union is a partnership that stands by far the best chance of resisting the enormous internal conflicting pressures within the continent of Europe. I hope that we shall not try to bulldoze the Prime Minister and the Government off the strongest position that they can hold, which is that, if other countries adopt a single currency, the United Kingdom will then consider whether it would be beneficial for us to join. The pressure that some of my hon. Friends wish to put on the Prime Minister to say that, whatever happens in the European Union, we shall never consider joining a single currency, would weaken his position absurdly. I hope that they will cease to pressure him in that way.

11.52 am

**Mr. Anthony Coombs** (Wyre Forest): First, I congratulate and thank my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), for giving us an opportunity to discuss this important subject and for pointing out that a single currency enjoys not only minimal popular support in this country but dwindling support throughout Europe. The gulf between the political elite in Europe and popular opinion on this issue is increasing, which is extremely dangerous.

I was going to begin by saying that the single currency is an idea whose time has come and now, thankfully, gone. Far from moving smoothly towards its conclusion in 1999, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) would have us believe, its wheels are falling off as it moves forward. We have been told that the convergence criteria are being achieved. But only Luxembourg—not exactly a major player in Europe—currently meets those criteria. In 1993, the franc had to be loosened from its 2.5 per cent. band to a 15 per cent. band within the ERM.

It is interesting to read some of the comments of former Maastricht enthusiasts in France, quoted in *The Economist* this week. Julien Dray, a leading left winger and author in 1992 of a pro-Maastricht book, said that if the fight against the budget deficit was simply to meet the Maastricht criteria,

"our fellow-citizens will rightly soon be saying that they have had enough of this Euro-construction which requires nothing but sacrifices in the name of an Eldorado which no one is any longer sure even exists."

Even Martine Aubry, a former socialist Employment Minister, who happens to be the daughter of Jacques Delors, conceded that a single currency was

"not worth breaking the country to acquire".

Jacques Delors has argued that, if the French and German economies slow down, the deadline for European monetary union and a single currency will not be met. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East would like us to believe that the French and German economies are not slowing down. The latest figures show that, for the past three months, German gross domestic product has been falling. In France, industrial production over the past three months declined by 6.4 per cent. If that is evidence of their moving smoothly towards the convergence criteria, those who argue it are living in cloud cuckoo land. Theo Waigel, the German Finance Minister, is also gradually distancing himself from the idea of a single currency by arguing for additional criteria and hinting that Italy and possibly France could not meet them.

The wheels of the single currency are undoubtedly falling off, and the reasons are obvious. First, the idea of a single currency is fundamentally flawed. At a time when European countries need to be more flexible in terms of dealing with the "challenge of global competitiveness", a single currency would impose a straitjacket on them by requiring unrealistic convergence criteria in fiscal terms. It would have no popular mandate in terms of the huge transfers of money from one country to another that would be required to make it work. For example, interest rate changes would have a far greater effect on Britain than on other European countries, for the simple reason that more people in Britain own their own homes. It has been calculated that, in Britain, the effect of interest on ordinary householders as a proportion of their household debt is 10.9 per cent., whereas in Germany it is only 3.9 per cent. and in France it is 3.2 per cent. So the effect of ceding decisions on interest rates to a supranational body would be far greater on British householders than it would be on French or German householders.

Secondly, the Maastricht criteria are, inevitably, heavily deflationary, especially if they are related to the strongest currency, as the Germans insist that they must be, through the exchange rate mechanism. As a result, as we have seen in France, Germany and other countries that have become constricted into preparations for the convergence criteria, our economy would probably gradually contract.

Moreover, budget deficits, the reduction of which is a major Maastricht criterion, will not be reduced as a result of cutting Government spending. That would be a virtuous way of achieving the criteria, especially for countries like Germany where nearly 50 per cent. of the country's resources go to the Government. Instead, they will be reduced by raising taxes, which will make the problem far worse in the long term. It will also worsen the problem of Europe's global competitiveness. So the criteria impose a fiscal straitjacket, whereas strenuous slimming is needed.

The third reason why it is becoming increasingly evident that a single currency is unrealistic is that it is not only anti-competitive but totally unnecessary. The Germans are so keen on it because they want to lock other countries into the very high social costs that they now endure. No less than one third of GNP in Germany goes on maintaining the welfare system, and the add-on to the average wage to cover welfare costs is no less than 80 per cent. As a result, the German economy is becoming increasingly sclerotic, and Daimler, Volkswagen and Siemens—companies that one would think of as paradigms of German competitiveness—have lost 150,000 jobs between them in the past few years.

It is small wonder, therefore, that even people such as the chief executive of the CBI, Adair Turner—he has never been exactly regarded as a Euro-sceptic—have described the inevitable concatenation of a single currency with the social chapter as "an employment-destroying disaster" here and throughout Europe.

A single currency is also unnecessary, and even the EC is admitting that there is no particular correlation between exchange rate stability and investment or trade flows within the trade bloc. As for Britain being marginalised, I would frankly prefer to be marginalised if our economic performance continued to improve as it has done in the past few years when we have not been part of the ERM, as opposed to how constricted we would be were we a part of it. As evidence for that, the president of the German equivalent of the CBI recently said not only that Britain had attracted nine times as much inward investment as Germany in the past 15 years but that it was the European country best equipped to face the challenge of global competitiveness. That is a result of the flexible, free-market policies that we have been following in this country, away from the constrictions of European monetary union and the single currency.

The main flaw in the single currency enterprise is that its main aims are not primarily economic—however flawed the arguments may be—but political. Helmut Kohl talks about an

"irreversible process for which decisive steps will follow in the next two years".

**Mr. Rowe:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Union between Scotland and England was primarily political?

**Mr. Coombs:** Precisely. My hon. Friend makes my point for me.

When one sees the vilification poured on Bernard Connolly for having the temerity to challenge the intellectual basis on which political union and the single currency are based, the concern felt by many in the EC and the Commission at the feebleness of their arguments becomes ever more evident. The irony is that a single currency will not work unless the conditions for political union are in place. It is obvious that the conditions for political union are not in place, and there is no public support for regarding Europe as a federal body or entity in the way in which a successful single currency would inevitably require.

It is time that the Government recognised that a single currency is a flawed and eventually disintegrating enterprise. It would be very much in their interests if they committed themselves to a referendum on a single currency, if it ever happens—although I do not think that it will ever come to that, and the matter will remain, happily, entirely hypothetical.

Contrary to the Labour party—which is six-sided and hypocritical on this matter as it is on so many policies—we would gain a great deal of political credit if we recognised the single currency as the chimera and myth that it undoubtedly is, and said that to the British electorate.

12.4 pm

**Mr. Richard Shepherd** (Aldridge-Brownhills): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs). My hon. Friend referred to Bernard Connolly, who has been a good and faithful servant of the Community and has pointed out some of the inherent problems with the way in which monetary matters are managed.

The debate has focused on a subject which has consumed a great deal of the 20th century: the adjustment of exchange rates between one country and another. We can go back to the post-first world war settlement, Winston Churchill, the gold standard and the famous and wonderful pamphlet by Maynard Keynes, "The Economic Consequences of Mr. Churchill", the Bretton Woods settlement, through to the fixing of exchange rates by the mechanism that Europe developed. Unfortunately, we joined that system and had some very unhappy experiences in it.

My purpose is not to look at the economic side of the matter, although we know full well that only 44 per cent. of our total trade—visibles and invisibles—is with the continent of Europe, that the principal foreign currency in which we trade is the United States dollar and that we have a critical relationship with the US. Whether the proponents of the single currency or its opponents like it or not, our economic cycles seem to follow more closely those of the United States than those of the central European countries.

I wanted to look at the constitutional argument, which has divided part of our Government and Opposition Front Benchers, and particularly the Leader of the Opposition. Article 107 of the Maastricht treaty, which is justiciable, states:

"When exercising the powers and carrying out the tasks and duties conferred upon them by this Treaty and the Statute of the ESCB,"—

that is, the European system of central banks—

"neither the ECB, nor a national central bank, nor any member of their decision-making bodies shall seek or take instructions from Community institutions or bodies, from any government of a Member State or from any other body. The Community institutions and bodies and the governments of the Member States undertake to respect this principle and not to seek to influence the members of the decision-making bodies of the ECB or of the national central banks in the performance of their tasks."

That is reinforced in chapter 1, article 7 of the constitution of the European system of central banks.

I understand that to mean that no elected representative of the British people—including the present Chancellor of the Exchequer or, should Labour come into office, its Chancellor—may make representations to the central bank in respect of monetary policy, to cite one area. This is a huge constitutional change, and so profound. How is it possible for the Leader of the Opposition to say that he has no constitutional problem with that?

If the Leader of the Opposition becomes Prime Minister, what will he say to the millions who vote for Labour when our economy is out of joint with the central European economies? What will he say when interest rate policies pursued in Frankfurt are not appropriate for the British economy? What will he say to all those who elected him? Will he say that we no longer have the constitutional power? Is that what the present Chancellor of the Exchequer is saying by his promotion of the endeavour?

I suggest that it is a profound constitutional area and it startles me slightly to understand that, on the very basis of article 107 and the subsequent articles, any British Government could contemplate turning round to their people and saying, "I am afraid central European interest rates, although not appropriate for us, are the governing factor." We will then ask what the Government are doing about that and whether they are making the sternest, strongest representations to the government of the European central bank. The present Chancellor would no doubt reply, "Oh no. What does it matter? I no longer

*[Mr. Richard Shepherd]*

have authority as we signed it away by treaty without any consultation with the British people." I have not heard a reply from the Prime Minister on that subject, and we have great difficulty in pinning down the Chancellor to specific detail on such matters of great importance.

I had thought, and this may be based on the over-optimism of someone who watches things come and go, that the clear experience of joining a fixed exchange relationship, which ended so tragically and unfortunately less than three years ago, would have exorcised from the mind of the House the desire to enter into something even more absolute. Let us remember that exit from the ERM gave us the ability to make our interest rates more consonant with the needs of the British economy. That was the constitutional power of the British Government.

Now, under the Maastricht treaty, the Leader of the Opposition says that the Labour party has no constitutional difficulty about denying us, the people, the right to influence output, employment and all the necessary apparatus of sensitive management of an economy.

12.10 pm

**Mr. Mike O'Brien** (North Warwickshire): I hesitate to intervene in the debate lest I interfere in the private grief of the Conservative party. I suspect that all parties have their own reservoirs of private grief to entertain them. The Minister and I have agreed to be relatively brief, and for that reason I should prefer not to take any interventions as there is a lot to say on the issue.

I welcome the debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on raising an issue of such enormous importance to the people of Europe in the coming decades. It will not surprise him when I say that I fear that the Labour party does not agree with him. The Labour party approves of the principle of economic and monetary union, but believes that questions about the practicalities still need to be resolved. In principle, we believe that in the long term a move towards economic and monetary union through the creation of a single currency would produce significant benefits for the people of Britain and Europe. In particular, a single currency would remove the cost of currency transactions, which have been variously estimated to cost in excess of £15 billion per year. The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) said that such transactions account for 0.5 per cent. of GDP of European currencies. It is also likely that a single currency would boost inward investment by reducing exchange rate risks, and in the long term it would create a more stable economic environment for industry by reducing currency speculation.

Unlike the Government, the Labour party has a clear principle to guide it when assessing the criteria and practicalities of entry into a single currency. Getting the circumstances right is important to the Opposition. We will take a hard-headed, businesslike view of the costs and benefits of a single currency. If approached wrongly, a single currency could do enormous damage to the British economy; if approached correctly, it could be a great stimulus to trade expansion, new jobs and prosperity.

The Opposition's criteria for judging the issue are clear. We believe that the convergence of the real economic performance of member states is a vital precondition of economic and monetary union. Convergence must be based upon improved levels of growth, jobs and productivity, and not just on monetary objectives alone. That is why we have long argued that the Maastricht convergence criteria need to be applied flexibly and that real economic convergence is of primary importance. Indeed, the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) said that the Prime Minister had suggested that the Maastricht criteria no longer applied at all—I hope that the Minister will tell us whether that is the case.

I was pleased to see that page 1 of the report from the European Monetary Institute on the circumstances for EMU contained the following sentence:

> "For there to be a successful European currency area, a high degree of sustainable convergence of economic performance in the participating area is a pre-requisite".

We in the Labour party agree with that. I was also pleased to note that during a recent debate in European Standing Committee B the Paymaster General agreed that Labour's policy that economic convergence was a prerequisite of entry to a single currency had now been accepted by the Government.

The Labour party also believes that, on entry, we should be confident that British industry will be able to compete effectively within the single currency area. Furthermore, and in response to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), the Labour party has always said that it wants the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers to be developed as the political counterpart of the proposed European central bank to give the public a voice in shaping economic policies. The move towards a single currency must also be based upon the consent of the British people.

The Labour party's first commitment in Europe is to jobs for our people. That is why we back the Swedish proposal to write into the Maastricht treaty a clearer commitment to full employment. Labour's vision is not of a Europe for bureaucrats or politicians, nor is it just a Europe for business—although we want business to succeed and prosper—our view of Europe is a community for ordinary people. We want workers to have better rights at work. That is why the Labour party will sign the social chapter and join our European partners in setting a minimum wage. We also want the unemployed to have jobs, which is why we put economic convergence before monetary criteria for joining the EMU.

The Opposition want a Europe in which Britain has a central role—where it is, in the Prime Minister's own words:

> "Where it belongs, at the very heart of Europe".

Under the Tories, Britain has been reduced to the sidelines in Europe. The Prime Minister has sacrificed the interests of Britain to the interests of the Tory party.

The Tories are now so divided that they cannot agree the agenda for Britain's future in Europe. Some of them would crawl forward; some of them would go into reverse. I have made the analogy before and I will repeat it today. The Prime Minister reminds me of the driver of a stalled, clapped-out old bus marked "Conservative party". He sits there watching his passengers squabble while he tells them that he is not going to start the engine. The reason is that he is unable to move. He knows that if he starts and moves either way some of his passengers

will get out. Two of them have already vacated the old bus. The Prime Minister dares not move, so he spends his time inventing excuses for doing nothing.

**Mr. Graham Riddick** (Colne Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. O'Brien:** The hon. Member was not present for the entire debate, so I will not give way to him.

Because of the Government's policies, Britain is marginalised and isolated. We do not know whether the Government support the principle of European monetary union. The Prime Minister has been quoted as saying:

"There is no more important issue facing the European Community than the path we choose towards economic and monetary union. We are all committed to this goal."

Does that remain the Government's position? Who knows, least of all, I suspect, the Prime Minister? The Deputy Prime Minister has said:

"No truly unified market can exist without a single currency. A close association of monetary policies will be needed if the single market itself is not to be put at risk."

Is that Government policy? Who knows, least of all the Deputy Prime Minister? Are the words of the former Conservative Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher, the policy of the Conservative party? Is it based on the words of the Secretary of State for Defence? He has said:

"Economic and monetary union are a long way to political union and no Government can give up the government of the UK."

Who knows whether that is Government policy, least of all the British people? We simply do not know the Government's principles on this matter. As a result, as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) recently said, so simply but accurately:

"Our partners in Europe do not listen to us."

They do not listen because the Tories continue to play the British hokey cokey—in, out, in, out, shake it all about. They are having a pointless little dance, which is played to placate the egos of the Euro-sceptics on the Conservative Back Benches, but which, by turns, now simply irritates or amuses our European partners.

It is fair to say that over the years all political parties have had their internal disagreements about Europe. It is also fair to say, however, that historically there has always been leadership from the leaders of both parties, whether Macmillan or Gaitskell, Alec Douglas-Home or Harold Wilson, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, Lord Callaghan or Baroness Thatcher. In each case, leadership was displayed—a sense of direction was clear for the Government of the day. Today, we have a divided, disorganised and disunited Cabinet, which fails to provide the sort of vision that Britain needs on the European issue.

The decision to publish a White Paper on the intergovernmental conference was dictated by internal struggles within the Tory party. It was a victory for the Europhobes. It is vital that British interests in Europe are determined not by parties' internal problems but by a genuine appreciation of where those interests lie.

The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) asked the Minister five questions. Let me put our five questions about the White Paper and Government policy. Do the Government agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said that a single currency is not "a threat to the nation state"?

Do they agree with the Deputy Prime Minister that a single market needs a single currency? Can they say whether, in the unlikely event of their re-election, a single currency is a possibility in the next Parliament, if the economic conditions are right? If the economic conditions were right, would the Government in principle favour persuading the country that it was right to join a single currency? One must ask whether they are prepared to agree with the following statement:

"Some observers hope—and others fear—that economic and monetary union as set out in the Maastricht treaty will be a step in the direction of a federal Europe . . . I believe that such hopes or fears are unrealistic".

Do they agree with that statement by the Prime Minister? Of course they do not.

The Government do not know what they want on Europe. In a sense it does not matter, because by the time the decisions have to be made, the Government will be gone. The divisions in the Tory party will be played out, as we have seen in this debate. The Tory party is taking up positions from which to fight its civil war in the long period that it is about to undergo in the wilderness. Meanwhile, there will be a Government with a clear vision, sense of direction and agenda for Britain's future in Europe, and it will be a Labour Government.

12.20 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) for obtaining this important debate. It shows the importance that the Conservative party attaches to European matters that so many of my hon. Friends are here. It also shows the absence of concern on the part of Labour Members about a matter of vital importance for Britain that they feel that they have better things to do elsewhere.

**Mr. Jenkin:** They are beating up Harriet.

**Mrs. Knight:** I should not like to speculate about that, but we shall find out at lunchtime what happened.

I suppose that the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) should be congratulated on his efforts to find a fig leaf to cover the absence of a Labour party policy on Europe. He spoke about clear principles. Perhaps I may remind him of statements made by three of his Front-Bench colleagues recently. We shall be interested to know with which of these statements he agrees.

Perhaps the hon. Member for North Warwickshire agrees with the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who said of a single currency:

"Yes we are against a single currency".

Perhaps he agrees with the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who said that he was

"Personally . . . in favour of a single currency";

or with his party's Members of the European Parliament, who are in favour of a single currency within the time limits and timetable. Or does he agree with the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who said some time ago that setting such a timetable was "irresponsible"? Those clear variations exemplify a party with no policy on this vital topic.

*[Mrs. Knight]*

I consider all the points made by my hon. Friends in this debate to be important and I will answer as many of them as I possibly can. On those points that I do not reach, I will write to my hon. Friends giving full and detailed answers.

The Government have consistently said that the United Kingdom would join a single currency only if it was in the national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time. It is because the Prime Minister secured our right to opt out that Parliament and the Government can take a decision at the appropriate time in the light of all the circumstances.

I remind the House of the answer that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) when he said:

"I can certainly reassure my right hon. Friend that, for a decision of such magnitude, we shall keep in mind the possibility of a referendum, if the Cabinet were to recommend British entry. That has been in my mind, as my right hon. Friend knows, for a long time and it remains there. I think that it is right to keep that before us for consideration."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 1225.]

I am sure that all my hon. Friends will agree with that.

It is clear that it would not be in the national interest of any European country to proceed with a single currency—or in Europe's interest for any country to do so—before conditions were right. A premature economic and monetary union could be disastrous for the future of Europe. Given the importance of the United Kingdom's trade with the rest of Europe, and the rest of the world, we have a strong interest in making sure that such a disaster does not occur, whether or not we take part.

The convergence criteria set out in the Maastricht treaty aim to ensure that economies are moving in the right direction towards economic convergence, a necessary condition for economic and monetary union. However, the criteria of reducing debt and low inflation are sensible economic criteria in their own right.

Growth rates in many European countries are relatively sluggish at present, a point made by many of my hon. Friends. The problems that France is experiencing spilled over into the streets at Christmas. Its economic activity has slowed substantially, strikes have destroyed jobs, unemployment is 3 million and rising, and a high percentage of the work force is unemployed. Germany also reports economic difficulties, with new investment plans being directed to former eastern European countries or to lower-cost countries such as Britain.

Fulfilment of convergence criteria, while necessary, is still an insufficient condition to ensure successful economic and monetary union. The criteria represent nominal convergence. That is important but only alongside proper convergence, which requires economic liberalisation to encourage economic growth—the sort of measures that we have already enacted. If Europe wants proper convergence to make a single currency obtainable, it will have to follow suit.

Integration of markets is important for assessing whether countries are ready for EMU. That is illustrated by unemployment, which was mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and for Ludlow. High unemployment is a problem for many of our European partners. It is rising in Germany and high in France. In Italy it is 11.5 per cent. and in Spain over 22 per cent. In the United Kingdom, it is at 8 per cent. and falling. Of the five largest European economies, Britain is not just doing well but doing substantially better than the others. It is worth looking at the reasons why that is so.

In Britain, for every £100 spent on wages, an employer has to add an extra £18 for non-wage costs. That same employer would have to add £32 in Germany, £34 in Spain, £41 in France and £44 in Italy. Those are substantial additional costs.

The head of the German CBI recently said that German labour laws were "too rigid" and that social costs and taxes were "too high". He added that Germany worked

"the shortest working week in Europe"

and that

"the German Government spends 50 per cent. of GDP as opposed to 34 per cent. in Britain".

He went on to say:

"No wonder Germany has a problem".

The Germans' proposals to help reduce their economic problems include reducing employers' social costs—a policy that has been followed by the British Government. In addition, they are talking about cutting income tax—precisely what the British Government are doing.

In a week in which hypocrisy has hit an all-time high, is it not grossly hypocritical of the Labour party to want to introduce a European jobs tax into Britain by adopting the social chapter and thereby, at a stroke, increasing unemployment in Britain? Hypocrisy is saying one thing when another is in fact true. We all want Europe to follow the more flexible wage markets, lower tax burdens and lower non-wage costs that we have in Britain. We have the basis of an enterprise economy, and foreign investors recognise that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow asked about the pros and cons and costs and benefits of a single currency. It is too early to judge the costs and benefits, as the Prime Minister said in the debate on 1 March. That illustrates the value of the United Kingdom's opt-out, because it is impossible to judge something until one gets closer to it. The views of industry vary considerably. The business world has mixed views on the subject, but UK businesses are sure that if the single currency goes ahead it will have important implications for them whether or not Britain participates, so it is important that it is well planned. One reason why Britain is participating in the negotiations is to ensure that practical issues such as that are properly considered.

The City of London is also a subject of vital concern. It is a centre for international financial excellence and innovation and it is the overwhelming choice as the European headquarters for major international banks. It handles more currency than all the other European Union centres put together and I am confident that it will remain competitive and rise to the challenges, whether or not the United Kingdom participates in the single currency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East raised five issues, which I shall address one by one—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. I am afraid that we must move to the next topic.

## ROM-Data Corporation

12.30 pm

**Mr. David Jamieson** (Plymouth, Devonport): I am pleased to have been granted this short debate, as there are important questions to be answered about the ROM-Data Corporation and the way in which the Department of Trade and Industry grant aid has been given to companies in the south-west. I am happy to allow the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) to have some time to speak in the Adjournment debate that I have initiated.

The south-west is in great need of economic regeneration; there has been a rundown in defence industries and many of the primary industries that used to exist in Cornwall and parts of Devon. As you will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, unemployment is high, not only in Plymouth, but in Falmouth and Camborne. That is why inward investment is essential to create new jobs and improve the long-term economic conditions of the south-west.

I welcome the regional office that has been set up in our area, which has helped to make improvements in some of those sectors. I fully appreciate that there are limited and finite resources available for that assistance, which is why those resources must be used well and effectively. I also appreciate that, when those grants are given to companies, spotting winners is difficult, that only some companies can benefit from those funds, and that no Department can ever guarantee success. It is sometimes easier to spot losers and guaranteed failure.

The Department of Trade and Industry has an absolute responsibility to undertake the most careful checks before large sums of taxpayers' money are given to any company. At least two factors must be considered: the first is that a proper, skilled assessment of business plans must be conducted by an independent authority. Secondly, careful checks into the financial background of directors should be carried out to discover any former bankruptcies, liquidations or even fraud.

In the case of the ROM-Data Corporation, various questions are raised. The first involves the competence of the advice given to the DTI. The second relates to the DTI's policy when giving grants to people with dubious financial backgrounds. Were checks made of the ROM-Data Corporation? Was there a full and proper scrutiny of the company's business plans before the grant was made?

I shall give a brief history of the ROM-Data Corporation. It was set up in Falmouth in 1991 to do the job of data processing. In that year, it received regional selective assistance of £825,000 of taxpayers' money—a substantial sum. It is the sort of sum that many companies in the south-west would like to enjoy, and they would welcome receiving a fraction of it. A promise was made that many jobs would be created.

Early in 1994, wages and value added tax were unpaid, and, I believe, the company approached the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne, who assisted it to obtain more time to pay the VAT. That is what any Member of Parliament would have done in those circumstances.

Later that year, the company received £250,000 of loan guarantee—another substantial sum of taxpayers' money—despite the fact that it had not been paying wages, and was clearly experiencing financial difficulties. At the end of 1994, not only were wages and bills unpaid, but the company went into liquidation. It left many creditors; the wages of many workers in the Falmouth area, Cornwall and Devon were not paid. Many small businesses suffered as their bills were not settled.

The question must be asked: what checks were made in 1991 by the DTI into the directors of the ROM-Data Corporation, particularly Mr. John Dawson? Mr. Dawson was a former Bath Conservative councillor whose firm, John Dawson (Motor Holdings) Ltd, in 1981, suffered a spectacular bankruptcy—one of the largest bankruptcies in the south-west at that time. Mr. Dawson left more than £2 million of debts. Wages were unpaid; there were many creditors—many of which were small businesses—who were hurt when the company went into liquidation. I believe that Mr. Dawson fled to the West Indies on his yacht, and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

What checks were made into Mr. Dawson's background, and, more importantly, what did they reveal? The DTI Minister, Baroness Denton, wrote a letter to the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who had quite properly inquired why one of his constituents had not received his money from ROM-Data. On 12 January 1992, the Minister wrote to the hon. Gentleman saying:

"all applications for Regional Selective Assistance are rigorously appraised by officials within this Department."

The hon. Gentleman must have pressed the matter further on behalf of his constituent, as the same Minister admitted on 2 April 1993 in a further letter to the hon. Gentleman:

"Mr. Dawson may have made a commercial mistake in his past."

She was presumably referring to the liquidation that amounted to more than £2 million and the fact that the police were looking for Mr. Dawson in 1981.

On 2 March last year, I asked a question of the former President of the Board of Trade, now the Deputy Prime Minister, about what checks were made. The answer that I received stated:

"A range of inquiries were undertaken by the Department and others into the background of ROM-Data, including checks on the directors of the company through the Companies House and the insolvency service".—[*Official Report*, 2 March 1995; Vol. 255, c. *716*.]

On 19 July 1995, I asked a further written question of the President of the Board of Trade. I asked him whether the Department was aware of the previous bankruptcy of the director, John Dawson. The reply that I received stated:

"The Department made certain inquiries into the background of the directors prior to the offer of grant in 1991. However, the bankruptcy record referred to did not come to light at the time."—[*Official Report*, 19 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. *1562*.]

The bankruptcy did not come to light, despite the checks that had been made with the Insolvency Service, but, in 1993, Baroness Denton had had the information at her disposal—she said that Mr. Dawson had

"made a commercial mistake in his past."

She must have known then the information held by the DTI, so why was that not made clear in the answer before the House in July 1995?

When pressed on the matter of the checks, the new President of the Board of Trade came clean in a written answer to me on 19 December last year. He said:

*[Mr. David Jamieson]*

"although some checks may have been made . . . the subsequent investigation has revealed no documentary evidence that these checks were made."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. *1091-92*.]

In a further letter to the hon. Member for Ryedale, the President of the Board of Trade said of the answers given to me earlier in the year:

"Answers which had been given earlier this year . . . were misleading."

In his letter, he underlined the word "were".

The answers given to me in the House were indeed misleading: they were untruthful and incorrect. The President of the Board of Trade said that checks were made, but in December he said that there was no evidence that those checks were made. The President of the Board of Trade has therefore admitted that the previous President of the Board of Trade misled the House on that important issue.

I shall now discuss the way in which those grants are assessed. A panel has been set up by the DTI, composed of people employed by the DTI, to inquire into those matters. I have not received answers from the President of the Board of Trade, which were due on 15 January 1996, to questions about the role of a Mr. Kenneth Holmes. I believe that he was an accountant. He was appointed to the DTI, I believe in the late 1980s, to help assess grant applications to decide whether they were the right type of applications to be eligible for substantial grants.

I ask the Minister today, because he has failed to answer that question so far in written questions that I have tabled: was Mr. Holmes involved in the vetting of the ROM-Data application for grant in 1991? The answer needs to be given to that, and I shall return to that later.

Was it known that Mr. Holmes, as it is alleged, has been involved with other companies that have had financial difficulties? I quote the company H. Bear and Sons, which he bought in 1987, which I believe went into liquidation in 1989.

If Mr. Holmes vetted the ROM-Data application, was he given permission by the DTI to become, on 21 November 1993, not only a director but the chairman of the ROM-Data Corporation? Only 12 months before ROM-Data went into liquidation, the man who had approved the grants had become a director and a chairman of a company that subsequently went into liquidation. The company has left unpaid the wages of constituents of the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne, and has many creditors for more than £2 million. I am pleased to note that the Serious Fraud Office is now inquiring into those matters.

Does the Minister approve of employees of the Department of Trade and Industry, who are carrying out the extremely sensitive work of vetting grants of substantial sums of taxpayers' money, becoming directors of companies that have benefited financially from their own decisions? How does he feel about a DTI official approving a grant and later becoming a director of that company, which then owes the DTI that money? Is it a coincidence that Mr. Holmes, like Mr. Dawson, is a member of the Conservative party? I believe that his wife is vice-chairman of the Totnes Conservative party. In spite of his liquidations, Mr. Holmes carries on in a very comfortable life style.

The DTI should have conducted a searching internal investigation, and a careful analysis of what went wrong. I have been told by the President of the Board of Trade that those investigations are now complete. They are so detailed that, I believe, the two most important players, Mr. Dawson and Mr. Holmes, have not even been interviewed. I want to know from the Minister why those two people have not been interviewed in connection with that important matter.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne, in whose constituency the events occurred, has acted honourably in this matter throughout. He played a part in helping the ROM-Data Corporation to defer payments of VAT, as any hon. Member would have done for a time.

I believe that the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne also helped the company obtain the loan guarantee. I question whether that was entirely wise. I notice that, in July 1995, the hon. Gentleman was quoted in the *Daily Mail*. He said that he had not investigated Mr. Dawson's background

"because I am only an MP and cannot be expected to rush off to Companies House to check out track records every time a business wants help".

*[Interruption.]* A quick check with the House of Commons Library would have given him the information he wanted.

Even if that was not good enough, the hon. Gentleman may also have read the *Western Morning News*, which, as early as 3 June 1992, published an article entitled "£2m debts that haunt high flier". If the hon. Gentleman had read that, he would have known that that man was extremely dubious. Was not the hon. Gentleman slightly suspicious that Mr. Dawson was not paying his constituents' wages? He nevertheless helped him to obtain further assistance.

I called the debate with some reluctance. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] I had to call it, because we are not receiving satisfactory answers from the President of the Board of Trade to questions. *[Interruption.]* I believe that the previous President of the Board of Trade has seriously misled the House in that matter. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. The debate is becoming a little cantankerous. I ask hon. Members, however provoked they feel, to observe the highest standards of courtesy.

**Mr. Jamieson:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that the Conservative Members who appear to be disturbed by the truth coming out about this matter will make their own contribution to the debate, and tell us what their part was in the matter.

We need a thorough investigation into the way in which those grants were made in the south-west. I am sure that any hon. Member representing the south-west would agree that we need to help genuine companies, those that can create real jobs and buy from other companies to create other jobs. That will not be achieved until the DTI makes known its plans to improve.

The case of ROM-Data shows what happens if one mixes together a solution of taxpayers' money, incompetence by officials, obfuscation by Ministers, a large handful of people in the same political party and

a generous supply of greed. A rich soup is created, in which taxpayers' money may be misappropriated and corruption may thrive.

12.45 pm

**Mr. Sebastian Coe** (Falmouth and Camborne): I resent being limited to barely a few seconds in a discussion that centres on my constituency.

It is a matter of record that I drew attention to most of the issues that have been mentioned in the debate well in advance of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). More than a year ago, I expressed my anxieties about the way in which the company had operated, and its subsequent liquidation, to one of my hon. Friend's predecessors at the Department of Trade and Industry, the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle).

It is a matter of record that ROM-Data was given a grant to set up in my constituency in 1991—a year before the general election, a year before I was honoured with the stewardship of that constituency. The hon. Member for Devonport mentions the way in which the vetting procedure may or may not have taken place, and I know that that is the subject of a full and thorough inquiry within the DTI, which I instigated and asked for more than a year ago.

Several issues have been raised, but I do not wish to enter into those, as they will be the basis of that inquiry and the President of the Board of Trade has promised to report back to the House.

I want to tease out two or three issues. It would be odd for a Member of Parliament representing a constituency with higher levels of unemployment than in most parts of the country, to sit on his hands when confronted, in the space of three or four days, with the potential loss of 170 jobs in his constituency. I very much doubt that the hon. Member for Devonport would have acted differently in those circumstances.

No local Member of Parliament has the ability to rubber-stamp or hand out a Government grant. There is a lengthy application process, in which many agencies in the constituency—and in this case the county—are involved. That is what happened in the case of ROM-Data. All types of agencies were involved, including economic development organisations. Jobs are important. No Member of Parliament will sit and do nothing when there is the potential for job losses on that scale in his or her constituency.

Broader issues should be discussed. The hon. Member for Devonport spoke of the need to vet grants. Of course that is paramount in any process. However, he has failed to say that, in my constituency, like his, and in much of the south-west, our lifeline is regional selective assistance and grants. That assistance should be provided.

I recently met an all-party group of councillors and local business men in my constituency. They said that they were aware of the way in which the ROM-Data case has been dealt with, and the way in which the hon. Member for Devonport has made mischief and slowed the process dramatically. I am delighted to be joined in the Chamber today by my fellow Conservative Members of Parliament from Cornwall and the south-west, who know that those delays have not been helped by the actions of the hon. Gentleman.

It is a difficult issue, and we must tease out and examine various points. However, the manner in which the hon. Gentleman raised the matter this morning leaves something to be desired.

12.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim):** I have listened carefully to the points made by hon. Members this morning, and I shall attempt to deal with them in the short time available.

I refer at the outset to the allegation by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) that Mr. Holmes was a Department of Trade and Industry official. I state categorically that that was not the case.

I shall continue with some general remarks about the way in which the Department has approached the case. First, I make it absolutely clear that Ministers accepted from the beginning that it was important that the facts of what occurred should be investigated fully and properly, and that the results should be made known. My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) and others have been active in raising concerns about the case, and Ministers have been equally anxious to discover what has happened.

That is why the Department set up a formal investigation into the handling of the case as soon as problems became apparent, and why the Department drew the case to the attention of the Serious Fraud Office. Above all, it is vital that we know what happened and why, so that we can take effective action to ensure that there is no repetition.

Secondly, we have made it absolutely clear that we shall be open about what went wrong, both to ensure that we get to the bottom of what has been a lengthy and complex sequence of events, and, more importantly, to ensure that nothing is done to impede or prejudice in any way the investigation of the events by the Serious Fraud Office. That investigation is continuing, so I am limited in what I can say today about the company's actions, or about particular individuals who might be the subject of further proceedings. I also must not prejudge the further inquiries that are being made under the Department's internal disciplinary procedures.

However, I assure hon. Members that we intend to be open about the matter. That is why, as soon as it became clear that answers to earlier questions from the hon. Member for Devonport might have been based partly on inaccurate information supplied by officials, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade warned the House of that possibility. When, following further investigation, it became clear that that had occurred, he informed the House immediately. It is in that spirit of openness that my right hon. Friend has undertaken to report the findings of the Department's investigation to the House as soon as he is able to do so. That will not be long delayed.

The Department's internal report on its handling of the ROM-Data case has now been completed. Ministers have received the report only in the last few days. It deals with a series of complex events which must be considered carefully. However, Ministers remain committed to making the Department's findings public as soon as possible. The Department will also consider taking further action under its disciplinary procedures. That latter aspect,

*[Mr. Phillip Oppenheim]*

together with the continuing investigations by the SFO, makes it difficult to say much about the role of individuals at this stage.

The DTI has rigorous procedures for handling public money, which are communicated to staff in extensive written guidance. The Department's financial procedures and systems are regularly checked by its internal auditors and the National Audit Office. My initial impression of the common theme running through the report's findings is that the main problems resulted from failings in the way in which the specific ROM-Data case was handled, rather than major deficiencies in the Department's overall systems and procedures—although clearly improvements can, and will, be made in a number of areas.

We shall consider how to implement the report's various recommendations for improvements in existing procedures once we have had the opportunity to consider them properly. They are essentially concerned with detailed additions to the existing systems and procedures. In light of the findings, the DTI will also pursue the necessary further inquiries under its internal procedures in order to establish whether and what disciplinary action should be taken against any staff members.

I had intended to run through the chronology of events at ROM-Data. However, as time is limited, and as most hon. Members are aware of that chronology, I shall not do so. I turn instead to the role played by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne.

My hon. Friend was obviously concerned about the failure of an important local employer and a company which had received substantial sums of public money. As the constituency Member of Parliament, he had quite properly and assiduously supported the company's application to secure a loan guarantee scheme loan which offered an opportunity to protect jobs in his constituency. In so doing, he acted in the same manner as any hon. Member seeking to fulfil his proper role in this place. I find it difficult to believe that the hon. Member for Devonport would not have done the same thing in similar circumstances.

**Mr. Jamieson:** I would have checked.

**Mr. Oppenheim:** If the hon. Gentleman is saying that directors' backgrounds should be checked every time that Labour Members lobby for regional selective assistance or a loan guarantee scheme grant, I suggest that he conduct a poll of his right hon. and hon. Friends. I will be amazed if he can find one Labour Member who has done such a check.

**Mr. Jamieson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman had quite enough time to put his case.

I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne, because he contacted Ministers as soon as he became aware of possible irregularities in the case. I make it absolutely clear that he was the first person to contact Ministers following the company's liquidation. He immediately passed all his information to Ministers, and he has kept in close touch with Ministers since then. He has acted properly and constructively throughout.

Ministers want to get to the bottom of the matter, put right any failings by the Department and be as open as possible about the circumstances. As soon as Ministers heard about the ROM-Data case, they asked the Department for an urgent report. The contents of that initial investigation, which was conducted in February 1995—shortly after the meeting with my hon. Friend—led to the decision to establish a full internal inquiry into the Department's handling of the case.

The inquiry's terms of reference were extended subsequently in light of emerging concerns—for example, concerns about earlier ministerial answers that were given on the basis of inaccurately supplied information, to which I have referred already. Parallel work by the Department on the circumstances of the ROM-Data Corporation led to the establishment of a separate SFO inquiry after the Department had referred the case to the SFO in August 1995.

The Department aims to find out what happened, where, and how any mistakes were made in its handling of the case, and to suggest ways of preventing such failings occurring again in future. I attach particular importance to that last point, as will be apparent from what I have said about the important action that the Department will take. It is clear that there have been procedural failings, and, if we find that DTI officials have breached the Department's rules of conduct, they will be held to account through the Department's disciplinary procedures.

**Mr. Jamieson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** With respect to the hon. Gentleman, he has taken up half the time available for debate. He raised a series of complex issues, and I am doing my best to address them. I must add that most of those issues had already been raised separately by my hon. Friend in whose constituency the problem occurred. I do not believe that the hon. Member for Devonport has any constituency interest.

The SFO must determine whether others have acted improperly, and its inquiries are continuing.

**Mr. Anthony Steen** (South Hams): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I hope that my hon. Friend will excuse me, but I have only a few minutes in which to conclude my speech.

Finally, I shall put the unfortunate events into context. As my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne pointed out, regional selective assistance is a highly successful and popular scheme. Last year, the DTI offered grants of £159 million, which are expected to result in £1.3 billion in new investment and the creation or safeguarding of 36,000 jobs. In the same year, we wrote off less than £2.5 million. That is too much, as no one likes to see public money lost. However, some failures are inevitable and the RSA failure rate is extremely low. We must learn the lessons from this case, in order to prevent any repetition in the future.

## Rest Homes

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Before the House debates the next topic, I want to point out that although the Adjournment debate embraces different topics, technically it is one debate, so that any right hon. or hon. Member who wants to speak twice should seek the leave of House. That is the case for the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait).

1 pm

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Hastings and Rye): I am grateful for that guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker and I hope that, with the leave of the House, I may be permitted to speak again. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of rest homes for the elderly, and to the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), for kindly taking time out from a busy day to respond to my concerns.

I have long taken an interest in rest homes for the elderly, and the debate was provoked by a document from the Centre for Policy on Ageing, "Home Life II", to which I shall refer later. First, I refer to the bed blocking that occurred over Christmas because social workers, for all sorts of valid reasons including flu, were not available to ensure the appropriate care. Many of my constituents involved in the rest home sector made the sensible proposal that in such cases, there is no reason why a hospital could not discharge into a rest or nursing home, for respite-type care over a brief period, people who could so benefit. Hospital beds would not be blocked, but available for more crucial cases, and social workers would have adequate time to make an assessment. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister could throw that suggestion into the melting pot of ideas when his Department considers the matter.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster): Does my hon. Friend's constituency encounter the same problem as Lancashire, where the Labour-controlled county council keeps open expensive county homes rather than use more efficiently run and cheaper private homes?

**Mrs. Lait:** My hon. Friend anticipates my next point. That problem exists in East Sussex, as in other counties. Sometimes it is caused by people being inappropriately allocated to nursing homes, rest homes or domiciliary care. General practitioners have reported seeing bed sores of considerable size and complexity on elderly residents in rest homes who should be in nursing homes. Similarly, there are people in domiciliary care who should be in rest homes. At one stage, Lancashire county council was maintaining people in domiciliary care in their homes on packages costing £1,000 a week. I understand that that practice has come to an end, but in Hertfordshire, payments to private sector nursing homes have reduced from £370 to £350. Some nursing homes have been allowed residential care beds, with an insistence on the same staffing levels, and are paid only £250 a week. It is not difficult to anticipate the problems as county pressure increases on the private sector to reduce nursing home fees to £250 to cater for Hertfordshire residents, while county-owned beds will be considerably more expensive.

As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, East Sussex is currently wasting £4 million a year by overpaying itself to the extent of £100 per week per bed. The solution is to split the purchaser from the provider. As long as the present system remains—whereby social service departments are providers and inspectors and they let the contracts—we shall continue to receive justified criticisms from the private sector.

The Centre for Policy on Ageing was instrumental in producing the Government-sponsored report "Home Life", which set out rest home care standards that are generally accepted and agreed. Subsequently and under the same chairman, Lady Avebury, the centre established a further working party to produce "Home Life II". In fairness to the working party, Lady Avebury and the centre's director, Gillian Dalley—who has been helpful in advising me—I shall quote from a letter that Gillian Dalley wrote to me, referring to

"the draft which has been circulating without the Advisory Group's authorisation."

She wrote also to everyone who commented on the draft:

"The draft of the revised document which many of you have seen was an interim draft not intended for public circulation because further work and editing was going on."

I completely accept that explanation, but when the draft entered the public domain of the rest home sector, it caused those of my constituents who are rest home owners and others throughout East Sussex promptly to contact me, because of the history of Government sponsorship of "Home Life". The fear was that the Government had sponsored "Home Life II" as well.

The interim draft included the recommendation that every rest home room should measure 12 sq m, excluding bathroom facilities, and that 15 sq m would be better. In Hastings and St. Leonards, we are in the process of raising a large sum to help our local voluntary association for the blind to provide rooms that measure 10 sq m—the current standard. It does not take a big leap of the imagination to appreciate the effect on the private, public and voluntary sectors of a requirement for rest home rooms measuring 12 sq m or 15 sq m.

The interim draft's other recommendations include:

"Residents should not be thought of as objects of charity to be entertained through carol singing or children's plays, or be recipients of harvest festival goods or Christmas presents."

That is one of the draft's more ludicrous suggestions.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** And patronising.

**Mrs. Lait:** My hon. Friend is right.

One of the interim draft's more impractical suggestions is:

"Commodes should only be used as a last resort. Portable chemical toilets are a better option."

I am sure that many hon. Members are aware of the down side of chemical toilets.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Certainly those of us from rural areas.

**Mrs. Lait:** Those of us from rural areas are well aware of the down side of portable chemical toilets, and I am sure that we would not want many of them in rest homes.

Rest home owners anticipate problems with recommendations such as:

"The window cill should be low enough so . . . resident can see out when seated or lying down. There should not be horizontal bar obstructing vision."

*[Mrs. Lait]*

Many rest home residents are a bit dodgy on their pins and it does not take much imagination to realise the risk of nasty accidents in the absence of window bars. That apart, many rest home windows are of Victorian or Edwardian design. Their replacement would not only involve expense but require extraordinarily long and complex planning negotiations. Further, the document states:

"Annual accounts should be readily available to residents, relatives, inspection units and other organisations involved."

In one sense, I have no difficulty with that. I just hope that local authority homes could provide that information, because one major criticism from the private sector is that local authorities cannot do so.

The recommendation in the document that strikes terror into hearts of my local rest home owners is:

"Homes which fail to meet these standards will be required to make changes in order to meet them."

That is the most draconian requirement that I have come across in the guidelines. The National Care Homes Association, the East Sussex Registered Rest Homes Association and many others to whom I have spoken point out not only that the recommendations are expensive, but that they are inappropriate in a number of cases and are not suitable for many residents of rest homes. They are prescriptive and coercive. They do not allow for innovation, change and local interpretation by the people who run the rest homes and who are expert in providing good standards of care, as most people involved in the sector know.

The document is a motherhood-and-apple-pie wish list. I am told by the Centre for Policy on Ageing that it is amending the list. If anything like it was ever to emerge into the light of day officially, that would not just kill off the private sector, but the voluntary sector could not comply with its requirements. The public sector in its present state certainly would be unable to comply in most cases. I rather suspect that the public sector would try to comply at enormous cost to the public purse. That might mean a wider provision of beds by it. It would not utilise the expertise of the private sector, which would be forced out of the business.

If one is a conspiracy theorist, one can perhaps work out some of the thinking behind the document. However, I believe in a broad and wide provision of rest home and nursing home care and I do not wish to see anything done that would make the private or voluntary sector less competitive and less able to offer the high standards that those sectors now offer.

I am conscious, because of the research that I have done, that alternative work is being down by bodies such as the Residential Care Forum, which may produce some standards that people will find more compatible and easier to provide. We know from the past that, when guidelines come out, they are treated so often as law. Registration officers and social services insist that the guidelines are met. Too often, the guidelines are entirely physical and do not take into account elements such as the friendliness of a home and the involvement by owners and staff in ensuring that residents feel that they are living in their own homes. That is one of the keys to providing the best standards of care in the rest home sector.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister could repudiate the report and ensure that the Government will not in any way encourage such guidelines to be used in the rest home sector. If any further standards are to be encouraged by the Government, they should be produced in collaboration with the key people in the sector—the owners.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** My hon. Friend referred to the voluntary sector. I am sure that she is aware of the superb work done by the Abbeyfield Society. In Lancaster, we have been fortunate for some years to have a go-ahead chairman, Mr. Chirnside. Many Abbeyfield homes are doing a superb job, but they would find it very difficult to comply with those guidelines, even the modern ones.

**Mrs. Lait:** My hon. Friend makes an extraordinarily good point. I was tempted to mention all the people who provide such good care, in both the voluntary and the private sector. Many organisations, some very large and some small, have helped me in my research, but I was conscious that I would like the Minister to have as much time as possible to reply. Therefore, I am afraid that I refrained from commending many of the people who produce such good care in that sector.

1.14 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) for raising this subject. In another place, this would be called the dinner-hour debate, and it is perhaps appropriate that we take this half-hour to consider care for some often vulnerable people in our society who need to be looked after safely and of course with common sense. That is the flavour of the debate and of my hon. Friend's speech.

I have noted the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye and of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) about bed blocking and the inefficient use of the independent sector by some social service departments in providing or obtaining good-quality care for people who need residential care.

The debate gives me the opportunity to put the record straight on a matter that I know has been brought to the attention of and exercised the minds of a number of hon. Members in the House and one or two in another place. As I have said, I have noted the comments that have been made today, and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), who is in his place, has also written to me about the subject.

I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye that the draft publication known as "Home Life II", which has so upset owners and managers of residential care homes, is nothing whatever to do with my Department. The publication is the work of a group set up by the Centre for Policy on Ageing, which is a wholly independent organisation. The document is not the result of a Government working party, we are not funding it and we are not associated with any of the draft recommendations in it. I hope that that is clear. There has been some misunderstanding because of the origins of the original document, "Home Life".

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye has quoted sensibly from the draft document and has drawn to our attention some of its absurdities. There are others.

The requirement that residents' bedrooms should have not only television and radio, but music centres strikes me as strange for a residential home. My hon. Friend referred to the mention of carol singing and Christmas presents. She might also have referred to the fact that the document claims that

"An objective measure of food acceptability is to weigh and record plate waste."

The requirement on window sills and horizontal bars has been mentioned, but the document also suggests that every room, irrespective of personal need, should have a remote control system for closing windows and drawing curtains. As my hon. Friend said, the document is a wish list that goes beyond sensible borders.

The document also contains a glossary, which includes such gems as

"gender—all words indicating one gender must always include both genders"

and

"singular/plural—words indicating singular or plural always include the other".

And again:

"Life is always taken to include all aspects of life, physical, medical, social, cultural, spiritual, economic".

The term "relatives" is primarily used to describe people living outside the home

"whether they are related or not. It certainly includes friends".

Perhaps my favourite quotation is:

"Positive/negative—statements often have an equivalent negative/positive statement. The opposite is always assumed to hold even if it is not stated."

If you can work that out, Madam Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you.

We know that this is a draft, not a final document, but it has caused unnecessary concern among home owners and people living in homes. That is unfortunate. As I said, the document has nothing to do with our Department; I hope that it is now being revised in accordance with the commonsense response from my hon. Friends, among others.

There are some things in the document with which we would all agree and many others that are unexceptional—but I share the concerns about some of the contents. A number of statements in the document are far too prescriptive. They attempt to play nanny or to interfere in the lives of residents in an unnecessary way. There are some ludicrous examples, too, of political correctness. We have not been asked to endorse the publication and there is no question of that endorsement being given to the sort of ideas that we have heard discussed today.

If there is a "Home Life II", there must have been a "Home Life I". There was: it, too, was produced by the CPA, and that one we did endorse. It subsequently became widely used as a standards document by homes and regulatory authorities. But that was in 1984 when the Registered Homes Act was being introduced, and there was a widely recognised need for standards in homes to be improved.

Since "Home Life" was first published, a number of other, similar documents have been published. I could cite a range of them, including "Homes Are For Living In" and the "Caring For Quality" series published by the social services inspectorate. Any successor to "Home Life" will need to find its own place among those and other new publications being planned, for example, by the Residential Care Forum.

Whether or not we endorse particular documents that try to define standards for homes, we all recognise how vital it is that homes provide quality care. But I believe that that can be done while avoiding unreasonable and costly demands—of the sort my hon. Friend has highlighted—being placed on homes, and unwarranted interference occurring in the lives of residents. Homes, after all, are for living in. Moreover, the wish to see quality care should not lead us to too much prescription. We are committed to keeping the regulatory burden on homes to the necessary minimum, without loss of safeguards for residents.

We believe that much can be done to maintain and improve the quality of care by a sensible dialogue: a partnership between homes and authorities—and above all, between homes and authorities on the one hand and residents and families on the other.

Local standards for homes should be drawn up by authorities only after full consultation with providers, and those standards should be published. Such a process means that homes know what is expected of them and authorities have a clearer appreciation of what it is reasonable for homes to do. It also means, in accordance with the citizens charter principles, that potential residents will be provided with more and better information about homes.

Guidance about the local development of standards and other regulatory matters was issued to all authorities by my Department last September.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Does my hon. Friend agree that while we are always seeking information from private homes, it would be no bad thing to get rather more information from the county homes?

**Mr. Bowis:** My hon. Friend is right. As she will know, we require county homes to be inspected against the same standards as are expected of the independent sector.

Critics of our determination to improve regulation of homes have, I believe, been proved wrong. We did not abandon the law. We took steps to restore a sense of appropriateness to regulation—keeping things in proportion, cutting paperwork, seeking consistency in enforcement practice within and between authorities, and targeting enforcement effort. All that will benefit everyone. Residents will benefit by not having their homes unnecessarily examined or invaded in an unco-ordinated way by a range of bodies. They will also benefit from care staff not having their attention unnecessarily diverted; and of course taxpayers will benefit from better value for money.

I am not suggesting for one moment that we should go soft on poor homes in any sector: far from it. We expect regulatory authorities to take all necessary steps to bring low-standard homes up to scratch. The law provides authorities with all the powers that they need to take enforcement action in the light of the evidence concerned. We expect them to take similar action—this answers the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster—when their own homes are not up to scratch.

Our community care reforms are now in place. Our community care development programme is about moving on from consideration of structural changes.

*[Mr. Bowis]*

I hope that this will reassure my hon. Friends. We now want to concentrate on improving the quality of life of the people who rely on services. That is certainly true of care homes. Better outcomes for residents mean listening to what they say, involving them as far as possible in decisions about their care, and allowing them to exercise choice and control. Residents must be valued and their needs not subordinated to the needs of the home or the opinions of local authorities or inspectors.

**Mrs. Lait:** My hon. Friend referred to the need for residents to be given choice. Is he confident that all social service departments are giving residents and prospective residents the widest possible choice of homes to go to? Is he aware that social services still exhibit some restraint when offering choices to prospective residents?

**Mr. Bowis:** The answer to the first question is no, and to the second question, yes. The problem is that they do not offer enough information about all the options that are available. I should like some improvement in that area. Assessment and care plans should ensure that residents get the care that they need. Privacy, confidentiality and sensitive treatment are all essential. Much can be achieved by the idea of partnership between the home and its residents.

**Mr. David Hinchliffe** (Wakefield): I came to the debate to listen to a speech by the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) about standards of care in homes, but the debate might have been better entitled, "The business interests of private care home owners". I was saddened to note that, in a 14-minute speech, the hon. Lady did not mention residents' interests once.

We are talking about vulnerable people, and I am pleased to hear the Minister, at least, talking about their interests. The current review of the 1984 legislation is worryingly underpinned by a belief in deregulation that forgets the fact that people in care homes—I have talked to some of them—feel demeaned when they receive third-hand apples and oranges at harvest festival.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but this is a short debate—and interventions should in any case be short.

**Mr. Bowis:** I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not go on to criticise the nonsense in the draft document—unlike my hon. Friends—but I suppose that that shows the differences between our parties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye did talk about the interests of residents. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the SSI recently published a report—"Responding to Residents"—based on an inspection of local authority homes. There are many important lessons in it for all homes in respect of providing individualised care for residents. For many elderly people, it is important that homes do not become too restrictive—as the document under discussion seems to be—or lead to a loss of continuity or contact with their past lives. Relatives and friends should be encouraged to participate in the life of the home and how care is provided. A friendly, domestic environment should be maintained, and there should be opportunities for contacts with the wider community to be developed in accordance with residents' wishes. They should be allowed to have their own possessions around them. There should be sensible policies on risk taking, and encouraging residents to pursue leisure activities or to go outside if they feel that they can and wish to do so.

Many good homes provide such care now, and others are working to get there. A review is under way on inspection and regulation. I believe that it will open up some of the debates on how we should seek those qualities and standards in the future. We have seen considerable growth in the independent sector in recent years. One of the concerns that the review has is that we do not wreck the quality of the homes with a whole panoply of regulation. We are exploring that area in the review so that providers can be treated even-handedly.

I believe that I have had the opportunity to clarify our stance on the CPA's draft and to emphasise our concern to see standards in care homes maintained and improved, in full collaboration with providers—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. We now come to the next topic for debate.

## Health Provision (Bradford)

1.30 pm

**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe** (Bradford, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise my concerns and, more importantly, those of my constituents, about health provision in Bradford. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) will wish to comment on this important matter.

It is my belief, as I hope to prove today, that Bradford people are losing confidence that their national health service will be able to meet their medical needs when they require it. I have no intention of talking down the health service. I am proud that it was a Labour Government who set up the national health service based on need. Indeed, I pay tribute to the doctors, nurses and health workers, who are acting above and beyond the call of duty. I shall read an extract from a letter that one of my constituents, Mrs. Jean King, whose mother is in hospital, wrote to the chief executive of Bradford hospitals trust. She says:

"I am writing both to compliment and complain. The compliments are directed at your nursing staff and the complaints are directed at your organisation. All credit must go to the staff, they never complain they just get on with their duties as best they can. They look tired, stressed and they are definitely overworked. I am sure that they know they have not got the time to give the sort of service they used to give.

My mother has become depressed and distressed, not because of her illness but because nobody has the necessary time to give her the sort of care which used to be available for patients.

My mother is only one of many needy patients on that ward who try not to trouble the nurses because they can see how busy they are."

In another letter, one of my constituents, Mr. Key, makes further mention of the shortage of staff. Unfortunately, his wife passed away in hospital. He said that, in the last few days of her life, she was concerned about being moved into a side ward, as she feared that she might not be heard because the staff were so busy. Eventually, to benefit her family, she agreed to go into a side ward. She died with the alarm button in her hand.

There are many other cases that I could quote, but the constant theme remains the same: grateful thanks to the doctors, nurses and health workers, but harsh criticism of the system.

Bradford nurses still have not received their pay rise in their pay packets, due to the financial crisis facing the hospitals trust. That crisis is based on the faltering relationship between the purchaser, Bradford Health, and the provider, Bradford hospitals trust. The evidence is that, in the past, both parties had to go to arbitration to confirm their financial settlements, as Bradford hospitals trust claimed that it was not receiving the appropriate funds. To balance the books, the trust has had to make efficiency savings, which have resulted in savage cuts in the number of staff, the closure of wards and the loss of beds. That in turn has affected morale among hospital workers, who have seen the quality of their service deteriorate and the number of skilled and qualified staff reduce. At the same time, the number of administrators has increased, due mainly to the bureaucratic relationships and complexities of the purchaser-provider split.

In Bradford, we have seen an increase in the need for charitable donations to provide much-needed equipment, particularly in the care of cancer and heart patients. The death two weeks ago of my constituent, Mr. Geoffrey Cranswick, was a great tragedy, not only for a loving family who lost a special person but for Bradford. Mr. Cranswick collapsed in his doctor's surgery. His general practitioner tried to save his life, and hospitals in the area were contacted for an emergency admission to intensive care. Bradford royal infirmary has only five intensive care beds, four of which were in use at the time. The fifth bed was unavailable because of staff shortages. Eight other hospitals were contacted in the region until a spare bed was found, in Scarborough. Sadly, Mr. Cranswick died just after arrival in Scarborough.

Bradford's population of 485,000 deserves more than just five beds. Following the announcement of Mr. Cranswick's death, the director of nursing services commented:

"For the size of our population we look to be lacking in Intensive Care beds at the moment".

That is somewhat of an understatement. In December, 19 people needing intensive care had to be transferred outside the Bradford area.

The irony is that Mr. Cranswick was a tireless worker for the British Heart Foundation. I believe that a full inquiry is needed into the circumstances of his case. I hope that his family's pleas for extra intensive care beds will be heeded as a fitting memorial to him. I have a relevant quotation from our local evening paper in Bradford, the *Telegraph and Argus*, which said:

"There is obviously a nationwide problem. It is hard to work out whether the crisis is the result of a shortage of funds—or due to mismanagement of resources and bad planning."

The Secretary of State for Health is the man ultimately responsible for sorting out the mess. The Government created the new-look NHS. They must ensure that it stops failing people when they are in desperate need. The indications are not good. When I raised a question in the House about the problems of purchaser-provider splits, I was told that it was a matter for the chief executive of the trust and for the commission. I believe that to be an abdication of responsibility. The Government should and must act when things go wrong.

Again in December, the hospitals trust had to subcontract more than 1,000 patients to other private and NHS facilities because it did not have the capacity or the notice to make arrangements. Some £1.9 million was found by the regional health authority out of "unrenewable resources" to meet the backlog of cases that had been waiting almost 12 months. There were 516 general surgery cases; 322 orthopaedic cases; and 278 urology cases. Operations were carried out in the private sector at premium rates by consultants who would have carried out the same operations within the NHS. I urge the Minister to investigate how it was possible for such a situation to occur.

Bradford hospitals trust has shut down its capacity to match its budget provision. The trust's chief executive raised concerns with my colleagues and me about the seriousness of the financial situation. In the contracting year 1994-95, the trust was required to carry out 76,500 finished consultant episodes from a budget of £80.5 million. In 1995-96, it has been requested to supply 79,500 FCEs for £82.1 million—an increase of £1.6 million for a further 3,000 operations. In effect, it is a 4 per cent. increase in requirement, but with an increase of only 2 per cent. in funds.

*[Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe]*

Needless to say, the health commission does not accept the figures and makes the case that the trust is the provider and that it must be competitive on its prices to win contracts. That would be understandable if we were talking about a business, but we are not. Nor are we comparing like with like. Bradford hospitals trust depends on Bradford health commission for more than 90 per cent. of its budget. The trust forecast that it is heading for a finance deficit this year of £5 million. It says that further financial pressures are unavoidable on issues that have been agreed by the Government—the cut in junior doctors' hours, and more medical education—but have not been budgeted for.

The only method of retrieving the shortfall is for further cuts to be made in an already beleaguered service. The trust maintains that it is cost-effective, low priced, and an efficient production unit. It points to several local and national indicators to prove the point. What is clear to all of us in Bradford who use, and depend on, our hospitals is that we cannot afford more cuts. Yet we discover that the new formula funding for the regional health authorities means that Bradford will receive £5 million less next year, on top of the £5 million shortfall for this year.

Taxis ferry patients across the city, because the trust operates on two major sites. X-rays and scanners are available only at one site. We need more money and more investment, not less money and further cuts. Staffing levels on the wards are the lowest in West Yorkshire. On most wards, 19 staff provide 24-hour cover seven days a week. On others, there are six nurses—three qualified from the Royal College of Nursing and three auxiliaries—to 51 patients. When there is absence through sickness, the staff have to go to the management to arrange cover instead of using agency nurses.

All training courses have been stopped until the end of the financial year as the training budget has been used up. Nurses and staff are not allowed time off to attend courses to develop their skills. They have to pay for the courses themselves and attend them outside working hours. Staff working on Christmas day had to pay for taxis to get to work because there was no public transport and when they applied for a refund they were told to deduct the amount of the bus fare. That is outrageous.

In 1994, a document was launched in Bradford outlining the strategy for health until 2000. It pointed out Bradford's medical requirements and all the agencies involved gave a commitment to make Bradford a healthy place with healthy people able to depend upon first-class health provision. If present trends continue, that will become a worthless piece of paper to put alongside the patients charter. We do not want more words; we want a health service that provides for us when we are in need.

The trust recognises that it has a problem. It forecasts increased waiting times and says that current contracts will mean that people will be on waiting lists for more than 12 months. It believes that a cost reduction programme will make matters worse, putting the trust at greater risk of complaints and litigation. Bradford people cannot afford that. I urge the Minister to investigate and put matters right. If he does not, the Government cannot continue to say that the health service is safe in their hands. This is not a matter of the numbers of patients being treated; it is a fundamental question of providing an effective, efficient and caring public service.

In 1991, the Bradford hospitals trust was launched as a flagship of the new approach to health provision. It saddens me to say that it is floundering and in danger of sinking. The casualties will be the decent people of our city, people who cannot afford to buy their way out through the private sector if they are in trouble.

It is a great privilege and responsibility to represent Bradford, South. I hope that the Minister will take the issues seriously and not respond by quoting statistics showing the throughput of operations. I hope that he will show a genuine desire to get to the heart of the issues and to put matters right.

Doctors, nurses and health workers in Bradford deserve better support. People in Bradford know what the problems are and they deserve better treatment. I hope that the Minister will investigate all the matters that I have raised and ensure that Bradford receives proper and appropriate health care.

1.44 pm

**Mr. Max Madden** (Bradford, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) on securing the debate and allowing me a brief opportunity to participate.

The Under-Secretary of State for Health is new to his portfolio, but I am confident that the briefing material given to him before the debate will have said that concerns about the NHS in Bradford have been put to the House by different Members of Parliament representing the city during the past 10 years or so.

I do not want to be alarmist—what I have to say is substantiated by what my hon. Friend said—but the NHS in Bradford is in deep crisis and unless the Government intervene decisively, that crisis will deepen. Those who depend on the NHS in Bradford are clearly not receiving the quality of service to which they are entitled and all the prospects are that that quality of service will deteriorate unless decisive action is taken.

As the House has been told on numerous occasions, Bradford suffers from deep poverty. That poverty is endemic and breeds all sorts of health demands. Clearly, Bradford NHS is incapable of meeting those needs at present and, as time goes by, without the injection of additional funding, it will continue to be unable to meet those growing and important needs. We suffer particularly from high rates of heart disease. Thankfully, our infant mortality rates have improved substantially in recent years, but there is continuing concern about infant mortality and the health of children in our district.

As my hon. Friend said, the NHS in Bradford is grotesquely underfunded. That has been the case ever since the NHS trust was first established there. Public warnings were consistently given about that underfunding, which were reaffirmed by the Select Committee on Health which visited Bradford at that time. Those warnings were never heeded, but I appeal to the Minister to do so today and to take action.

The morale of nursing and medical staff is at an all-time low. There is gross understaffing. As my hon. Friend said, the nursing staff-patient ratio is not only below the regional average but way below the national average. Considerable burdens are imposed on staff, who experience great stress and there is unacceptable dependence on temporary or so-called bank or agency nursing staff.

There is also considerable anxiety about the need to increase the number of consultants, in comparison not only with Airedale but with the rest of Yorkshire. My hon. Friend rightly spoke about the language that we now hear so much of in the health service—for example, throughputs and activity rates. We are dealing not with supermarkets but with those who are desperately trying to provide the best quality of care and service in Bradford, as is the case throughout the rest of the country. That is not being delivered in Bradford today and the main reason for that is the underfunding.

As my hon. Friend has already said, it is no good the Minister saying, as he may well do, that the funding is adequate and that the matter is one for the trust and the health commission—once better known as the health authority. Despite the new name, the reality remains the same, and that is that there is serious underfunding, which is historical. Unless action is taken, the consequences of that underfunding will continue and there will be more unfortunate cases, such as that of Mr. Cranswick, which has illustrated the need for urgent action now.

Some particular incidents have caused considerable concern recently. My hon. Friend referred to the decision to spend nearly £2 million on reducing the number of those who have been on waiting lists for nearly a year which, as the Minister will have heard, has resulted in that money being spent primarily within the private sector. It is unacceptable that nearly £2 million of taxpayers' money should be spent within the private sector.

The absurdity of that is compounded because most of the operations were carried out by NHS consultants who should and would wish to carry out those operations within the NHS. That decision was politically driven. The Government clearly said that they wanted to reduce waiting lists and did not care how it was done. In Bradford, the result was that money that should have gone into the NHS went predominantly into the private sector.

I hope that the Minister will give us more than sympathy today. I hope that he will call urgently for information about the situation. If he agrees with the views expressed not only by me and by my hon. Friend today but continually by many others who are desperately concerned about health in Bradford, I hope that he will find a way of injecting substantial funds into the NHS in Bradford and do so urgently.

1.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam):** I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe). I congratulate him on securing time in the House to debate the important matter of health care in Bradford. I acknowledge, too, his long-standing concern and his local knowledge. I well understand his feelings following the sad death of Mr. Geoffrey Cranswick, his constituent. He made an eloquent plea not only on the general question of health care in Bradford but on the particular question of intensive care beds, which are a material factor. I also acknowledge what the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) said. He too has a great deal of knowledge about, and concern for, health matters in Bradford. I promise not to give too many statistics, but we must include a few facts in dealing with this case.

Before referring specifically to Bradford, let me say a little about the position in the country as a whole in order to put the matter in context. The number of available intensive care beds has increased by nearly 90 in the past four years. We recognise that the lack of intensive care provision has provoked criticism. It is sometimes claimed that the problem is due to a shortage of qualified nurses; retaining highly qualified nurses can be a problem, but—as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirmed only last week in Health questions—we now have 1,000 more qualified nurses than we did in 1990. Indeed, the number of qualified general intensive care nurses increased by more than 18 per cent. between 1990 and 1994.

It must be stressed that intensive care is precisely that: it is a very intensive business. Between five and seven highly trained nurses are required to deal with one bed in an intensive care unit. That is one reason why we are encouraging the development of high dependency units, which can take some of the strain off intensive care provision.

In response to the claims of shortage in provision, the Department of Health commissioned a study from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, led by Professor McPherson. His report, which was published last year, identified considerable variation in provision; it also found a significant number of inappropriate admissions. It must be recognised that what capacity we have must be used sensibly: it should not be misused in the handling of cases that do not necessarily justify intensive treatment. Following the publication of the McPherson report, a working group of medical and nursing professionals was formed to draw up guidelines for admission to, and discharge from, intensive care. It is expected to complete its work early this year.

Both the hon. Member for Bradford, South and the hon. Member for Bradford, West said that this should be a matter for the Government. In fact, the Government—or, rather, the professionals whom they have commissioned—are examining the whole business of intensive care, including intensive care in Bradford. Last year, we also asked local health authorities to review local intensive care provision in the light of Professor McPherson's report. We are also supporting the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre with a grant of £400,000. Both performance and outcome are being examined. I agree with both hon. Members, however, that we should consider not merely short-term but medium and long-term benefit.

Let me now deal with the position of local health commissions, and Bradford health commission in particular. It is the responsibility of district health commissions, or authorities, to use their resources to meet the health needs of their populations. The hon. Member for Bradford, South expressed the fear that resources for Bradford might be insufficient, but let us look at the facts. In 1995-96—the current financial year—Bradford health commission received over £200 million, an increase of £9.6 million in cash terms, including an increase of £1.6 million for development. Furthermore, in the next financial year, beginning in April, Bradford is to receive £210 million—another substantial increase in cash terms, including a real terms increase of £1 million. While the hon. Gentleman clearly believes that Bradford's health service is underfunded, the fact is that it is receiving substantial amounts each year in addition to what it already has.

**Mr. Sutcliffe:** The worries that we have expressed are not merely our personal worries; they have been substantiated by the hospital trust management, which says that it faces real shortfalls.

**Mr. Horam:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but the fact remains that we are increasing funds for Bradford in real terms.

Let me be more specific. One of the ways in which Bradford has benefited from the extra money is through improvements in its accident and emergency department. After Bradford health commission had completed its own review, the results of which were published last September, it was able to assist with A and E services at Bradford royal infirmary, which is part of Bradford Hospitals NHS trust. The commission also provided an extra £140,000 for A and E staffing. This year, the trust has increased the number of staff in its A and E department by one consultant, four senior house officers and eight nurses. It has invested a total of £420,000, and a new computer system has been installed.

The hon. Gentleman, however, is concerned about not just A and E but wider health matters. The trust has also appointed eight additional consultants, including three anaesthetists and a general surgeon. As recently as the end of 1994, my hon. Friend the Minister for Health opened a new wing at St Luke's hospital in Bradford, which is part of the trust. The development cost £25 million.

The hon. Gentleman raised the sad case of Mr. Geoffrey Cranswick. I shall not go into that tragic case at length, because it has already been dealt with exhaustively, and we probably agree about what happened. Following the case, however, Bradford health commission's chief executive visited the trust—I believe that he did so the day after the events with which we are dealing—to discuss the need for more intensive care beds. To that, extent prompt action was taken, as it should be in such cases.

As I explained earlier, the health commission's contract allows for the funding of five intensive care beds, so the recent difficulties are not related to funding. In this case, as the hon. Gentleman admitted, they were due to staff shortages. Two people were not available because of flu, and there were four more shortages because of the inability to attract properly trained nurses. That is a problem, but it does not relate specifically to funding.

**Mr. Madden:** I am sorry to interrupt the Minister when he has only a few more minutes in which to speak. May I ask, however, whether he has received any representations from either Bradford health commission or Bradford Hospitals NHS trust regarding the allocation of resources and the need to increase those resources?

**Mr. Horam:** No, I have not. What I have received is a report on the position. I looked into it after the hon. Gentleman raised the issue in an Adjournment debate. I am assured that much joint work is now being done to bring about a better understanding of the pressures on the service in Bradford. That involves more co-operation between the commission and the trust—the specific point about which the hon. Gentleman complained.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the commission and the trust have been working together on a programme called "Making Bradford Better". He did not mention it, but I am sure that he knows of it. The project evolved from joint discussions and work, and is intended to effect early improvements in specific patient services. Specific programmes include dealing with emergency admissions and the Bradford eye service. Whatever may have obtained in the past, the relationship and level of understanding between the commission and the trust are improving. I acknowledge that great effort is needed to ensure the continuation of that joint work, which clearly benefits Bradford.

On the occasion in question, only four intensive care beds were in service. There should have been five, and it is clearly vital for that fifth bed to be returned to service as soon as possible. It is accepted, however, that five beds are not enough to serve the 500,000 people who live in the Bradford area. Six beds should be available as early as possible, and the commission and the trust assure me that every effort will be made to achieve that.

I mentioned high dependency beds, which can take the pressure off intensive care beds. There are plans to fund an additional four such beds.

The hon. Members for Bradford, South and for Bradford, West may never accept that Bradford has enough money, and I would probably feel the same if I were in their shoes, but funds have been increased substantially. Moreover, as far as I am aware, co-operation between the trust and the commission is becoming better and better. Such co-operation must exist if the problems are to be solved. Specific attention is being paid to the question of intensive care and high dependency. I hope that all those factors will lead to an increase in Bradford's health provision, and I join both hon. Members in paying tribute to the work done by the professionals.

*It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

*Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.*

## BILL PRESENTED

### Edinburgh Assay Office

Mr. Secretary Forsyth presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to the Edinburgh Assay Office (to be presented under section 7 of the Act): And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Tuesday 30 January and to be printed. [Bill 47.]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### School Discipline

1. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is taking to help schools enforce firm discipline; and if she will make a statement. [9415]

6. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is taking to help schools enforce firm discipline. [9420]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire):** Last September, my right hon. Friend announced a range of initiatives to help schools combat the problem of disruptive pupils. They build on guidance on pupil behaviour and discipline sent in May 1994 to all schools, as part of the "Pupils with Problems" pack. She has also asked the consultative group on school standards for advice on what else can be done to help schools maintain and improve discipline.

**Mr. Evennett:** I thank my hon. Friend for his reply and welcome the additional resources provided by the Government to help schools deal with disruptive pupils, but does he agree that better teacher training in classroom management would be one way in which to help improve discipline in the classroom?

**Mr. Squire:** I agree with my hon. Friend who, as a former teacher, speaks with considerable authority. Initial teacher training should equip all new teachers with the skills to create and maintain a disciplined environment in the class. It is also fair to say that the increased emphasis that we are placing on school-based teacher training will assist in that respect. Separately, funding is available for training for existing teachers so that they also may improve their skills.

**Mr. Arnold:** I agree that teachers are the key to discipline, but they can be effective only if they receive proper back-up from local education authorities. As we well know, too many local education authorities, especially Labour-controlled ones, can be categorised as being soft on indiscipline and soft on the sources of indiscipline—basically, on badly behaved pupils. The Government were right to set up pupil resettlement units—the well-known sin bins—but bearing it in mind that their policies are implemented by the same Labour education authorities that are soft on indiscipline, what checks are made on those sin bins to ensure that they have tough discipline and get these yobs right?

**Mr. Squire:** My hon. Friend has put his finger on a significant point. There is no question but that we must ensure that the vast majority of school pupils are able to be educated in a proper and ordered environment. That will sometimes mean the exclusion of disruptive elements, but it is not sufficient that those elements are then left to drift—they must be educated too. The Office for Standards in Education inspection of the first 12 pupil resettlement units was revealing and worrying. From this September, it will inspect all 300 pupil resettlement units with a view to ensuring that standards are high enough.

**Mr. Barry Jones:** Would not providing real jobs for young school leavers help?

**Mr. Squire:** The hon. Gentleman has not considered the unemployment figures for the past three years. The figures for unemployment and for the proportion of people employed in this country are among the best, if not the best, in Europe. Rather, the problem is that some of our pupils suffer from a poverty of expectation, which goes back to the quality of teaching.

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** The Minister mentioned exclusions. Given the threefold increase in exclusions in the past three years, will he explain why his Department could not even be bothered to send a representative to the recent Runnymead Trust seminar, at which Sir Paul Condon was reported to have said that the majority of street criminals in London were excluded from school?

**Mr. Squire:** I do not know about the seminar to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I know beyond argument that the Government are deadly serious about equipping teachers, schools and local education authorities with the full range of powers they need to cope with indiscipline in schools. The hon. Gentleman mentioned permanent exclusions. We have made it clear that that is a last resort, not a first resort. In September, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out a number of ways in which we are seeking, through discussion—particularly with the teaching unions—to extend the scope of alternatives open to schools.

### Grammar Schools

2. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils are currently educated in grammar schools. [9416]

**The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard):** In January 1995, approximately 123,000 pupils were being taught in maintained grammar schools in England.

**Mr. Congdon:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that grammar schools provide not only an excellent education but a real choice for parents, particularly in inner-city areas? Does she also agree that parents who are fortunate enough to be able to send their children to such schools should have the courage to fight for the survival of grammar schools rather than to support policies that would ensure their destruction?

**Mrs. Shephard:** We are in favour of selection. Selective schools have a distinguished record of providing a high standard of education and increased choice, which many parents want for their children. Indeed, such parents are emerging in increasing numbers from the Opposition Benches. The events of the past few days have revealed that the Labour party's policy on choice, diversity and selection is a basic contradiction at the heart of its

thinking—choice and diversity for some, but policy intentions to remove choice, diversity and opportunity for selection from everyone else.

**Mr. Beggs:** Does the Secretary of State agree that in Northern Ireland we have managed to maintain a high standard of education for our children by maintaining a selective system, but that in good secondary schools and comprehensive schools—in which teachers are dedicated and committed and pupils are streamed and educated according to their age and ability—youngsters achieve as much as they do in grammar schools?

**Mrs. Shephard:** What is important is that parents should have a range of schools from which to choose: selective, non-selective, grant-maintained, specialist schools, city technology colleges and, of course, access to the independent sector through the assisted places scheme. Sadly, such variety would be crushed out of existence by the Labour party's policies, should it ever have the chance to put those policies into practice.

**Sir Malcolm Thornton:** No one doubts the excellent record of many grammar schools in this country and the contributions they have made to many children's education. Does my right hon. Friend agree that what is perhaps more important than the label which is put on a school—the name it is given—is what happens within it? Does she agree that those schools that are targeting the real needs of pupils will achieve the best for them and provide parents with the diversity and choice that is central to the Conservative party's attitude and approach to education?

**Mrs. Shephard:** There is no doubt that all schools are capable of providing an excellent education and good results. Schools, of course, depend very much on the quality of the head and teachers in them. That is why we are introducing a qualification for head teachers. I think that my hon. Friend will agree that a range of schools from which to choose, and the very existence of choice, help to drive up standards.

**Mr. Skinner:** Is the Minister aware that grammar schools are not all that they are cracked up to be? I went to one and they taught me Latin—amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant. They also taught me the Archimedes principle—when a body is weighed in air and then in a fluid, the upthrust or apparent loss in weight is equal to the weight of the fluid displaced. But none of that equipped me for life. I went down a coal mine, which is where I got my real education. Do not believe all that rubbish about selectivity. Let us give every child in Bolsover and the rest of Britain the chance to do as well as one another.

**Mrs. Shephard:** It is not part of the Government's policy to impose on our education system the dead hand of uniformity, as the Labour party would seek to do. The hon. Gentleman is the most wonderful advertisement for the selective system. He should be used in publicity.

**Mr. Patrick Thompson:** In the 1960s, I was a physics teacher at Manchester grammar school, teaching the Archimedes principle, and I am impressed by the knowledge of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on that subject. Does my right hon. Friend recall those direct grant selective grammar schools which provided a good education for people of all backgrounds in Manchester and throughout the country? Does she also recall that it was a Labour Government who pushed those schools out of the state system and thereby took away the opportunities for young people?

**Mrs. Shephard:** It was indeed the Labour party which, in the 1960s and 1970s, sought to use education as a tool for social engineering. If we read the lips of Opposition Members, see that they continue to want to do that. Did not a Labour predecessor of mine say that he would not rest until he had got rid of every blank grammar school in the country?

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The Secretary of State's comments on this issue are interesting. If the Conservatives think that selective grammar schools are so good, why did Baroness Thatcher close so many and why has the Secretary of State no plans to open more?

**Mrs. Shephard:** As I have already said a number of times, we are in favour of selection because we believe in diversity and choice for parents, as do some Opposition Members, particularly on the Labour Front Bench. As the hon. Lady knows, we are currently consulting on proposals to broaden selection. Although that has not been received with three cheers by all Opposition Members, I am sure that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) would welcome it. Given the welcome boost to the issue provided by Labour Members' activities, we shall consider what further developments might arise from that consultation exercise.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Does my right hon. Friend agree with the comment in the "Our View" column of Monday night's *Lancashire Evening Post*, which said:

"Many parents still believe we are paying a high price for . . . comprehensive education."?

Does not the fact that so many people apply to the two grammar schools in my constituency confirm that view?

**Mrs. Shephard:** Indeed. As I said, it is not part of the Government's policy to impose the dead hand of uniform comprehensive education across the country. We need choice and diversity, and selective schools are an important part of that.

### Temporary Employment

3. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of people currently in temporary positions because they cannot find a permanent job. [9417]

**Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** Around 650,000.

**Mrs. Mahon:** Is the Secretary of State aware that, when the Courage brewery in my constituency closes, with a loss of 200 jobs, only part-time insecure jobs will be on offer to those workers—and not to many of them? Has she any idea how devastating it is for people who

want to make a stake in society by buying a house or engaging in social activities when they have only temporary, low-paid work? What will she do about it?

**Mrs. Shephard:** Of course I agree that unemployment is a very unpleasant experience, but two thirds of all those who become unemployed find work within six months. I hope that the hon. Lady's constituents will find some comfort in the fact that the Employment Service has placed a record 2 million unemployed people in work this year.

I must correct the hon. Lady's apparent belief that there is a problem with temporary or part-time jobs. In 1994, only 6.3 per cent. of the work force were in temporary work, compared with more than 10 per cent. in France and Germany and a massive 33.6 per cent. in Spain. In case the hon. Lady has missed the connection, I should point out that socialist Spain—where the proportion is a massive one third—embraces both the social chapter and the national minimum wage. I believe that I am right in thinking that the Labour party wants to subject the people of this country to both of those policies.

**Mr. Viggers:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have some special knowledge of the employment situation in France, as my daughter has lived there since her marriage? Is she aware that unemployment among the under-25s in France has now reached the appalling figure of 27.3 per cent.? Is she further aware that, to avoid the rigours of the national minimum wage, it has become normal for employers to offer young people unpaid work—the so-called "stage"—for three or even six months, and the expectation of a chance of getting a paid job at the end of that period is held out to them? Is not that a scandal? Can we expect a similar situation in this country if we embrace the social chapter?

**Mrs. Shephard:** There is clearly a direct correlation between France's embracing a national minimum wage and its regrettably high rate of youth unemployment. Youth unemployment in this country is below that in Spain, Finland, Ireland, Italy, France, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Portugal. I think that that speaks for itself.

**Mr. McAvoy:** Is the Secretary of State aware that, in 1994, the unemployment rate among graduates six months after graduating was 10 per cent.? They were thereby forced to look for any kind of job—particularly temporary jobs—to try to get along. Does she agree that that is a complete waste of their time and of the taxpayers' money invested in them? Does she have any suggestions or helpful comments for people in that situation?

**Mrs. Shephard:** The employment rate among graduates in this country is very much higher than that in the European Union, and unemployment among graduates here has halved in the past year. We do not want anyone to be unemployed, but unemployment is falling further and faster in this country than in any of our major competitor countries in the EU.

### Older Workers

4. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provision is being made for the employment of older workers. [9418]

8. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress is being made in the campaign for older workers. [9422]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan):** The Government's economic and labour market policies have led to an increase in employment of 600,000 over the last two and a half years. Thirty-nine per cent. of those jobs have been filled by people aged 50 and above.

**Mr. Stephen:** Does my hon. Friend agree that older people very often make reliable, experienced and knowledgeable workers? Is not it a tragedy that so many of them are thrown on the scrap heap when they can be most productive? Is there any evidence to suggest that the attitude of employers is shifting towards older workers? Are the Government doing anything to ensure that the attitude does shift?

**Mrs. Gillan:** The Government are doing something. Our older workers campaign continues apace, particularly with the recent publication of the third booklet in the series entitled "Age Works". It makes no economic or business sense to exclude people because of their age, and many companies—such as B and Q and the Nationwide building society—are now welcoming older workers and older job applicants. I received a letter from a recruitment consultant this week, who wrote:

"We currently have temporary staff in their 50's and 60's working for us. They are reliable and conscientious and as an agency we have no hesitation in promoting the mature worker".

**Mr. Stewart:** My hon. Friend has reported considerable and welcome progress to the House, but would she comment on international examples of apparently succesful legislation to ban age discrimination in employment procedures?

**Mrs. Gillan:** My Department has carried out a study of approximately 20 countries, including the United States where such legislation exists, and no conclusive evidence suggested that it helped older workers when they tried to find a job. I have found that persuasion and our campaign is genuinely working. Richard Worsley, the director of the Carnegie Third Age programme, wrote just this month in *People Management*:

"In 1995 I surveyed 500 employers in the United Kingdom about their advertising policies. Nearly 90 per cent. of them replied that they do not or will not use age limits in recruitment advertisements."

That magazine has made it clear that, from January, it will no longer accept any recruitment advertisements that exclude some applicants purely on the ground of their age.

**Mr. Hain:** Is the Minister aware that no progress has been made in many former coal-mining areas, such as my constituency, where 50 per cent. of over-50-year-old men are economically inactive? That is a staggering figure and has contributed to the hopelessness and despair that not only the young, but many middle-aged and older workers, feel. The Government's policies are, more and more, driving them to despair. What is the Minister going to do about that?

**Mrs. Gillan:** I am very sad to hear that the hon. Gentleman has constituents who feel depressed and

are unable to get a job. All I can say is that, from the summer of 1994 to the summer of 1995, employment for the over-45s grew by 1.7 per cent. compared with 0.9 per cent. for the remainder of the work force. I very much hope that his constituents find jobs in the near future.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** In view of the Minister's comments, why have the Government decided not to make student loans available to the over-50s?

**Mrs. Gillan:** Our policy is well known—[HON. MEMBERS: "What is it?] I am concerned to get older workers into jobs. The campaign that is being conducted by the Government is proving its success time after time.

**Mr. Rowe:** I am pleased to hear about the progress that my hon. Friend has made. She will be as aware as anyone that a man of 50 has the expectation of a further 36 years of life during which he may have low pension expectations. Has she plans to improve the spread of the use of national vocational qualifications to enable older people to validate the considerable experience of life that they have so far gained?

**Mrs. Gillan:** Opportunities should exist irrespective of age. Everyone with the ability and desire to participate in the labour market should be encouraged to do so for as long as they wish, regardless of age.

## Church Schools

5. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from Church bodies on her proposals for fast-track opt-out for Church schools. [9419]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received 69 representations from Church bodies on the Department's consultation paper on self-government for voluntary-aided schools. A summary of responses has been placed in the Library.

**Mr. Jones:** Contrary to the impression that the Minister seeks to give, is not it true that Church schools have overwhelmingly rejected proposals for grant-maintained status? What lessons have the Government learnt from that? Surely that rejection will speed up the rejection of grant-maintained status across the country.

**Mr. Squire:** The inference to be drawn from the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question is rather strange. He seems to suggest that, via a press release from the Government, attempts have been made to hide the result of the consultation. We have always made it clear, as we did in the Chamber two days ago, that we would consult—the Prime Minister made that clear in his speech in September. We listened to the results of that consultation and responded. The difference between the Labour party and the Government is that, too often, the Labour party is not prepared to consult, or even to listen, when the majority of people tell it that they like selective education.

**Mr. Couchman:** Has my hon. Friend had any representations from the Bishop of Southwark suggesting that a Church school in Southwark should be opted out to replace St. Olave's so that the children of middle-class parents may be spared a 30-mile round trip to Orpington?

**Mr. Squire:** While I cannot speak for the specific source mentioned in my hon. Friend's question, the obvious lesson from the events of the past few days for any voluntary-aided—let alone selective—school that has not yet opted out is to get going.

## Temporary Employment

7. **Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the proportion of employees currently in temporary employment. [9421]

**The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth):** Latest figures from the labour force survey indicate that about 7.5 per cent. of employees are in some form of temporary employment.

**Ms Anderson:** Is the Minister aware that, according to the latest labour force survey, the number of people who are in temporary jobs because they said that they could not find permanent jobs has increased by 140 per cent. over the past five years? Can the Minister explain that increase?

**Mr. Forth:** The number in temporary employment fluctuates, depending on economic circumstances and the development of the labour market. The hon. Lady seems to have missed the point that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made earlier. If one regards temporary work as being undesirable—I in no way agree with that view; temporary work has its place in the economy—Britain has a much lower number, and proportion, of workers in temporary employment than nearly all of our major continental partners, especially those of a socialist bent who are imposing social chapter conditions and statutory minimum wages on their employees. The more restrictions one seeks to place on the labour market, the more likely there is to be a higher number of temporary workers. I hope that the hon. Lady will convey that fact to her Front-Bench colleagues.

**Mr. Marlow:** Does my hon. Friend include in his statistics of those in temporary employment the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)—in view of the remark of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that, if she has not been fired between now and later in the year, she will be voted out of the shadow Cabinet? If she loses her job, does my hon. Friend recommend that she become a teacher in a grammar school or that she go down t'pit, as suggested by the hon. Member for Bolsover?

**Mr. Forth:** Perhaps I should arrange for a form from the next labour force survey to be sent to the hon. Lady so that we can be sure that her status is clear.

**Mr. Meacher:** Does the Minister think it right and fair that, generally, temporary workers do not get sick pay or premium payments for working overtime or shifts, are excluded from occupational pensions and are paid less than full-time staff for doing the same work? I have with

me examples such as a double-glazing factory worker from north Wales on £1.75 an hour, a trainee hairdresser in Oldham on £40 a week who has to pay £5 a week in bus fares and lunch money and an advertisement from a jobcentre in Chorley for a landscape gardener for just £1 an hour. Is it not disgusting that Tory economics favour six-figure, fat cat executive share options on the back of the temporary worker sweatshop economy?

**Mr. Forth:** I recommend to the hon. Gentleman that he listens to our replies before he reads out his prepared soundbites. If, as he seems to be, he is saying that temporary employment is undesirable and disastrous, he should examine his party's policy more closely and explain to the electorate and the work force why the policies that he seeks to impose would almost inevitably greatly increase the number of temporary employees to the sort of figure that is found in socialist Spain. When he has an explanation for that, he should come back to the House and give it.

### Commuters

9. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies she has made of the average daily number of workers commuting into travel-to-work areas with a higher than average level of unemployment. [9423]

**Mr. Forth:** The Department has not made any such studies.

**Mr. Field:** A number of commuters travel from the mainland to the Isle of Wight every day despite the relatively high unemployment on the Isle of Wight. Will my hon. Friend consider including the island in a study at some future date to discover why the island's resident population are not taking the jobs that are filled by commuters from the mainland?

**Mr. Forth:** My hon. Friend asks an interesting question. It is undeniable that a large number of people are prepared to travel extraordinary distances—for example, from Southwark to Bromley—to improve their family circumstances. I have even heard of family members travelling from Islington to Hammersmith. That illustrates that the labour market is a free market, and we encourage people to move to wherever they can better themselves.

As for my hon. Friend's constituency, the only figures that I have been able to find show that local council planners in his authority estimate that, each day, 1,000 people travel off his island to work and about 500 people travel on to the island. There is a healthy awareness in the locality of my hon. Friend's constituency of the availability of jobs. My hon. Friend asked an interesting question and I shall consider his proposal as a prospective project for my Department's research budget next year.

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** The Government have introduced a travel-to-interview scheme for travel-to-work areas. Under the scheme, unemployed workers are entitled to subsidies to help with the costs of travelling to interviews. Owing to the scheme's mismanagement, 88,000 people have been refused access to that resource. As we speak, a young gentleman called Chris Owen is walking the 160 miles from Gwent to London for a job interview tomorrow. The Minister spent £74 million tarting up his headquarters with new carpets, curtains, tables and chairs, but he has refused the young man £11 to come to a job interview in London. Will the Minister review his decision, pay the £11 and, as a sign of contrition, buy the chap a new pair of shoes to compensate for the 160 miles that he has already walked? Is it not a disgrace that the Government can cause someone to lose a job simply by refusing the £11 bus fare for an interview?

**Mr. Forth:** The hon. Gentleman displays his usual ignorance of the rules of the schemes that we introduce to help people who are out of work. Opposition Members—and certainly the hon. Gentleman—do not understand that each scheme and programme to help people who are out of work has to have its rules. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not have it otherwise, because taxpayers' money could be misdirected. It is for individuals and experts in the Employment Service to find the best way to help each individual. If someone wants to dramatise his position by doing what the hon. Gentleman has described, that is a matter for the individual involved. I will not be accused, and I will certainly not have the Employment Service accused, of not doing everything possible to help people in reasonable circumstances to return to work. Our track record on that is extraordinarily good.

### Expenditure (Somerset)

10. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional resources will be provided for education in Somerset in 1995-96. [9424]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Somerset's education standard spending assessment increased by £3.5 million in 1995-96 and is set to rise by £7.4 million or 5.1 per cent. in 1996-97.

**Mr. Robinson:** Does my hon. Friend share the outrage of parents, teachers and governors in Somerset and my constituency at the fact that the Liberal Democrat-controlled county council is thinking of not passing on up to £3 million of that £7.4 million to schools in Somerset? Is that not particularly disappointing given the excellent series of reports that the Office for Standards in Education has recently issued that show the quality of the schools in my constituency?

**Mr. Squire:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He will remember—as I suspect do all my hon. Friends—that throughout the past year the Liberal Democrats have been accusing the Government of underspending on education. Now, as my hon. Friend rightly said, as a result of the settlement announced, there is ample opportunity in Somerset for the Liberal Democrat council to spend that money on education. If it does not do so, to use a word in common usage at present, it will be being hypocritical.

**Mr. Don Foster:** Further to the reply that the Minister has just given, will he confirm to the House

that the capping limit on Somerset is such that it may raise its cash limit by only 3.1 per cent.? Will the Minister confirm that Somerset has received only 20 per cent. of its request for capital allocation? Will the Minister confirm that service delivery increases in Somerset—through rising pupil numbers, inflationary prices and changes in legislation alone—will cost £10 million? Will the Minister confirm that Somerset is a prime example of why the report by the Tory-dominated Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee said of education spending that the Chancellor's Budget did not live up to the claims that he was making in it?

**Mr. Squire:** The total increase in spending that Somerset can make next year is about £8.5 million—the type of figure for all services that most local education authorities would be delighted to receive. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that a restricted document has fallen into public ownership. I am a little unclear whether his contribution today should be described as naive, woolly or barmy—all words used in the document—but I would say to him that it is right and proper for the local education authority in Somerset to be able to spend that money overwhelmingly on education, and it has the means to do so.

**Mr. David Nicholson:** Will my hon. Friend support the efforts made by Conservative Members and Conservative county councillors in Somerset to ensure that all the money budgeted for education this year goes to schools and is not retained by county hall? Apart from the resource argument, will he acknowledge that there must be constant pressure to improve teaching methods and standards in schools, which is why all Conservative Members welcome the motives of, and commend the example shown by, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)?

**Mr. Squire:** I agree with both the main points made by my hon. Friend. As he well knows, the Government are committed to raising standards in all our schools—including those in inner cities, which appear to be so unpopular at present among Opposition Members.

### Examination Results

11. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what conclusions she has drawn from the 1995 A-level and GCSE examination results; and if she will make a statement. [9425]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice):** 1995 was another year of which teachers and candidates can be justly proud. The GCSE and GCE results in 1995 were among the best ever achieved.

**Sir David Madel:** Does my hon. Friend agree that A-level and GCSE results will continue to improve as long as schools maintain a vigorous policy of setting and streaming, subject by subject?

**Mr. Paice:** I certainly hope and believe that there will be a continued improvement, as there has been for many years, in the success rates at GCSE and A-level examinations. As for setting and streaming, obviously the structure of their teaching mechanisms is a matter for teachers and governors to decide, but I suggest that any means of grouping pupils according to ability or aptitude that enables teachers to focus their efforts more effectively must lead to better results for everyone concerned.

**Mr. Bryan Davies:** Will the Minister confirm that, for the first time for very many years, the percentage of 16-year-olds staying on in full-time education has decreased this year? How on earth are we to attain the targets for achievement among 18-year-olds—the targets that the Government have set—if we are slipping back at this stage?

**Mr. Paice:** The hon. Gentleman clearly does not understand what targets are, because they do not specifically relate to school-achieved qualifications. For example, the target at ages 18 and 19 relates to qualifications equivalent to NVQ3, and those qualifications may be an NVQ gained partly at work or partly at college, or A-levels. There is a range of ways in which those qualifications may be achieved. To equate staying-on rates with the ability to meet our targets is a complete misunderstanding of what targets are all about.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Will my hon. Friend consider the examination results in those 11 schools—schools most of which I know well, and have known for 30 years—that are between the home of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and St. Olave's school in Orpington? Will he not find—I can assure him that he will—that more money is being spent on those schools now by the Government than was ever spent on them previously; that the Labour Inner London education authority and its predecessor, the London county council, for both of which organisations I have worked, also spent large sums on those schools; and that the present Lambeth and Southwark councils are also spending unprecedented sums on the schools?

It cannot be said that those schools are underfunded. It cannot be said that they do not have the opportunity to achieve properly. If local parents would send their children to those schools, as they expect other parents to do in other areas, the schools would have a better chance.

**Mr. Paice:** My hon. Friend has studied the statistics in great depth and I would not dream of dissenting from them. As he reminded the House, secondary level education in Southwark is better funded than ever before by this Government and, more important, it is better funded than in many other local education authorities in the area. More money is spent per secondary pupil in Southwark than is spent in Barking, Brent, Bexley or, yes, Bromley. If we look further afield, we will see that Southwark spends £400 more per pupil than Bradford.

The important point is the way in which that money is used to maximum effect in the teaching of our young people. It is no coincidence that some of the authorities with the worse performance record are led by Labour, and have been for decades.

### Parental Choice

12. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new measure the Government will be taking to extend parental choice in education. [9426]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Parental choice is being extended in many ways: by increasing the number of assisted places available in independent schools, by the continued expansion of the grant-maintained sector, by city technology colleges, by enabling more schools to become specialist technology and language colleges and by giving more schools and local education authorities more flexibility over their admission arrangements.

**Mr. O'Hara:** If the Government are so proud of the so-called parental choice that is offered in the state education system, why do so many Conservative Members commit their children to the private sector? Is it because they do not have the courage to commit their children to the lottery of choice and opportunity over which they preside in the state education system?

**Mrs. Gillan:** I was pleased to see that the question was not withdrawn, unlike a question in the other place earlier this week. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong and I shall give him an example from the Government Front Bench. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), has both his children in the comprehensive school system.

**Mr. Pawsey:** What action does my hon. Friend intend to take to protect hon. Members who exercise their right to decide to which school they will send their children? In addition, will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Labour Members on the courage that they have displayed in opting for selection and in sending their children to grammar schools?

**Mrs. Gillan:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I believe that all hon. Members should be able to choose where they send their children, and several Labour Front Benchers have made an excellent choice of school for their children. However, we must remember that, under Opposition policy, they would not have that choice.

**Mr. Blunkett:** Will the Minister confirm for the House and the country that last year the number of parents who failed to get their first preference for their children increased by more than 100 per cent, but, even so, more than four out of every five parents secured their first preference? Does that not compare very favourably with a selective system, which excluded four out of every five parents from their first preference? Is it not the comprehensive system, which allows parents to exercise their preference, that offers real choice and diversity in this country? It does not offer what the Secretary of State described earlier this afternoon as the "dead hand" of comprehensive education.

**Mrs. Gillan:** The hon. Gentleman knows that it has never been possible to guarantee every parent a place for his or her child at a preferred school. Some schools have been oversubscribed for many years because they are so good and so popular. The hon. Gentleman should examine the dead hand of his policies. Labour would end grant-maintained status, abolish the option of self-government for schools, weaken the autonomy of Church schools and of their governors, abolish assisted places, and end selection. What choice would that give the parents of this country?

## Unemployment

13. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current figure for unemployment (a) in the United Kingdom and (b) in other European Union countries. [9427]

**Mr. Forth:** On the International Labour Organisation measure, unemployment in the UK in November 1995 was 8.1 per cent.—lower than in any other major European country and well below the European Union average of 10.6 per cent.

**Sir Roger Moate:** Those figures show again that Conservative policies are working in making Britain the enterprise centre of Europe and bringing unemployment down at a time when it is rising fast in Germany and France. Would not UK unemployment rocket even to the level in socialist Spain if Labour was ever in a position to sign up this country to the social chapter, impose a minimum wage and give in to every inflationary wage demand from its union paymasters?

**Mr. Forth:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People are becoming daily more aware of the comparison that can be made between this country's success in establishing an enterprise economy, attracting inward investment, encouraging entrepreneurship and new businesses and reducing the unemployment rate for 28 successive months, and the policies of our continental partners and competitors on the mainland—who are experiencing rising unemployment because they have shackled their economies with the social chapter, statutory minimum wage and all the other restrictions that Labour would seek to impose on our economy. That comparison is well understood by people throughout the country.

**Mr. Pike:** Will the Minister accept that it is not a good Government record to claim that they have reduced unemployment to the level that they have, when so many people in temporary or part-time jobs want full-time jobs? They are working in low-pay and, in many cases, poverty-pay jobs that are an absolute disgrace for Britain in 1996.

**Mr. Forth:** I regret that the hon. Gentleman did not seem to be in the Chamber for earlier questions. We have tried to get it across to Labour Members—unsuccessfully so far—that temporary work accounts for a much lower proportion of our work force than in most continental countries. The hon. Gentleman may regard temporary work as some sort of evil, but his party will create the conditions to increase temporary work rather than the other way around. As to the other factors that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, it should be understood by Labour Members that the vast majority of people who work part time do so from choice as a result of their individual circumstances. We encourage individual choice, but obviously Labour Members do not.

## School Security

14. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to improve security arrangements for primary and secondary schools. [9429]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Following the tragic death of Philip Lawrence, my right hon. Friend has established a high-level working group to advise urgently on what more should be done to improve security in and around schools.

**Mr. Coombs:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the appalling death of Philip Lawrence is a symptom of the wider problem of indiscipline in the classroom? What hope can he give the House that the Government are prepared to take the measures necessary to ensure that the 5 per cent. of pupils who are disruptive and unruly will not in future be allowed to disrupt the education of the 95 per cent. of pupils who want to learn?

**Mr. Squire:** My hon. Friend draws attention to a subject that the House was discussing earlier. I reaffirm that the Government are utterly committed to all teachers and schools having a full range of measures open to them for tackling indiscipline. We are well aware of the urgency of the matter. The high-level group is discussing practical measures to improve school security, including updating and reissuing the Department's guidance on school premises.

**Mr. Madden:** Does the Minister agree that large-scale temporary classrooms and crumbling old schools present an attractive target to vandals and criminals? Will he confirm that there are a large number of temporary classrooms and crumbling old schools in Bradford? Does he understand why we were gobsmacked when, in the latest capital allocations, Bradford received just £4 million of the more than £40 million requested to deal with the problem? Instead of denigrating Bradford children and their examination results as the Minister did again today, when will the Government give Bradford the resources to ensure that all our children are given the most decent start in life and the best facilities possible to maximise their performance?

**Mr. Squire:** As the hon. Member well knows, the capital allocation formula is a universal one that is applied to all authorities, and the priorities were drawn up more than 10 years ago. Bradford is no more or less disadvantaged than any other authority. If the implication at the heart of his question is that in some way the state of a building is responsible for indiscipline or bad behaviour, I beg to disagree. There are clearly several causes, including a need for greater parental control and involvement, and—in some places—a need for greater teacher skills. I made reference earlier to the efforts that the Government are making, in partnership with local education authorities and the Teacher Training Agency, to ensure that those skills are more widely practised.

**Mr. Atkins:** Will my hon. Friend examine the security arrangements and ancillary matters at Lostock Hall high school in my constituency? Labour county councillors and Labour activists are seeking to frustrate the wishes of the parents in the ballot on grant-maintained status that is being held at the school this week. Such are the antics that extreme disquiet has been expressed by parents and governors alike. Will my hon. Friend invite the Labour party to desist from involving its local members politically in what should be an educational decision that will affect the future of the children at that school and their parents?

**Mr. Squire:** My hon. Friend will understand if I do not comment on the specific example that he has given, especially as the ballot is in progress. I can say that, sadly, what he has described, if it is happening, is only too reminiscent of what colleagues have reported when either Labour or Liberal Democrat councillors seek to frustrate and disrupt a ballot on grant-maintained status. It is for that reason, if no other, that any comments from Opposition Members that they are truly and deeply supportive of GM schools must be dismissed as garbage.

## School Funding (Nottingham)

15. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what capital funding allocations have been made to local education authority schools in Nottingham for 1996-97. [9430]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The annual capital guidelines for capital work in schools in Nottinghamshire local education authority in 1996-97 are £2.811 million.

**Mr. Simpson:** Will the Minister explain to parents in Nottingham if there is any fairness in a system that makes available on average £5,000 in capital allocations to a local authority school, compared with £250,000 in capital allocations to grant-maintained schools? Will she also explain fairness in a system that made available four times the amount of capital allocations to the city technology college than to all the Nottinghamshire schools combined? Is that not an example of a Government committed, if not to capital punishment, to capital programme punishment of the state education system?

**Mrs. Gillan:** The hon. Gentleman should know the answer to his question. Capital funding comparisons on the basis of central Government support alone are misleading. Local education authorities have access to capital receipts and revenue moneys, while GM schools are almost entirely dependent on Government grants. It is for the local education authority to decide what proportion of its capital spending is directed towards schools in Nottingham and whether to supplement borrowing sanctioned by its ACG from other sources, including capital receipts and revenue budget.

I suggest that, as the Labour party has controlled the county council for 14 years, perhaps the hon. Member should address his questions to his own party members.

## Unemployment

16. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to tackle unemployment among those over 45 years old. [9431]

**Mr. Paice:** We intend to continue the successful economic and labour market policies which, together with the campaigns to which the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), referred, have reduced unemployment for that group by 21 per cent. in the past two years.

**Mrs. Prentice:** Does the Minister agree that it is outrageous that people over the age of 45 should feel that they have been thrown on the scrap heap? Does he also agree that there is age discrimination in the workplace? If

he is not prepared to introduce legislation to resolve that, what evidence does he have that the voluntary scheme is working?

**Mr. Paice:** I entirely agree that discrimination on the ground of age is unjustified and unfair. There is ample evidence, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said earlier, that many businesses now recognise the greater skills and greater commitment—among other attributes—that older workers can provide. We have been running a number of campaigns, to which my colleague referred earlier, and we are conducting an evaluation process to discover the success of those campaigns and to establish the attitude of employers.

I believe that the vast majority of employers—but not all of them—are beginning to recognise that older workers represent a tremendous resource which they ought to be tapping, to provide their future skills needs.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** Does my hon. Friend accept that the best way to help the over-45s who are unemployed—or indeed anyone who is unemployed—is to create the right economic climate for industry? The country to which we have all looked in the past as a superb example of this, Germany, is now finding out that the minimum wage and the social chapter are catastrophes. Unemployment in Germany is rising beyond 4 million, and it is exporting manufacturing capacity abroad, is it not, faster than any other European country?

**Mr. Paice:** My hon. Friend is entirely right. The real way to deal with unemployment and job-search difficulties for any age group is to have real growth in employment created by the economy. That is what has been happening over the past few years under this Government and, as my hon. Friend rightly says, it is not happening in a number of European countries.

My hon. Friend rightly reminds us of Germany. Only a week or so ago, I met some German industrialists who were bemoaning Germany's situation and the imposts of taxation and of regulation of their labour market—and the increasing unemployment that they are causing. It means that they are being forced to look abroad to continue investing. I am delighted to say that these particular industrialists were investing in my constituency, but they would usually prefer to invest in Germany. They do not do so because of the imposts of the social chapter, the minimum wage and the sort of regulation that we would have again if the Labour party was ever given the chance to implement its policies.

## School Admissions

17. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consultations she undertook before proposing to amend school admission arrangements. [9432]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The consultation on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's proposals for giving schools and local education authorities more flexibility over school admissions does not finish until 22 February.

**Dr. Wright:** I am grateful for that answer. Can the Minister explain to those of us who are serious about extending and exercising parental choice how a proposal to increase schools' ability to choose children and reduce parents' ability to choose schools contributes to parental choice? In particular, how does it do so when combined with the proposal to withdraw the right of the parents of children in voluntary-aided schools to ballot on those schools' futures?

**Mrs. Gillan:** I am very pleased to note that the hon. Gentleman supports the Government's education policies so robustly by sending his children to selective schools. I am delighted that he has made the right choice as a parent.

At present, all schools can select 10 per cent. of their intake; our consultation is looking at increasing that to 15 per cent., thereby providing more choice and diversity in the education system.

**Mr. Neil Hamilton:** Is my hon. Friend aware of the impact on social cohesion of the Government's policies on parental choice? Is she aware of the conflict to which this can give rise between middle-class and working-class parents—for instance, in the Labour party, in which it is largely the middle-class Blair glitterati who have chosen to send their children to grant-maintained schools? What can we do to improve the consciousness of people like the deputy leader of the Labour party concerning the benefits that the policy can bring about for working-class parents of working-class children?

**Mrs. Gillan:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have had much publicity over the past few days, as a result of Opposition Members, on the choice in education that is provided by the Government, and that will bring it forward. I do not understand why Opposition Members oppose the choice that we put into the education system—for example, assisted places, the very existence of which allows a wider socio-economic spread of children within the independent sector. The Conservative party provides real choice in the education system for all parents.

## Cycling

18. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to put cycling and cycling proficiency on the curriculum of primary schools. [9433]

**Mr. Paice:** Schools are free to offer lessons in cycling and cycling proficiency, but the Government have no plans to include cycling in the national curriculum.

**Mr. Robathan:** When, Madam Speaker, you and I were at school—not so long ago in your case—a great many children cycled to school, and as a result there was much less congestion on our roads in the mornings and afternoons. Does my hon. Friend agree with hiscolleagues in the Department of Transport that we should encourage cycling and discourage congestion? Does he agree with his friends at the Department of Health that we should discourage child obesity and encourage healthy child activities, such as cycling? Does he agree with his colleagues at the Department of the Environment that we should decrease pollution and vehicle emissions? If so, will he also make it his Department's policy to encourage

schools to make cycling facilities available to encourage cycling to and from school? Does he further agree that it is a long way to cycle from Peckham to Bromley or from Islington to the Oratory school?

**Mr. Paice:** I am sure that when my hon. Friend was at school there were a lot more cycles and a lot more cycle sheds, behind which he no doubt learnt something. What the Government have done is to slim down the national curriculum, as a result of requests from teachers, to give teachers far more flexibility in how they organise their school days. We would like them to use that flexibility as they think most appropriate. Clearly, the opportunity for young people to learn about cycling and to take cycling proficiency tests would be one of the things to which I hope they would give some priority.

## Northern Ireland (Mitchell Report)

3.31 pm

**The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major):** With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement on the report of the international body on the decommissioning of illegal arms, which was published earlier today.

The key to progress in Northern Ireland is confidence—confidence to enable the parties to sit down together without threat of force. The retention of arms by the paramilitaries on both sides is the biggest single factor in holding back that confidence. It has so far prevented the holding of all-party talks. That is one of the reasons why we and the Irish Government established the international body, to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue as one track of the twin-tracks initiative that John Bruton and I launched last November.

The body's remit was to identify and advise on acceptable methods of verifiable decommissioning, and then to report on the commitment of the paramilitaries to work constructively to achieve that. We set the body the challenging target of reporting by mid-January. I am extremely grateful to Senator Mitchell and his colleagues, the former Prime Minister of Finland, Harri Holkeri, and General John de Chartelain, for the energy and determination with which they have completed this difficult task.

The body's main conclusions are: first, that the total and verifiable disarmament of all paramilitary organisations has nearly universal support and must continue to be a principal objective; secondly, that to reach an agreed political settlement and take the gun out of politics, all parties should commit themselves to, and honour, six principles embodying the path of democracy and non-violence. These principles include the total and verifiable disarmament of all paramilitary organisations; the renunciation of force and the threat of force; agreement to abide peacefully by whatever agreement is finally reached; and an end to so-called punishment killings and beatings.

Thirdly, the body concludes that there is a clear commitment on the part of those in possession of illegal arms to work constructively to achieve full and verifiable decommissioning as part of the process of all- party negotiations. The body makes a series of recommendations on the modalities of decommissioning of illegal arms. It emphatically declares that there is no equivalence between such arms and those held by the security forces. It rightly emphasises the need for independent verification.

Fourthly, the body concludes that other confidence-building measures are needed, such as an end to targeting of potential victims by the paramilitaries, information on missing persons and the return of those previously intimidated out of their homes.

The body also records its conclusion, on the basis of its discussions, that the paramilitaries will not decommission any arms prior to all-party negotiations. The House will note that the body did not conclude that they cannot decommission; the body concluded that they will not, and the House will draw its own conclusions. Although the body makes no formal recommendation on this point, it suggests an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all-party negotiations.

The Government welcome the body's endorsement of the seriousness of the decommissioning issue. We welcome and fully endorse the six principles that it sets out. We call on each and every one of the parties to do the same, speedily and unequivocally.

If all concerned were to accept those principles, and honour them, as the international body also rightly emphasised, that would be a significant step forward. Even more significant would be if, in addition, all parties, particularly Sinn Fein, also joined the two Governments in supporting the wide principles of consent set out in the Downing street declaration.

The Government also welcome the body's broad recommendations on the modalities of the decommissioning process. We are ready to implement them. It is now for those in possession of illegal arms to say whether they will accept and act upon them. We look forward to an early and definitive response from the paramilitaries on both sides.

We welcome, too, the emphasis on other confidence-building measures. If the paramilitaries give up their present practice of keeping themselves ready for a return to action, that will be a most welcome sign of real commitment to peaceful methods. Otherwise, gun law continues to hang over the heads of the people in Northern Ireland.

There is therefore much in the report that we can welcome and endorse. But the practical problem remains—how to bring all the parties together. Self-evidently, the best way to generate the necessary confidence is for the paramilitaries to make a start on the decommissioning process. We see no reason why they should not do so.

There can be no justification for the maintenance of private armies by those who claim to be committed to exclusively peaceful means. Opinion polls in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have shown overwhelming public support in both communities for decommissioning before talks. We shall therefore keep up the pressure for an immediate start to the process.

However, I am not prepared to accept that any one group should, through its intransigence, stand in the way of peace and a comprehensive settlement for the people of Northern Ireland. We will not be deflected from our aim. It is now apparent that there may well be another way forward, consistent with the basic principles to which we have always adhered.

One of the confidence-building measures taken up by the international body is the idea of an election. The body made it clear that a broadly acceptable elective process, with an appropriate mandate and within the three-strand structure, could contribute to the building of confidence.

The Government believe that such an elective process offers a viable alternative direct route to the confidence necessary to bring about all-party negotiations. In that context, it is possible to imagine decommissioning and such negotiations being taken forward in parallel.

The election proposal originated in Northern Ireland and, as recent opinion polls have shown, has widespread cross-community support there. A number of parties, including those led by the hon. Members for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), as well as the Alliance party, have put forward proposals for some form of elected body as a means of getting all parties talking together, even if the paramilitaries persist in their refusal to decommission prior to negotiation.

*[The Prime Minister ]*

It is true that other parties have registered their concerns; they will certainly need to be addressed. We will discuss urgently with all the parties how to overcome them. But, in a democratic system such as ours, I cannot see how elections could be regarded by any of the parties either as a side issue or as a block to progress.

As the Mitchell report says:

"Elections held in accordance with democratic principles express and reflect the popular will".

So let me make it quite clear to the House that we are ready to introduce legislation, and to seek both Houses' urgent approval for it, in order to allow such an elective process to go ahead as soon as may be practicable. I hope that this will attract support right across the House.

To sum up, we believe that, in the light of the Mitchell report, there are two ways in which all-party negotiations can now be taken forward. Both are fully consistent with the six principles set out in the report. The first is for the paramilitaries to make a start to decommissioning before all-party negotiations. They can—if they will. If not, the second is to secure a democratic mandate for all-party negotiations through elections specially for that purpose.

Those are two routes to all-party negotiations and to decommissioning. The choice between them is ultimately for the parties themselves. I believe that the people of Northern Ireland have every right to expect that one or other of those routes will be taken, and taken soon. For our part, we, together with the Irish Government, will intensify our discussions with the parties. I intend to meet the Taoiseach again in the middle of February to review progress.

The people of Northern Ireland are enjoying today's peace. They wish it to be permanent. They also want and deserve political progress. It is time to put the old enmities to one side, and to allow the people of Northern Ireland and their representatives once again to have a normal say in their future and their affairs.

The proposals that I have put forward today require all concerned to take risks for peace. We have done so before, and we will do so again. Consistent with our principles, we will pursue this process. That is what is needed if we are to build on the achievements of the past two years.

Let us never forget that we are dealing here with the lives of innocent men, women and children. We are dealing with their future, and with the future of Northern Ireland. In the end, our obligations as politicians—as the House of Commons—are to the people whom we govern.

I pledge that I will leave no stone unturned to deliver to the people of Northern Ireland, on a permanent basis, the precious privilege of peace that they have enjoyed for the past 17 months.

**Mr. Tony Blair** (Sedgefield): I join the Prime Minister in welcoming the report produced by Senator Mitchell and his colleagues, who have been subject to a punishing schedule to produce the report in just eight weeks. I know that the whole House will be grateful to them.

I consider the report constructive and helpful, although it leaves a number of difficult questions unanswered. Those questions will be addressed in the no doubt intensive discussions between the two Governments and all parties. The report provides certain important elements that can help to move the peace process forward.

I, too, endorse the six principles set out by Senator Mitchell, and hope that other parties will as well. In particular, I endorse the commitment to democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues, and to the ending of punishment killings and beatings, which should stop at once. They have no legitimacy. They are simply terrorism in a different form, and they damage the process of peace.

I spell out our firm belief that, if trust is to be established, it must and it should be made clear by all parties that any final settlement will be dependent on the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, and the more that that is emphasised, the better. Senator Mitchell's report has set out in some detail the modalities of decommissioning paramilitary weapons, including a recommendation that it be verified by an independent body, and we, like the Prime Minister, endorse that. Will the Prime Minister perhaps explain how the Government propose to move forward on the creation of an international commission to verify decommissioning?

At the heart of this issue is how we now move to all-party talks. For that to happen, there must be confidence—in particular, confidence among all parties—that violence has gone for good and been replaced by democratic debate. May I therefore reiterate our support for the view that that confidence cannot arise unless there is tangible evidence of the commitment to democratic means?

We remain of the view that the simplest way of providing that tangible evidence is indeed the decommissioning of weapons. It is right in itself. People in all communities want it. It will strike any reasonable person as sensible. Senator Mitchell says that it will not occur, in his view, before talks. May I stress that, if that is so, it is incumbent on those making it so to engage with other means of building confidence? We accept the ways forward proposed by the Government. Perhaps the Prime Minister can assure us that the Government will consider, of course, other options put forward by the parties themselves.

The report makes reference to the possible role of an elective process—perhaps I can say a word about that. We agree that this proposal deserves serious consideration. Will the Prime Minister tell us what, in his view, would be the nature of the mandate and the time scale of such a process?

Will the Prime Minister confirm that an elective process would be a mechanism for substantive negotiations? If it is, how will it fit in the three-stranded process to which the British and Irish Governments are committed? How does he intend to deal with what he accepts are the concerns of other parties about the elective body? As the Prime Minister mentioned in his statement the issue of legislation, may I say that, if legislation is forthcoming and there exists the broad agreement necessary for it to work, for our part, we will be happy to co-operate in putting that legislation through Parliament?

The Labour party has adopted a bipartisan approach to the peace process. We have consistently supported the Government on it because we believe it to be right and we believe that the issues connected with it should transcend normal party politics. I reaffirm that bipartisan approach today and our belief that the Government must, of course,

make every effort to carry all parties with them. As each day passes, the benefits of peace in Northern Ireland become clearer. Although formidable obstacles remain—of course they do—peace is the only sane path to take for the future. We have offered, and we offer again today, our unqualified support in pursuing it.

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support for the international body and the report and for the specific points that he has made in the past few moments. He said that the principal Opposition party, the Labour party, has adopted a bipartisan approach to this process. That is most certainly so, in public and in private. I am grateful for that, and the process itself has been the stronger for that bipartisan approach.

On the specific points made by the right hon. Gentleman, I am pleased at his endorsement of the six principles, and I concur with the points that he made about them. He shares my firm belief that any final settlement must have the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

In response to the right hon. Gentleman's question, let me reaffirm again to the House that, at the conclusion of the talks process, the outcome of that talks process will be put, by means of a referendum, for endorsement by all the people in Northern Ireland. I announced that some time ago, and I reaffirm yet again that that is the case. I think that, in these circumstances, that consent will be necessary.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct to talk about the need for verification of decommissioning. The international body's report deals specifically with that. We will need to discuss with the Irish Government the mechanism for establishing an international commission, but I see no great difficulties with it. I think that we would look for distinguished individuals, who would act as an independent body, to verify the manner and certainty of the weapons decommissioning.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that confidence requires tangible evidence of democratic views. He is right also to share my view that there is no justification for decommissioning not starting now, and that, in the event that it does not, those who have refused to do so have a special obligation to see how the process proceeds.

As we proceed, of course we will look at other options that are brought before us. We have always made it clear that we have an open mind to consider options that will carry the confidence of all the parties and people of Northern Ireland towards getting people together in talks—leading to negotiations, to a settlement, to a referendum and to the House's approval of the outcome.

As for the election and the purposes for which it could be used, I see it being used to determine which parties would participate in the talks, and to give each party with elected representation a fresh electoral mandate—testing the extent of its democratic support in current circumstances. I see the election providing a pool of representatives from which party delegations to the talks could be drawn, and a means to index the strength of the parties' delegations in the talks process. Apart from that, of course, I see the election providing, by weighted majority vote, an initial mechanism for testing widespread acceptability within Northern Ireland of the outcome of any talks process.

We will, of course, consider people's concerns as we do that. Again, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his confirmation that, when the time might be appropriate to introduce such legislation—I hope that it will not be too long delayed—the official Opposition will co-operate in its swift and comprehensive passage.

**Mr. David Trimble** (Upper Bann): In order to establish the necessary confidence, the Mitchell report sets out six principles, which we accept. It also sets out certain confidence-building measures, such as the elected body, which, in view of the refusal of Sinn Fein-IRA to make the necessary moves in relation to weapons, we regard as the only way forward. Does the Prime Minister realise that, in an opinion poll published in Belfast last week, the concept of an elected body was endorsed by 70 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland—and, indeed, by 68 per cent. of the supporters of the party led by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume)?

We welcome the Prime Minister's reference to urgent discussions to overcome any difficulties there may be about this proposal. Does the Prime Minister know that, in recent weeks, our party has been engaged in a series of meetings with other parties, including the SDLP, on this and related issues, and that our belief is that those problems can be overcome if there is the necessary will?

We also welcome the statement by the Leader of the Opposition about assistance for the necessary legislation. We believe that such legislation can be carried through the House very quickly, and that we should set the target of elections in April and May this year so that the elected body can get down to work as soon as possible, and thereby open the way to decommissioning and substantive negotiations.

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his response to what I had to say, and to the report before the House. I am pleased at his unequivocal support for the six principles. I hope that such unequivocal support will come from all the parties that are concerned with these negotiations.

I was, of course, aware of the opinion poll to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I am also aware of similar opinion polls that have been conducted in the Republic of Ireland on similar matters, which produced broadly similar majorities for an elected body and decommissioning. I was aware that the hon. Gentleman and his party had been considering this approach, and were discussing it among themselves, and I welcome his confirmation that he would be prepared to take part in discussions about this proposal in the future.

It is my wish that we shall be able to take all parties with us and move forward with this process. If decommissioning does not take place and it is necessary to use that route, I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his party and others will be able to move forward swiftly so that we can make early and tangible progress, for that is what people of both communities in Northern Ireland urgently wish to see.

**Mr. Tom King** (Bridgwater): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of us recognise that it was an act of courage to entrust that task to the independent body? If people thought that its task would be easy, the chillingly blunt refusal that it received of the suggestion of any decommissioning will have made them realise how difficult this issue is.

*[Mr. Tom King]*

May I endorse what the Leader of the Opposition said: that that blunt refusal makes much more difficult Sinn Fein-IRA's task of persuading people of their adherence to the six principles and of building the trust which the independent body says is so essential to this process? Does my right hon. Friend accept, however, that his determination to build on the positive aspects of this report, despite some disappointment with it, and to seek to continue, with the courage that he has shown, to carry forward his determined effort for lasting peace, must receive the support it deserves?

**The Prime Minister:** I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend. As he said, we asked the international body to undertake a difficult job, with no certainty that it would be able to make progress. I believe that it has done so comprehensively and well. It is fair to say—indeed, Senator Mitchell would acknowledge this—that the report does not offer a single party connected with the negotiations everything that it might have wished. There is something uncomfortable in the report for every party to the negotiations. We need to use the report as part of the structure to take the present process forward. That is what I seek to do in the response that I have made this afternoon, and I am grateful for the support that has already been provided for that.

As my right hon. Friend said, that raises difficult questions also for the paramilitaries—Sinn Fein-IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries. If they are committed to democracy, they must make it perfectly clear why they will not start to decommission. They must make it clear whether they accept that there is no equivalence between illegal paramilitary arms and the arms of the security forces, as they previously said. They must also make it clear whether they accept the principles on democracy set out in the Mitchell report as well as other matters. They must accept not just the principles of democracy but, as the Mitchell report makes clear, the honouring of the principles of democracy.

**Mr. John Hume** (Foyle): May I agree with the Prime Minister's comment that we are dealing with the lives of innocent men, women and children in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that it would be utterly irresponsible for any party to play politics with the lives of those people? It would be particularly irresponsible for a Government to try to buy votes to keep themselves in power. Does he also agree that the commission recommends no form of election? It made it clear that that proposal was outside its remit, and that it was making no recommendation, but simply reporting what was said to it.

May I take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to the commission for the intensity and urgency with which it has perceived its objectives? Although its members come from three different countries, it has spent Christmas and the new year urgently dealing with its track. I invite the Prime Minister to read paragraph 18, which points out that similar urgency is needed on the political track. Will he accept that advice and now fix a date for all-party talks, rather than waste time as he has for the past 17 months? [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] I live with it—you don't!

May I make it clear that my party fully and unequivocally supports the six principles in the document, which call for total commitment from all parties to the democratic and peaceful process, and to the total renunciation and rejection of violence? Does the Prime Minister feel that, if all parties committed themselves to those six principles, he could fix a date for all-party talks?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me say to the hon. Gentleman that there cannot be all-party talks unless there is confidence that encourages all parties to attend those talks. There is no point in the hon. Gentleman saying, "Let us have all-party talks," when he knows that, without confidence, neither the communities nor the political parties in Northern Ireland would be able to come to such talks.

The hon. Gentleman has for many years played a leading role in Northern Ireland in trying to bring people together and trying to ensure that we move towards peace. It would be a tragedy of enormous proportions if he himself put a barrier across our progress towards peace in Northern Ireland at this stage.

The hon. Gentleman talked about buying votes in this House. If I had been concerned about short-term electoral matters on this issue, I probably would not have embarked upon the process in the first place. From the outset of the process, I have made it clear—and, from time to time, I have taken risks in order to demonstrate—that what I care about is trying to prevent the killing, the bloodshed, the hatred, the abuse and the sheer nastiness that has dominated too much of the lives of British citizens in Northern Ireland for far too many years.

I am prepared to take risks for that, but I am not prepared to buy votes for it. I will stand upon the principles upon which I have stood since the beginning of the process, and I do not intend to be shaken free of them by the hon. Gentleman's remarks or by any other circumstance. What matters to me is carrying the process forward.

The hon. Gentleman has been engaged in the battle for peace in Northern Ireland for longer than I have—I acknowledge that—but I care about it as much as he does, and I am engaged in it as much as he is. I am approaching the matter, as I hope the hon. Gentleman is, with good will, and my prime concern is that we move the process forward. We must not allow old hatreds, old enmities and old stupidities to prevent the progress from now until we secure peace.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Peter Robinson** (Belfast, East): I welcome the statement by the Prime Minister, and the sensible remarks from the Leader of the official Opposition. The Mitchell commission recognises that it would be impossible for those who believe that decommissioning should take place first to have any confidence unless the six principles outlined are not only accepted by the paramilitary organisations, but honoured. As one of those principles is the total decommissioning of their weaponry, cannot that honouring take place only after decommissioning has occurred? That being the case, the Prime Minister is right to recognise that the only real way forward is through an election.

May I state unequivocally that, while I might have liked some further principles to be added to the six that the Senator and his team have laid down, I can give my support to those six? I will work with the Prime Minister in his

efforts to bring about an election, so that the people of Northern Ireland can put forward their negotiators in an attempt to get a real and structured peace in Northern Ireland.

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has to say. I agree with the analysis of why the route forward is the democratic route, and we must bring into play the views of the majority of people in all communities, who I believe wish to see the process continued. I see no route other than the one I have outlined, unless decommissioning takes place prior to talks, which, of course, would remove the need for an elective route.

The paramilitaries may be intransigent or unwilling to begin decommissioning, which—I remind the House—is what is asked for. No one has asked for the total decommissioning of all weapons before talks begin. We have told Sinn Fein and the loyalist paramilitaries, in order to provide confidence for the people of Northern Ireland and the political parties and their representatives in Northern Ireland, "Show your determination to seek peace by beginning to decommission." We have said not that they should totally decommission, but that they should begin to decommission before we get into talks and negotiations. In the absence of that, I see no route available at present—unless a fresh one, as yet unknown, is suggested—other than the process I have set out before the House.

**Mr. Paddy Ashdown** (Yeovil): I warmly welcome the commission report from Senator Mitchell. It was a very tough job, but it has been done thoroughly and deserves support. I warmly welcome the fact that the Government have been able to provide such a welcome for it as well. Frankly, that cannot have been easy, because the report did not fulfil all that the Government had wished for. I am sure that the Prime Minister is right to welcome it. I was also extremely pleased to hear the welcome that the report has received across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland. That has shown—we have heard some of it today—some considerable statesmanship.

The Prime Minister should be clear—I do not need to stress it too much to him—that the Liberal Democrats take the view that those who have terrorised Northern Ireland through the bomb and the gun, on all sides, in the past 25 years need to show a concrete example of why they are now moving to democracy. It remains our view that the best way to do that would be through the decommissioning of weapons. It has for some time been argued that, should that not prove possible, approaching the process through an elected convention is a right and proper alternative route to take. We have proposed that to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on previous occasions.

Nevertheless, I am sure that the Prime Minister would agree with me—we have heard some evidence of it today—that that idea produces peculiar and legitimate sensitivities on the part of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, for whom words like "assembly" have chilling and unacceptable reverberations of failure in the past. Matters such as the size of such a body, its remit, its nature and its time limitation, are absolutely vital. We will submit some thoughts on that to the Prime Minister in the near future.

I should like to touch briefly on one other matter relating to confidence-building measures. In December, when I was in Dublin to see the Taoiseach, I proposed to him that there might be case for a limited cross-Ireland amnesty for the surrender of Semtex. I understand that much is held, and that many of those in possession of it would like a chance to get rid of it.

Semtex is unique, because it is a purely aggressive weapon, with no defensive purposes and no forensic history. Does the Prime Minister believe that, as part of the confidence-building measures, such an offer, made by both Governments and unconnected with the peace process, could nevertheless contribute greatly to building confidence around that process in the future?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support, and for his kind words about Senator Mitchell and his colleagues. I am pleased that he concurs with our view—one that I know he has expressed—that, first, the right approach would have been decommissioning by those who hold weapons, but, in the absence of that, the right way to proceed is the way that we have proposed.

As the right hon. Gentleman has said, the details of the election and the body are crucial. Those will need to be discussed with the parties, and we will wish to remove sensitivities wherever we can. I will, of course, be pleased to receive any representations from the right hon. Gentleman, the official Opposition or any other colleagues in the House.

On the question of an amnesty, our aim is to take terrorist weapons out of circulation. That is what matters. There could not, of course, be an amnesty for the murders and violence of the past.

**Mr. Ashdown** *indicated assent.*

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman did not suggest that, but I am making that point so that there is no misunderstanding that that could be on offer at any stage. The issues raised in the right hon. Gentleman's earlier comments will be among those that we will have to consider and examine.

**Mr. Andrew Hunter** (Basingstoke): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, in contrast to the remarks of hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), on the Conservative Benches and further afield there is widespread and the strongest possible support for the statement that he has made, and for his entire handling of the peace process?

Will my right hon. Friend comment on the proposition that what we are seeking by various means, one of which may be an elective process and decommissioning in parallel, from IRA-Sinn Fein and others is an irrefutable and irrevocable demonstration that they are committed exclusively to peaceful means? Does he also agree that we are seeking evidence that they accept the principle of consent, which means acknowledging that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and will remain so as long as that is the wish of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I can confirm that to my hon. Friend. Indeed, the House will have been familiar with the specific formulation that he used. I am grateful

*[The Prime Minister]*

for his support for the line that we have proposed to take. I know that my hon. Friend has taken a great interest in Northern Ireland, and is a frequent visitor to Northern Ireland. I think that his support for this approach is warmly welcomed.

**Mr. Clive Soley** (Hammersmith): If the Prime Minister is obliged to go down the route of an elected assembly because the paramilitary groups are not prepared to surrender weapons, he will know from what has already been said that there is acute concern, especially among the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, that any assembly should not represent a return to some of the structures that have failed in the past. His problem is to carry with him the elected republican parties in Northern Ireland. What guarantees did he give them and other people that their fears about the past will not come true in future?

**The Prime Minister:** I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. When I made my statement to the House some time ago, I acknowledged that not every party in Northern Ireland had advocated this approach, that there would be some sensitivities about it, and that we would seek to see what could be done to meet those sensitivities.

I have made the point consistently that, if we are to achieve peace successfully in Northern Ireland, we are going to have to achieve consent across the political divide in Northern Ireland. That has been our approach from the outset, and it remains our approach. Of course, we will try to take on board the sensitivities that people have as we take this matter forward.

**Mr. David Wilshire** (Spelthorne): Does my right hon. Friend join me in deploring yesterday's selective leaking and briefing by the Dublin Government and the Irish ambassador, and agree that, while remaining opposed to all-party talks before decommissioning, it would be utterly irresponsible simply to reject the report? Does he accept that this Tory at least is prepared to consider elections in Northern Ireland, because he believes it to be right, not because it might buy support? I find it deeply offensive for people to suggest that elections might be such a tactic. This issue is far, far too important to play gutter politics with.

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I share his view about the selective leaking of the Mitchell report, and, indeed, the selective leaking of any report on any occasion. It does, sadly, happen from time to time. Many people's lives would be easier were that not to be the case.

**Mr. Ashdown** *indicated assent. [Laughter.]*

**The Prime Minister:** One does not have to be in government to realise that leaking, whether total or selective, can sometimes be difficult.

I know my hon. Friend's strong feelings about Northern Ireland, but it would not have been at all responsible to reject this report because there are things in it that do not accord wholly with the previous position of the Government. I think that what we are doing is accepting, as every party to these negotiations has to accept, that, within the Mitchell report, there is something that each and every party will like and something that each and every party will not like.

But what we must not do is get ourselves in the position that we have so often been in in Northern Ireland, in which, because there is something one party does not like, it brings the whole process to a juddering halt. I am prepared to operate within the principles we have set out with a degree of pragmatism in order to reach the conclusion that this House wishes to see reached, and I believe that will be the view of most hon. Members.

On the other point made by my hon. Friend, I think perhaps I could do no better than to quote from paragraph 56 of the Mitchell report:

"Elections held in accordance with democratic principles express and reflect the popular will".

That is entirely true. That is how all of us arrived here in this House.

**Mr. Robert McCartney** (North Down): Does the Prime Minister agree that, while all welcome his statement on the commission's report, and while paragraph 20 sets out the six principles, with which the whole House agrees, it omits to mention the principle of consent that governs all democratic proceedings? Does he accept that the principle of consent would have to govern not only any agreement that may emerge from any substantive negotiations but the possibility of disagreement or failure to arrive at an agreement?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is right about the consent principle. The report makes it clear that all the parties should accept democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving issues, and should agree to abide by the terms of any agreement. As I said earlier—I suspect that the hon. Gentleman may share my view—it would be a significant additional step if Sinn Fein were to join the two Governments and the other parties in supporting the principle of consent in the Downing street declaration.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Eltham): I do not need to remind my right hon. Friend that among the more than 3,000 who have lost their lives in the past 25 years are Ian Gow, Anthony Berry, Robert Bradford and Airey Neave. Is it not a proper memorial to them and to all the others that we should go beyond bipartisanship to non-partisanship, that every party that takes part in the process, which we hope we will be able to start, should try to overcome any past obstacles, and that those parties should talk, not only to the Mitchell group, but to each other? That requires each of them to create the conditions under which the others will come.

**The Prime Minister:** All the former Members of the House mentioned by my hon. Friend were democrats. I think that all of them, were they here today, would have been urging us to take a risk for peace. In my judgment, all the people who have suffered in Northern Ireland over the past 25 years, were they able to be here today—on either side of the House—would be saying the same thing: peace is worth a risk—take it.

**Mr. Kevin McNamara** (Kingston upon Hull, North): I congratulate the Prime Minister on his good fortune in having a tangential advantage in the statement announced today—that of keeping his Government in power.

Will the Prime Minister inform the House whether the Taoiseach has agreed with the Government's proposed course of action? I am not suggesting that he can veto anything that the right hon. Gentleman does, but has he agreed with the proposal? Does the principle of consent, as outlined in the Downing street declaration and the framework document—which we all support—amount only to British sovereignty over Northern Ireland, not to the imposition of any arrangements that do not have the support of a majority in both communities?

**The Prime Minister:** The principle of consent relates to the agreement, and that is set out clearly in the documents before us. I do not propose to respond to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's statement. It is unworthy; I have responded to it once this afternoon, and see no purpose in responding to it again. I spoke to the Taoiseach last evening; he was well aware of what I was going to say, and we both look forward to meeting and to discussing the subject at a forthcoming summit.

**Mr. Hugh Dykes** (Harrow, East): Not only is the report a tribute to the people who created and wrote it, but it is the culmination of the long-standing forbearance, patience and courage of both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who have liaised with the senior Irish Ministers involved.

As a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Association, I thank my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for his earlier forthright mention of the fact that any delicate election process or system that is to be constructed, in whatever way it may emerge—in itself a difficult matter—would not be a return to the old Stormont paralysis or the Ulster assembly system, which was, I vividly and painfully remember, sabotaged by Protestant militants two decades ago.

**The Prime Minister:** It is certainly not a return to the past; I see it as a step to the future. I think that that is how it has been viewed by all those who have examined the proposition over recent months and put their name to it.

**Mr. Thomas McAvoy** (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I wish to associate myself with the gratitude expressed to Senator Mitchell and his team for their work, and with the tributes to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their responsible attitude to that issue.

The Prime Minister must know, however, that, when one adopts an idea that has emanated from one side or the other in Northern Ireland, suspicion is immediately aroused on the other side, as has happened in connection with more than one issue in Northern Ireland of late. Bearing that in mind, to keep the SDLP and the other parties on board, will he listen carefully to their representations about the nature and modality of the proposed assembly, and about the possibility of a time scale for its existence?

**The Prime Minister:** The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is yes. I think I may say that, in the past three or four years, I have gone to enormous pains, as have my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, to try to ensure that we can remove misunderstandings, and that we can take on board the views and sensitivities of all the parties. I have made that point clear repeatedly.

I am as well aware as any hon. Member that we need to carry people with us—all the people with us, if we can—if we are to achieve a satisfactory outcome to the negotiations that we are embarked on. That has been our position in the past, and it remains our position today.

**Mr. Graham Riddick** (Colne Valley): Although the Mitchell commission says that decommissioning would take place "during the process" of all-party negotiations, it does not say how those negotiations and decommissioning would interact. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that we will never allow a position in which Sinn Fein-IRA are allowed to take part in negotiations if there is even the vaguest implicit threat that violence may be resumed if they do not get what they want?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Perhaps I may refer him especially to paragraph 34 of the Mitchell report, which says:

> "The parties should consider an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all-party negotiations, rather than before or after as the parties now urge. Such an approach represents a compromise. If the peace process is to move forward, the current impasse must be overcome."

That is precisely the way I see it.

Obviously, at the beginning of such talks, I would suspect that the parties themselves will wish to erect a series of staging posts, but it is not for me at this stage to set out precisely what they would do or how they would agree it. I believe that they would wish to discuss that matter at the beginning of their talks. I think Senator Mitchell envisages that that is what they would do, and so do I.

**Miss Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement and the statement by the Leader of the Opposition. I say to the Prime Minister that I personally do not believe that either the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition would be prepared to play politics with the lives of the people of Northern Ireland.

I repudiate the insinuations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), and I wish to dissociate myself from those remarks.

Can the Prime Minister tell me any possible reason why, if the proposals for an elected body were taken up—as they might be—any democratic party that believes in democracy would refuse to get involved in an election for that body with a very narrow mandate?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for what she said, which I deeply appreciate.

As to the second part of her question, I can give the hon. Lady no good reason why any democratic party would refuse to take part in an election for the narrow purposes set out in my statement today. I cannot conceive that there is a credible reason for refusing to take part in that, and I very much hope that no one will.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his outstanding commitment to a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. It was his initiative, he has driven it, and it should not be overlooked. As a Conservative and committed Unionist, I also congratulate

*[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]*

the official Unionist party, its leader and his predecessor on their enlightened and constructive attitude to the peace process.

Paragraph 19 of the report says:

"there must be commitment and adherence to fundamental principles of democracy and non-violence."

Because confidence is so important, can my right hon. Friend tell the House this afternoon that it is his belief that Sinn Fein-IRA are prepared to accept those fundamentals, which they have never done in their history?

**The Prime Minister:** We wait to hear from them. The statement that they have produced so far has not covered that point. Clearly, we wish to hear from them and from the loyalist paramilitaries—from both sides—precisely whether they accept those principles and that commitment. We hope that they will accept them, and that they will state that unequivocally. I look forward to hearing them say so. They now have the opportunity to argue the case and to say directly, on television and on radio, that they accept those principles. I hope that they will use the opportunities that are open to them.

**Mr. Dennis Canavan** (Falkirk, West): Does the Prime Minister accept that the Mitchell report does not recommend immediate elections, but recommends a compromise between those who demand decommissioning before all-party talks and those who maintain that decommissioning can take place only at the conclusion of all-party talks? Will the Prime Minister accept a staged process of decommissioning in parallel with immediate all-party talks, with elections to be held on a new constitutional settlement after the all-party talks agree to such a settlement?

**The Prime Minister:** We must get all the parties to the table in order to have all-party talks. To do that, we need the confidence of the people and all the parties of Northern Ireland. That is the ingredient that is missing from the hon. Gentleman's proposition. That is why we are seeking an electoral position that will enable all parties to have that confidence and to have a direct mandate to enter into talks. The election is the mechanism that will allow that to occur. On that basis, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand why we have proposed it, and what it will achieve.

**Mr. Richard Spring** (Bury St. Edmunds): My right hon. Friend has spoken about the need to boost confidence in order to develop the political processes in Northern Ireland. Does he agree that a significant step toward improved confidence in Northern Ireland would be the immediate cessation of killings and punishment beatings?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I certainly agree with that. My hon. Friend has some direct experience of Northern Ireland, and I am grateful for his support. He is entirely correct. If that were to happen, it would certainly increase the feeling of confidence across the communities in Northern Ireland, and, as such, would be a very welcome development.

**Mr. Tony Benn** (Chesterfield): Is the Prime Minister aware that many people who hoped that the ceasefire would lead to early all-party talks have been strengthened in that view by the peace process in South Africa, the agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, and the Dayton accord—not one of which required the decommissioning of weapons? In the latter case, President Clinton said that the arms embargo could be lifted a few weeks after the Dayton accord was agreed.

Is the Prime Minister aware that the process began when my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), Mr. Adams and Albert Reynolds advanced a proposition to end the fighting based on the idea that the people on the island of Ireland—north and south and in the two communities—should be able to determine their own future? If there is a newly elected body and a referendum in the north that underlines the division of Ireland, it is no more likely that peace will be secured now—whatever the parties' intentions—than in the past hundreds of years.

**The Prime Minister:** If the right hon. Gentleman were to look more carefully, he would see that the report refers to "north and south respectively". The right hon. Gentleman ran them together, and referred to the "north and south", which gives a rather different impression of the view at that stage. Northern Ireland is already a practising democracy, and therefore is different from some of the examples that the right hon. Gentleman gave.

The underlying point remains the same. We have sought to gain the confidence of both communities from the outset. If we do not obtain their confidence, we cannot carry the process through to a conclusion. That point cannot be ducked if we are to reach a settlement.

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his approach and achievements to date? Could he confirm that there are two alternative approaches to all-party talks: one is through the acceptance by the parties of the six principles, and therefore confidence-building measures; and the other is through the election? Does the election require that the people standing for election should adopt the six principles first?

**The Prime Minister:** No, the two routes are not quite as my hon. Friend set out. The first way to obtain the confidence that would lead to all-party talks would be some prior decommissioning by the paramilitary bodies. On that basis, I think that all parties would come together and talk without an election.

The second way would be the elective basis that I set out this afternoon. If that is to be successful, we would hope and expect all parties to declare their support for the six principles. Those are the two options—either some prior decommissioning, or, through the process of an elective body, to determine who would take part in the negotiations.

**Mr. John D. Taylor** (Strangford): Does the Prime Minister accept that, like the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), all right hon. and hon. Members on the Ulster Unionist Benches live in Northern Ireland? They have suffered as well, and they speak for a large section of the community that has been severely hit by terrorism for 25 years. We are equally anxious to ensure that peace prevails in the long term in Northern Ireland.

Does the Prime Minister recognise that, although we accept the six principles in the report, we do not agree with other elements in it? We welcome the

Prime Minister's statement to the House, and we emphasise that we welcome also the thoughtful response by the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition.

As to the forthcoming election in Northern Ireland, will the Prime Minister correct the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who does not understand the difference between an assembly and an elected body? If that hon. Gentleman is in the British-Irish Parliamentary Association, he ought to know the difference.

Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that we are talking not about an assembly but about an elected body, having no legislative or administrative powers in Northern Ireland? Can the Prime Minister tell the House that, in co-operation with Her Majesty's Opposition and other parties, he will expedite the election to ensure that it does not coincide with other possible elections—for example, a general election in the Republic of Ireland?

**The Prime Minister:** I am pleased to have the right hon. Gentleman's support. The whole House knows of the time when the right hon. Gentleman was badly wounded as the result of an incident in Northern Ireland, and of the courage that he has shown in his career in politics since then. Many Northern Ireland politicians on both sides of the divide have shown great courage. I draw no distinction in the difficult circumstances of politics in Northern Ireland. I hope that those politicians will show the same moral courage to move forward as they have shown physical and moral courage in the past.

I know that the right hon. Gentleman cannot agree with every point in the Mitchell report. I dare say that no one does. Over time, it may turn out that one of the report's greatest strengths is that everyone will find something in it with which he can agree, and something with which he is not quite so happy to agree.

As to the proposed elections, the right hon. Gentleman is concerned that they would establish a body that had no legislative or administrative powers. I hope that it will be of assurance to everyone across Northern Ireland that it is a mechanism for getting into all-party talks and finding a proper solution, following which I hope that we can ensure that politicians in Northern Ireland are able to take a greater share of responsibility than they have been able to do in the past.

**Rev. William McCrea** (Mid-Ulster): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman agrees that real, genuine and lasting peace is a rich prize for the people of Northern Ireland—and something that they do not want in any way to see thrown away.

I am sure that the Prime Minister recollects that two years ago, in 1993, the leader of my party, my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and myself presented a document proposing a constitutional convention for Northern Ireland. Bearing it in mind that at least 70 per cent. of all the people right across the community in Northern Ireland support such a body, surely the matter should be moved upon with utmost urgency. Surely no one in a democracy should be afraid of the will of the ballot box.

**The Prime Minister:** I am extremely grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. I recall the proposals for a constitutional convention that the hon. Member for North Antrim and his hon. Friends presented to me some time ago. I have not yet mentioned Mr. Alderdice of the Alliance party, who has also played a constructive role. I hope that, as a result of all those proposals, we will be able to move forward.

**Mr. Seamus Mallon** (Newry and Armagh): May I assure the Prime Minister that we fully support the six principles, unequivocally and without any reservations? I also wish to point out that people should read the fifth principle—paragraph 20(e) as it is in the document—carefully before they start talking about the absence of the principle of consent from the document.

I wish to refer the Prime Minister to a section of the document that he mentioned earlier—paragraph 34 of Senator Mitchell's report. That paragraph recommends that all parties, including the Governments not "might", not "may", but "should" follow a course of action in terms of decommissioning as part of the talks process.

Is not the reality of the situation that the Prime Minister and the Government are actually rejecting that core element of Senator Mitchell's report, and that, not only on that but on all the key political elements of the report and the recommendations, the Prime Minister is at odds with Senator Mitchell, his commission, and the Irish Government? Is not the Prime Minister creating a situation in which the consensus that will be required in any democratic experiment simply will not be there, because he is at odds with those with whom he should be working closely on the central, fundamental elements?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman knows that I have worked very closely with him and his hon. Friends over the past three years, and I look forward to doing so in future.

On the specific points that the hon. Gentleman raised, if he considers paragraph 20(e)—or principle five, whatever one wishes to call it—he will see that at best it means limited consent, not full consent, in the terms of the documentation that we have seen in the past. Limited consent I concede: full consent I emphatically do not concede. That is most certainly not the case.

I have two points to make to the hon. Gentleman about paragraph 34, and both are accurate and pragmatic. First, paragraph 34 is not a recommendation, and is not put forward as a recommendation. Secondly, it does not get everyone to the table. We have to get everyone to the table in order to advance, and that is the purpose.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) mentioned the elections. The purpose of those elections is not to produce some body that would return to the concerns that the nationalist community has had in the past. The purpose is to enable a process to take place so that people can be elected to a body that does not have legislative powers, and to ensure that there is a democratic mandate for negotiations, and everybody can sit down together.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has been as passionate as any Member of the House over the years about getting everybody to sit down together and discuss the future. All I would say to him is that here is a way of achieving that, and he should not turn away from it.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. We are now going to move on.

## Registration of Immigration Advice Practitioners

4.37 pm

**Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva** (Brentford and Isleworth): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a system of registration for approved immigration advice practitioners; and for connected purposes.

I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce the Bill to the House. My Bill seeks to establish a system of registration to improve the standards of immigration advice practitioners. It is designed to help their clients—sometimes the most hapless victims and most vulnerable people in our society, and drawn largely from the ethnic minorities. Those clients are occasionally, and more and more frequently, at the mercy of unqualified and incompetent immigration advisers.

Those so-called advisers, or cowboys as I prefer to call them, operate by exploiting the ignorance of applicants and to reap large fees for poor-quality—and sometimes deliberately false—advice. In so doing, they extend and complicate the immigration application procedures, prolong the duress on the applicants, make them pay large fees at regular intervals and clog up the entire system of processing applications, to the detriment of genuine applicants.

Those people build up a large case load of work, which the taxpayer pays for, and embark on appeals, tribunals, judicial reviews and so on, funded by legal aid. In parallel, they charge their clients exorbitant fees at every stage.

If we are serious about stopping bogus applications, we must address the source of the problem: bogus advice given by bogus advisers who exploit applicants for reward.

It is not in the interests of bogus advisers to settle applications swiftly and satisfactorily. It is in their interests to prolong the process—until it fails, at which point their hapless clients are either prevented from entering the country or are removed from the country, erasing at a stroke any future action against them for negligence or complaint.

The scale of the problem is difficult to quantify, but from a small survey in the London area I have enough evidence to claim that between 70 and 80 per cent. of immigration advisers are of doubtful provenance. That of course excludes qualified solicitors, citizens advice bureaux and other reputable advisory services, and Members of Parliament.

My Bill is designed to license the cowboys who set up shop, advertise, charge fees and then move on, leaving chaos and despair in their wake.

At this point, I should like to quote the authority of Mr. Justice Stephen Sedley, chief immigration liaison officer in the High Court. On 31 March 1995, in ex parte motion Miranda he said, obiter dicta:

"I want to say that this court sees a sorry trail of applicants whose rights have been forfeited or lost or garbled or injured by putting themselves into the hands of unqualified advisers in the immigration field."

Other countries have faced this problem and set out to resolve it. Three years ago, Australia passed a statute—the Migration (Amendment) (No. 3) Act 1992, which confined the right to give advice to lawyers or to registered agents. In order to secure registration, proof has to be given of competence and some financial security. The Australian migration agents registration scheme has an independent board appointed by the Immigration Minister, which has the power to register aliens, to investigate complaints received about an agent and to impose disciplinary sanctions on an agent.

Voluntary workers are required to register, but are exempt from paying registration fees. Criminal penalties exist for unregistered practice. So far, 1,800 agents are registered under the Australian scheme; 307 have been refused registration; 270 have been deregistered; and 741 complaints have been received.

As some of my colleagues know, I am strongly committed to deregulation, but I also recognise, just as the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 recognises, the principle of necessary protection, as defined in the 1994 Act and in Standing Order No. 124(A). I do not believe that self-regulation will work. The cowboys will not register. They will operate by word of mouth and client ignorance. Under self-regulation, the relevant bodies will not have the power to monitor and police themselves. Cowboys are mobile and can set up shop at any time under assumed names. They then charge their clients arbitrary fees.

My Bill is designed to set up a council of licensed immigration advisers, whose duty will be to maintain and ensure standards of conduct and professional competence among those who practise as immigration advisers. The council will issue licences and will maintain a register, under the direction of the Secretary of State. It will also have powers to investigate and to make rules. It will be an offence to pass oneself off as an immigration adviser without a licence. It will be an offence liable to summary conviction and/or imprisonment for someone to practise as an immigration adviser in return for payment or material reward without holding a licence.

My Bill will protect the most vulnerable. It will make the application process more efficient. It will save the applicants who are now exploited a considerable amount of money. Most important, it will save the public money, by reducing the cost to the taxpayer of the legal aid that is being used because of the poor quality of advice that is given by unqualified or incompetent immigration advisers.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva, Sir Ivan Lawrence, Mr. James Pawsey, Mr. Jacques Arnold, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Julian Brazier, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. Piara S. Khabra and Mr. Simon Hughes.

REGISTRATION OF IMMIGRATION ADVICE PRACTITIONERS

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva accordingly presented a Bill to establish a system of registration for approved immigration advice practitioners; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 March and to be printed. [Bill 48.]

## Points of Order

4.46 pm

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order to suspend the House for 10 minutes so that Opposition Members can have a cup of tea, because they have been banned from the Tea Room?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** No suspension is called for for anything at the moment.

**Mr. Charles Hendry** (High Peak): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am extremely concerned— *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The House will listen to an hon. Member who has an important point of order.

**Mr. Hendry:** I am extremely concerned that, on an Opposition Supply day, some 220 Labour Members are missing. Will you check, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the annunciator screens are working, so that all the Labour Members who might want to support their health spokesman know that the debate has started? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman had a genuine point of order.

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley)** *rose—*

**Mr. Graham Riddick** (Colne Valley) *rose— [Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) will stay behind the red lines.

I hope that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) has a genuine and honourable point of order I know that he wants to speak in this afternoon's debate.

In that case, we shall move on.

# Opposition Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

## National Health Service

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** I have to announce that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.47 pm

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Peckham): I beg to move,

That this House views with alarm the mounting evidence of inadequate patient care and of overstretched staff and facilities in the NHS; deplores the relentless cuts in NHS beds; condemns the increased amount of money spent on internal market bureaucracy rather than on front line services and staff; and calls on the Government to announce an immediate moratorium on bed closures; nominate someone in each health authority to identify bed shortages and take appropriate action locally; monitor and publish a weekly report on the number of beds and staff available; and issue clear national guidelines to end the uncertainty about who pays for continuing care.

The debate is about the crisis in our national health service. It is about the hundreds of patients who wait on trolleys for emergency treatment. It is about the thousands who are denied the treatment that they need. It is about the millions of people throughout the country who no longer feel that they and their families can rely on our NHS.

The people of Britain want to know the answer to some very simple questions. Why is our great national health service being torn limb from limb by the Tory Government? Why is the NHS, which the Conservatives claimed would be safe in their hands, being savaged in their hands? Why have one in six NHS acute hospital beds been cut since 1990? Why are there 20,000 more managers and accountants in the NHS, but 50,000 fewer front-line staff on the wards?

The British people have a clear decision to make and that is what today's debate is about. It is a decision between a unified national health service with Labour and an NHS that is simply being frittered away under the Tories; a decision between more money on doctors and nurses with Labour and wasted money on accountants, form filling and bureaucracy under the Tories; and a decision between a strong public service for the next century with Labour and an NHS that is privatised, broken up and sold off to the highest bidder under the Tories.

**Mr. Robert Atkins** (South Ribble): I would just like to ask the hon. Lady one question. Is it still Labour party policy to abolish fundholding?

**Ms Harman:** We have said that we are absolutely concerned that access to hospitals should be on the basis of clinical need, that everyone in primary care should work towards a local health strategy, agreed locally, and that there should be the minimum of duplication and bureaucracy. The right hon. Gentleman will understand from that that there are many problems with GP fundholding. We are concerned to ensure that there is fair treatment for every patient and a fair say for every GP in our renewed national health service.

**Mr. John Sykes** (Scarborough): How much extra money would the hon. Lady pour into the hospitals? Is

*[Mr. John Sykes]*

not it a good thing that there is no such thing as a grant-maintained hospital, otherwise would not she have been in more trouble?

**Ms Harman:** I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not rise to complain to the Secretary of State about the fact that, in his health region, 7,546 hospital beds have been closed. That is what his constituents want him to be speaking up about in the House rather than making cheap points. *[Interruption.]*

Today's debate is important because the NHS is at a crossroads. The importance of the NHS cannot be overstated. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Harman:** The NHS is the public institution that the British people cherish more than any other. It remains, despite the Tories, one of the few public services that bind the nation together. People want to have the confidence that the NHS will be there for them and their families. But today, under the Tories, they cannot have that confidence.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster) *rose—*

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Stamford and Spalding) *rose—*

**Ms Harman:** I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Sexist.

**Mr. Davies:** Is not it extraordinary that a party that has the pretension to be an alternative Government simply does not know the answer to the question whether it wants to abolish GP fundholding?

**Ms Harman:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening or he cannot understand. We have set out our concerns and how we shall address them.

Whatever the Secretary of State says, people know what is really happening. They know that each and every day seriously ill people are being turned away from casualty. They know that treatments that used to be available on the NHS are simply no longer available in some areas. They can see from their own daily lives the growing reality of privatisation of our health services.

The Tories' strategy for the NHS is clear. They are allowing the NHS to fail and that is privatisation by the back door. Up and down the country, they are withdrawing many services so that people have to go to the private sector for treatment. They are changing what is left of the NHS so that it becomes less and less a public service and more and more a private business run on the basis of cost, not on the basis of need.

**Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): Given the hon. Lady's commitment to the Conservative principle of choice in education—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Tredinnick** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Tredinnick** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Is the hon. Gentleman deaf? *[Interruption.]* Order. There will be freedom of speech on both sides of the House.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** Has the hon. Lady ever taken advantage of private health care?

**Ms Harman:** No. But let me make something clear to the hon. Gentleman, who has spoken of choice in relation to private health care. For many people, it is no longer a question of choice; they feel that they are refugees, driven out of the national health service because it is no longer available to them. We want the national health service to be available, so that people do not feel that they must pay again to obtain private treatment.

Nowhere is the rundown more devastatingly clear than in casualty departments. A fundamental principle of the NHS is that it will always be there for people in an emergency; at least, that used to be a fundamental principle, but it does not apply any more. Casualty departments have been closed, and critically ill patients are being turned away. It is happening throughout the country, as every hon. Member will know.

In London, at the St. Helier hospital, Carshalton, the casualty department was closed for 22 hours on 27 November. All ambulances were turned away. On another occasion, in the same hospital, patients had to be treated in the ambulances outside the casualty department because there were not even enough trolleys in the department; they were all full. On 14 January, at the Royal Hallamshire hospital in Sheffield, patients waited for 19 hours on trolleys in casualty. Many personal tragedies are occurring throughout the country.

Nine-year-old Nicholas Geldard was playing at his Stockport home just before Christmas when he fell ill. The emergency services searched hospital after hospital for an intensive care bed, but none could be found. Eventually, an ambulance had to take him across the Pennines in the small hours of the morning, in freezing fog, with his parents following by car. When they finally arrived at Leeds general hospital, they were told that their son had died on the way. No one can say whether he would have lived, but we know that he never had the chance of life that an intensive care bed in the NHS could have given him.

Consultant physician Professor J. D. Ward of the Royal Hallamshire hospital in Sheffield warns:

"For God's sake, do not get ill . . . to be taken as an ill patient into an acute casualty or admissions ward is now a major danger in life."

It is not that the Government have not been warned; they will not listen. They have ignored the advice of the British Medical Association, which has told them that hospital emergency services are at breaking point because of a

"severe and prolonged crisis in the acute sector".

They have ignored the Royal College of Nursing, which has warned that nurses' morale is now so low that 37 per cent. say that they would leave nursing if they could.

The reason for the crisis in our hospitals and for the plummeting morale of doctors and nurses is obvious: more than one in six NHS hospital beds have been closed. When sick patients are turned away from hospitals, the Government are betraying the basic principles on which the NHS was founded.

**Mr. Anthony Coombs** (Wyre Forest): The hon. Lady cannot get away with being so evasive about GP

fundholders. As of next year, 100 per cent. of the people in my constituency will be treated by GP fundholders and, as a result, they will receive a far better standard of primary health care than ever before. They will want to know, just as we do, whether the Labour party would abolish GP fundholding for those who are gaining so many benefits from it. Is the answer yes or no?

**Ms Harman:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is so interested in the policies that will be pursued under a Labour Government, and he will certainly hear of the discussions that we are having with GPs, both fundholders and non-fundholders, to sort out the mess that the Tory Government have created. I am surprised that he has not risen to his feet today to complain about the problems caused to his constituents in the west midlands because, in that region, one in five hospital beds have been closed in the past five years, the number of nurses has been cut by 12 per cent. and the number of managers has gone up by 310 per cent.

**Mr. Coombs:** What is the answer? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. It is no good the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) saying, "What is the answer?" when the hon. Lady is giving her answer. He may not like the answer, but that is not my responsibility.

**Ms Harman:** It used to be a fundamental principle that NHS patients would be entitled to the best medical treatment, irrespective of where they lived, but now managers in each region are deciding on the ground of cost what will and will not be available on the NHS.

Two years ago, only four health authorities were excluding treatment from the NHS. Now 40 health authorities, one third of all the authorities in the country, are rationing, so people have to be careful where they become ill. Do not get brittle bones in Dorset, because the health authority is stopping screening for osteoporosis there. Do not get infected wisdom teeth in Hertfordshire or Kingston and Richmond, because the health authority will not take them out there. Health care has become a lottery, depending on where people live.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the Labour Front-Bench spokeswoman, to practise sex discrimination—in the debate, she has given way only to men and not to women?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** That is not a matter for the occupant of the Chair, but I am sure that the hon. Lady's point of order will have been noted by Madam Speaker.

**Ms Harman:** It was not sex discrimination that made me not respond to the hon. Lady's intervention: it was kindness.

The problem is that, when people cannot get the treatment that they need on the NHS, they have to go private or go without. Again, we see the Government strategy of creeping privatisation at work. Again, it used to be a fundamental principle that the NHS provided not just for illness, but for a wide range of health care needs, but now services are being pushed one by one into the private sector.

Take dentistry. When people go to an NHS dentist, they pay so much, now that the charges have gone up, that they think they have gone private anyway. First, charges are pushed up so high that people can hardly tell the difference between the public and the private sector; then fewer and fewer dentists do NHS work, so more and more people end up having to go private.

Take long-term nursing care. The Government close long-stay wards and force people into the private sector. People used to receive treatment free and now they have to pay. It is no wonder that private health care is growing. These are the facts. There are now 28 per cent. fewer NHS hospital beds than there were 15 years ago, but there are 66 per cent. more private hospital beds than there were 15 years ago.

That, however, is just the start. The Government want to go further. They are handing public health services over to private organisations through market testing, the private finance initiative and making the NHS buy services in the private sector. Their privatisation strategy is about not just putting out services to the private sector, but changing the basic ethos of what is left of the NHS, so it is no longer doctors and nurses who decide how people are treated: it is accountants and bureaucrats put in by the Tories.

If people want to know where so much NHS money has gone in the past five years, I shall tell them. It has gone on accountants, on senior managers, on their company cars and on their form filling. The number of managers has increased from 5,000 five years ago to 23,000 today. At the same time, 50,000 staff have been cut from our wards. These are the Tory priorities for our health services: more people to count the cost of care, fewer people to provide that care. They are not, however, the priorities of the British people, who are totally opposed to the privatisation of the NHS.

The Secretary of State for Health, for all he protests—as he will, no doubt, today—that he is the friend of the NHS, is nothing more than the presentable face of privatisation. I should like to ask him some simple questions about where he stands. First, on the casualty crisis, does he agree with this statement:

"I believe that it is unacceptable that people entering the hospital through the accident and emergency unit should be kept waiting for hour after hour on a trolley"?

Does he believe that that is unacceptable? That statement was made by the former Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). If the Secretary of State agrees with that statement, which he says he does, and I welcome that, why does he not implement—

**Sir Norman Fowler** (Sutton Coldfield): The hon. Lady has just quoted my words, so I think that I am entitled to ask her the further question: does she welcome the steps that the Government have taken to create new emergency wards at Good Hope hospital, to provide new nurses and to modernise the accident and emergency unit?

**Ms Harman:** No, I do not—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Will hon. Members listen? I do not welcome those steps

*[Ms Harman]*

because they are a sham. If hon. Members will listen, I received a letter from the chief executive of Good Hope hospital today, who said:

"I can tell you there are no new beds being opened. We are simply re-opening beds that have been closed through lack of staff resources."

**Mr. Robin Corbett** (Birmingham, Erdington): I thank my hon. Friend for coming to Good Hope hospital in north Birmingham. May I confirm that none of the so-called beds opened when the Secretary of State for Health was walking down the corridor is new—they are reopened beds? There is no money available for an admissions ward alongside the accident and emergency unit. It will be a year before building on that ward can be started, even if it can be funded. May I confirm that the money that is now being spent on refurbishing the accident and emergency unit is not new or extra money, but money that the regional health authority already had and had allocated for that purpose?

**Ms Harman:** My hon. Friend's points demonstrate that the Government's response to the crisis facing patients is to produce bogus statistics and false solutions. Why does not the Secretary of State produce a real solution to the casualty crisis and act now?

There are many ways in which the NHS could improve the service that it provides. New technology offers unprecedented opportunities so that, for example, a doctor in Sheffield can examine a patient in London. New drugs and treatment, such as hormone replacement therapy for brittle bones, offer new hope to many women. New screening techniques can prevent and detect serious diseases, such as cystic fibrosis, and new ways of delivering care to people in their own homes can revolutionise medical treatment.

Rebuilding the NHS after the Tories will be a challenge, but its staff—the doctors, nurses and all the other staff—have repeatedly shown their commitment to the NHS as a public service. They have shown their ability to deliver high-quality care, despite the Tories. Labour will bring together staff, patients and the community to draw on their views, to create not division but consensus and to plan for the future of health care.

We will transfer the £1.5 billion that the Government waste on bureaucracy to front-line services—to doctors and nurses and not to accountants and managers. We will end the unfair system whereby treatment is dependent on which GP is purchasing the health care rather than on the clinical needs of the patient. We will end the lottery of long-term nursing care, which means that the care received and the price paid depend on where one lives. Our NHS will concentrate on the patient, not on the costs.

The NHS has great potential, which Labour in government will unlock. The next general election will decide the future of our health service. Already we have an NHS in which there are hospitals without trolleys, patients without beds and wards without nurses. The Tories have a hidden agenda for a fifth term that will destroy our NHS for good. The Secretary of State's friends give the game away. Roy Lilley, Tory health expert, called the NHS

"the rump of the remaining nationalised industries and an overburdened bureaucracy".

David Green, of the Institute for Economic Affairs, said that the NHS

"breeds a childlike reliance. It has to go."

The NHS is simply not safe under the Tories.

In their hearts, members of the Tory party hate the NHS. Its only safeguard is the party that created it—the Labour party.

5.13 pm

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell):** I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"believes that the NHS is a great British success story which delivers health care of international quality, which is and will remain available free at the point of use on the basis of medical need and provides excellent value for money for taxpayers; congratulates all NHS staff for their hard work and dedication, particularly during the exceptional period of increased demand for NHS services over recent weeks; welcomes the increasing number of qualified nurses and midwives over the last seventeen years and looks forward to the NHS continuing to flourish under the policies of a Government which has backed its commitment to the service with year-on-year increases in real resources.".

This week, we have seen a completely new political principle being put into action by the Labour party. It used to be true—there was general recognition of its effectiveness—that the best way to express support for a political colleague was to go on to the media, write an article, give an interview and offer a public endorsement for the sort of policies that we have heard espoused from the Labour Benches. That is, of course, the old-fashioned method.

This week, the Labour party has found a completely new way to express the warm fraternal solidarity for which it is famous. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) has told us that the Labour party has expressed its support this week for the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) by remaining silent. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—that not normally taciturn individual—has not been anywhere near a studio this week. There has been no sign of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) or the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). They are all biting their tongues, restraining their natural urge and containing their generous instincts to support the hon. Lady. It has been the chorus of the Hebrew slaves in mime.

Conservative Members say that the hon. Lady's friends should have supported her. This week, we have seen the irresistible force of parental obligation meeting the immovable object—

**Ms Hilary Armstrong** (North-West Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder what you can do to help the House. The Government have clearly sent in the wrong Secretary of State. This is meant to be a health debate, but the Secretary of State does not seem to know that.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The Secretary of State's speech has been entirely in order so far.

**Mr. Dorrell:** This week, we have seen the irresistible force of parental obligation meeting the immovable object of political correctness. The reason why the hon. Lady is right, and virtually all of her Back-Bench

colleagues are wrong, is that she has shown by her actions that she endorses the principles and values of a free and open society. That is important in education, and it is equally important in health care.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I have yet to hear the word "health", but I have every confidence that it is coming.

**Mr. Dorrell:** I fear that noise from Labour Members might have drowned out my point. I said that the principles for which the hon. Lady is standing are just as important in the management and development of the national health service as they are in education and much more broadly in our society. She is standing for the principles of choice and diversity. The sadness in the House this afternoon is that her rhetoric on the health service does not reflect her actions in the education sector.

We have argued that we need the NHS to deliver a service which empowers local people and allows them to make choices, and which allows the managers who are in charge of trusts to manage the trusts for which they are responsible.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Dorrell:** As many of my hon. Friends have pointed out in interventions, we need a national health service that allows fundholding doctors to make decisions in the interests of their patients and, by so doing, to raise the quality of care throughout the NHS. Those are the principles on which our health policy is built. The hypocrisy of Labour Members—

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. It is clear that the Secretary of State does not intend to give way now.

**Mr. Dorrell:** The hypocrisy of Labour Members is demonstrated by the gap that has opened up this week between their rhetoric and their actions. That is what makes my hon. Friends angry.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Dorrell:** I am spoiled for choice. I shall give way to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), who I believe is an education spokesman.

**Mr. Peter Kilfoyle** (Liverpool, Walton): I am indebted to the Secretary of State. He has said a great deal about principles. Will he explain how his Government's principles helped the 38 people who, two weeks ago, were kept overnight on trolleys in Fazakerley hospital in Liverpool, which led to surgical and medical cases being kept in beds in the maternity unit? Is that a reflection of his principles? Where was their choice?

**Mr. Dorrell:** I started my speech by pointing out the Government's commitment to the principle of local management in the health service to ensure that the health service responds to patients' needs as they arise. I shall now demonstrate how those principles in action have delivered the emergency service, which all national health service patients are entitled to expect.

The problem for the hon. Member for Peckham is that she is willing to endorse the principles by her actions but not to endorse those principles being put into effect within the national health service.

**Mr. George Howarth** (Knowsley, North): On the Secretary of State's principles on the national health service, will he explain why Fazakerley hospital, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) has already referred, is generating so many problems that two or sometimes three people contact me every day to complain about the service there? When I wrote to the Secretary of State and asked him to investigate what was going on there, he refused to conduct an investigation. If he has nothing to hide and there are no problems, why will he not hold an investigation? Is he more content to play politics than to sort out the health service?

**Mr. Dorrell:** I am content with a system that vests in local managers and clinicians the power to make decisions in the interests of patients in their area.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Dorrell:** Before I deal with the background to the two points raised about Liverpool, I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman).

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** I tried to make this point to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who would not listen. Does my right hon. Friend accept that all patients in my constituency will shortly be in fundholding practices and that the GPs in charge of those practices will be able to send their patients to the most up-to-date hospital north of Watford, with all the latest facilities, including a good day hospital that carries out cataract and varicose vein operations? Fewer hospital beds will be needed because the hospital has all the latest equipment, which is as good as anywhere in Europe.

**Mr. Dorrell:** My hon. Friend is right. The fundholding system benefiting her constituents would be under threat if the hon. Member for Peckham put into effect her rhetoric on the national health service, which is in sharp distinction from her actions in her own family.

**Mr. Graham Riddick** (Colne Valley): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that all doctors must take the Hippocratic oath? Is it not clear that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has taken that to heart, but misunderstood it?

**Mr. Dorrell:** My hon. Friend makes his point compellingly. What makes Conservative Members angry is the distinction between what Labour Members say and what they do.

I shall outline the background to the stress and pressure on the emergency services, which we have seen over the past few weeks.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Dorrell:** What I am about to say lies behind all the questions that Opposition Members have asked me. If it does not answer their questions, I shall give way further.

*[Mr. Dorrell]*

Over the past two months, there has been an unprecedented peak in the emergency work load placed on the NHS emergency services. I can illustrate that simply by a few facts: in the week commencing 8 January, emergency admissions in the city of Birmingham rose by 35 per cent. on the normal seasonal average; in Shrewsbury, they were 29 per cent. above the normal seasonal level; and in Winchester they were 50 per cent. above the normal seasonal level. So, throughout the health service, since the middle of November, there have been examples of unprecedented peaks in the emergency work load. The best overall measure was that, in the whole of London in December 1995, emergency calls increased by 11 per cent. compared with December 1994.

The background against which this debate takes place is of an unprecedented increase in the NHS's emergency work load. The fact that the hon. Member for Peckham does not like to face is that the more flexible local management in the health service that she likes to denigrate has responded to that increase and ensured that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, it has been met. That has been done by increasing the bed space available to the emergency services. She decries that and says that a hospital that is not using all its beds should leave beds closed rather than reopen them to absorb the emergency work load. New bed space has been opened throughout the health service and existing bed space has been redesignated to ensure that the emergency work load is met.

The position is clear throughout the country: in Consett, 26 beds; in Sunderland, 26 beds; in Grimsby, a whole ward; in the Good Hope hospital, 39 beds; in the West Middlesex hospital, 12 beds; in Newham general hospital, two wards creating 32 beds. Furthermore, not just new bed space is being created but existing bed space is being redesignated to ensure that the emergency work load is met. The Birmingham Heartlands hospital has 60 extra beds from that source and in the North Staffordshire trust, 70 surgical beds have been redesignated as medical to meet the emergency demand.

The hon. Member for Peckham is therefore right to identify an increase in the health service's emergency work load, but she is profoundly wrong to denigrate the management system that has ensured that the health service has responded to that increase in emergency work load and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, delivered the emergency service that NHS patients need.

**Ms Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): The local flexibility to which the Secretary of State referred operates at the Royal Free hospital trust in my constituency. One of my constituents, a cancer patient, was given a day for admittance to the hospital but his admittance was cancelled at 5 o'clock on the day that he was due to go in. He went in one day later and went through the entire pre-operation medical procedures, only to be told that the operation had been cancelled. At that time, the hospital could not give him an alternative date. Instead, it has allowed him to go home every day but he must return to the hospital at 6 o'clock in the evening. He believes, and I have had that belief confirmed by others, that during his absence his bed is used. That is not redesignation of beds but hot bedding.

**Mr. Dorrell:** It is well known that, if an hon. Member wants a Minister to examine a specific case, he or she will do so. I shall not seek to respond off the cuff to a specific case. I remind the House that, over the past two months, the national health service has done what it is there to do: treat priority cases first. In the overwhelming majority of cases, it has delivered the emergency service that we want to see.

**Sir John Gorst** (Hendon, North): How does my right hon. Friend reconcile all that he has said and the principles that he correctly outlined at the beginning of his speech with the intention to close the accident and emergency unit in my constituency and replace it with a miserable alternative that is of no consequence when compared to the original?

**Mr. Dorrell:** My hon. Friend knows that we are currently engaged in consultation on the shape of services to be delivered at Edgware hospital in the future, and part of a state-of-the-art accident and emergency service for his constituents will be delivered through Edgware hospital. The precise nature of the total service to be delivered at Edgware is the subject of current consultation.

**Mr. Hugh Dykes** (Harrow, East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Dorrell:** I shall give way to one of my hon. Friends—my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes).

**Mr. Dykes:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Does he agree that a perfect example of his point about the increase in treatment figures and in the accident and emergency figures is Northwick Park hospital—a big district general hospital shared by my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes)—where the figures have risen enormously recently, but where treatment has improved, as all of its patients say, without any reasoned exception?

**Mr. Dorrell:** My hon. Friend is exactly right, and that has been the overwhelming experience of patients of the emergency services of the NHS. I must move on, because the hon. Member for Peckham said in response to my arguments—

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Dorrell:** Later. The hon. Lady said that the shift to meet the emergency work load has led to a reduced service for those on elective waiting lists, with the result—she claims—that there has been an increase in the proportion of elective surgery done by the private sector. I have heard her make that claim several times since I took up my present responsibilities, so I have had it examined. I have looked at the evidence to see whether it is true that there has been a dramatic increase in the share of elective surgery conducted in the private sector.

The fact is that, in the past 14 years, the share of elective surgery done in this country on people resident in this country by the private sector has risen from 14 per

cent. of the total to 15.3 per cent. of the total—an increase of 1.3 percentage points. The House will not recognise from that statistic the rhetoric of the hon. Lady.

That brings me to another element of the choice and diversity for which the hon. Lady has made herself famous this week—the application of that principle within the NHS. Many of my hon. Friends have raised the issue of GP fundholding, and they are right to do so. The Government have made it clear that we are determined to develop the primary health care service of the NHS because—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members appear to have lost interest in the NHS. So much for their passionate interest in the development of primary care in the health service. They seem to be more interested in their private internal bickering. No doubt they are all discussing the performance of the hon. Member for Peckham. We know from the lunchtime news what Labour Members think of her performance, and we can see them all plotting their next move in the battles that are going on within the Labour party.

When Opposition Members have concluded their private discussions, perhaps they would like to turn their attention for a moment to the future of the NHS and the delivery of high-quality primary health care. The fundholding system has been described by the chairman of the Socialist Health Association, Julian LeGrand, as the biggest success story of the health service reforms. Perhaps more tellingly, the hon. Member for Peckham's predecessor as Opposition health spokesman, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), went to the National Association of Fund Holding Practices—

**Mr. Henry McLeish** (Fife, Central): This is old hat.

**Mr. Dorrell:** Old hat? This happened last October. How long does a policy last in the Labour party? Last October, the right hon. Member for Derby, South went to the National Association of Fund Holding Practices conference, and thought that she had better curry favour from the audience. She said that Labour understood and welcomed the advances fundholding has brought to many patients. The hon. Member for Peckham has shown us this week that she thinks services should be determined by—in her case—the interests of the son. I would argue that the same principle should apply to the patient.

There is, in the words of the right hon. Member for Derby, South, clear evidence that fundholding brings benefits to patients. I look forward to hearing from the hon. Member for Peckham how she justifies her policy of replacing fundholding. How can a party which espouses the true interests of patients be committed to sweeping away a system that its own previous health spokesman has recognised serves the interests of patients?

**Mr. Jerry Hayes** (Harlow): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) went on to say that she hoped that fundholding would be abolished in the first year of a Labour Government? Does that still stand?

**Mr. Dorrell:** The right hon. Member for Derby, South's line on fundholding was reminiscent of the line taken by Anthony Crosland on selective schools. Her line was, "We shall get rid of fundholding." The hon. Member for Peckham's words, however, are slightly more honeyed. She says, "We shall replace fundholding." What does that mean? The patients of fundholding practices—they will make up more than half of the patients in the NHS this April—want to know what the hon. Lady would do, were they ever misguided enough to put her in charge of the NHS.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): Fundholding has brought immense benefits to the patients in the large village of Poynton in the north of my constituency. I had the privilege to open a new medical centre there that provides, on the doorstep of patients, facilities that hitherto would not have been available and for which local people would have to have gone to the district general hospital. The fundholding practice is working closely with the district general hospital and is providing additional, technologically advanced services right on the doorstep of patients.

**Mr. Dorrell:** My hon. Friend is precisely right. He quotes a good example where service has been enhanced, and that has happened not just in the practice in the constituency of my hon. Friend, but across the NHS. When one fundholding practice makes such a breakthrough, others—fundholders and non-fundholders—want to apply the same principles.

I said that I applaud the hon. Member for Peckham's endorsement of the principles of choice and diversity, and so I do. What I deplore is double standards and two-facedness. This week, the hypocrisy of the Opposition has been exposed. The hypocrisy of choosing selection for themselves while denying that right to others is just the tip of the iceberg. The hon. Lady can be excused for that, but not for the other hypocrisies for which she is personally responsible—the hypocrisy of talking about underfunding, while promising no more money; the hypocrisy of paying tribute to fundholders, while maintaining a commitment to abolish them; the hypocrisy of bewailing management costs, while voting against the abolition of regional health authorities; the hypocrisy of supporting a health authority's right to choose where to commission health care, while arguing that the internal market is wrong; the hypocrisy of arguing that the private finance initiative is right in principle, while arguing that it represents the privatisation of the health service.

**Mr. Stephen Byers** (Wallsend): On the question of hypocrisy, the Secretary of State says that he is to launch an attack on bureaucracy in the health service. Can he tell the House why, compared with five years ago, there are 50,000 fewer nurses and 18,000 more administrators?

**Mr. Dorrell:** I am getting rather fed up with people taking statistics that they know to be dishonest and misrepresenting them—

**Mr. Byers:** Answer the question!

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) asked a question—he should stay silent and wait for the answer. That is a courtesy of the House. We need ordinary and decent manners, and I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman kept quiet.

**Mr. Dorrell:** The hon. Gentleman knows very well that the figures that he quotes rely for their effect on, first,

*[Mr. Dorrell]*

ignoring the build-up of practice nurses in general practices, and secondly, pretending that nurses in Project 2000 are not in training and therefore do not count. As the hon. Gentleman knows very well, like-for-like comparison shows not a cut, but an increase in the nursing work force.

It has not escaped notice that the loudest cheer this week was that for the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) in the Members' Dining Room on Monday night. The simple reason for that is that he spoke for the majority of Labour Members. Those Members are now discovering what stakeholding means for them. It means what the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) said on the lunchtime news about the parliamentary Labour party meeting this morning:

"We called the meeting. Let us hear the opinion of the parliamentary Labour party."

He might have added, "and then ignore it." Labour Members are discovering precisely what stakeholding means for them. It means do what Tony says. "Get up," says Tony, and they get up; when Tony says, "Sit down," they sit down; when Tony says, "Turn right," they turn right and when Tony says, "Turn left," they turn left. Where once there was commitment and passion there is now simply the grin on the face of the leader—a leader who likes to talk about standards in public life.

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are we debating the health service or the Leader of the Opposition?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Dorrell** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. We are debating the health service.

**Mr. Dorrell:** We are indeed debating the health service.

I made the mistake of assuming that the leader of the Labour party was interested in the future of the national health service. It is to him that the difficult questions must how be addressed. He cannot hide behind the hon. Member for Peckham. What we need to know from the leader of the Labour party is whether he will authorise more money for the NHS. Will he support choice and diversity in general practice? Will he wind up fundholding in general practice?

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): Hypocrite.

**Mr. Dorrell:** Will he support local managers—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Did I hear the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) suggest that an hon. Member was a hypocrite?

**Mr. Shaw:** I would not want to suggest that at all; it must have been a mistake.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member did say that. Is the hon. Member withdrawing that remark here and now?

**Mr. Shaw:** I certainly would withdraw it if you thought I said it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I heard the hon. Member say it. Does the hon. Member withdraw it or not?

**Mr. Shaw:** I certainly shall withdraw anything that you are not happy with, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Does the hon. Member withdraw the word I heard him say—that the Leader of the Opposition—

**Mr. Shaw:** I do—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Does the hon. Member withdraw his comment that the Leader of the Opposition was a hypocrite? Does the hon. Member withdraw that?

**Mr. Shaw:** I withdraw it.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I am most grateful.

**Mr. Dorrell:** The questions remain for those on the Opposition Front Bench and most importantly for the leader of the Labour party. Those questions require him to face one way. They require him to convert soft-focus rhetoric into hard commitments. If he fails to do so, we must draw the conclusion that warm words are simply hot air. Today, another opportunity to do that has passed. Yet again, Labour has failed the test.

5.42 pm

**Mr. Sam Galbraith** (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I was somewhat disappointed that the Secretary of State spent so little time talking about the health service. I now realise why it is that more and more people within the NHS—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not criticising the Chair. The whole of the Secretary of State's speech was about the health service.

**Mr. Galbraith:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I now realise why fewer and fewer people in the NHS listen to the Secretary of State. I was also disappointed that once again he raised the issue of choice under the Government as a result of their changes. The right hon. Gentleman should be aware that, before the Government changes, any doctor, be it a general practitioner or a hospital consultant, working anywhere in the health service, could send any patient anywhere in the United Kingdom at any time.

**The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone):** That was the theory.

**Mr. Galbraith:** That was the practical reality. That fact is so. That is no longer the reality and I wish that the Secretary of State would stop going on and on about choice within the NHS.

**Dr. Keith Hampson** (Leeds, North-West): What the hon. Gentleman suggests is simply not what happened in fact. For years and years, all hon. Members who represented Leeds, including Opposition Members, complained bitterly about how Leeds general infirmary was swamped by patients. They were sent to it from all over the area, to the point where our constituents in Leeds

could not get treatment at our hospital. The hospital received no financial recompense for that. That is not the case now. One thing is for certain; the Labour party will not do any better than the Conservative Government, who, in the past three years, have raised the capital spending of LGI from £8 million to £20 million.

**Mr. Galbraith:** The hon. Gentleman reinforced my point by saying that people came from all over to his hospital. That reinforces my argument that choice always existed. Nowadays choice does not exist; one goes to where the contract is made. That is the reality.

Being a good Presbyterian, I want to start my speech today with a text from the Secretary of State. In *The Guardian* on 11 January he was reported as saying:

"It is no good continuing to provide treatment which is out of date, nor rushing to carry out new procedures before they have been clinically evaluated."

That is an appropriate text, to which I shall return partly in relation to the changes within the NHS. I should like to start by relating it to beta interferon, once again. That drug is at the heart of much of the controversy in the NHS—the controversy does not specifically relate to the drug but concerns treatment rationing and effective treatment.

When the right hon. Gentleman has considered the subject before, he has sought to make a distinction between rationing and non-use of ineffective treatments. I am extremely happy that he has done so, because he has probably read some of my speeches on the matter.

In *The Herald* of Glasgow, of 5 October, I discussed the rationing of health care. I said that the definition of rationing was important and that rationing meant

"the denial to a patient of treatment that would benefit their physical or mental health, treatment the patient wishes to have and which, in the doctor's judgment, is considered to be medically appropriate. Unnecessary treatment, by which I mean treatment that is of no benefit to the patient, is not included within this definition."

It is therefore not indicated—that means, to requote the Secretary of State, one should not rush

"to carry out new procedures before they have been clinically evaluated."

In that respect, and given the Minister's view, I am really surprised that he is not taking a harder line on the handling of the drug beta interferon.

Let me explain briefly that beta interferon has been put forward as a treatment for multiple sclerosis—a debilitating disorder for which there are really no effective treatments. It is a disease that in part is considered possibly related to the immune system and slow viruses. One of the possible treatments put forward recently has been beta interferon.

The drug has been extensively evaluated, and as a result two studies were reported. The first of those appeared in an expedited publication in *Neurology* in 1993, volume 43, 655-81. A follow-up study was published in *Neurology* in 1995, volume 45, 1277-85. Those studies have been used as justification for the prescription of beta interferon—an extremely expensive drug. Those studies are what are known as phase 2 trials—a term that I am sure the Minister understands. Those trials do not use definitive end points but are studies used for looking at dose regimes and possible efficacy. They do not prove the worth or value of any treatment. They use surrogate end points such as remission rates and nuclear magnetic resonance scanning and different types of imaging of the brain.

Those phase 2 trials showed that, as a result of the drug, there may be an improvement, initially, in the remission rate, or at least a reduction in the exacerbation rate, but that it has no effect on disability at any stage. It is also a stage 2 trial and it is therefore not surprising that the authors, in their 1995 paper, conclude that their results do

"not establish an effect . . . in limiting progression of disability. This study was not originally powered to demonstrate a treatment effect on disease progression. At these levels of disability, more patients or longer follow-up, or both, would be required. Accordingly, additional clinical trials will be necessary to evaluate the role of IFNB in preventing disability."

It is a drug of unproven value.

I return to the Minister's comment that we should not rush to carry out new procedures before they have been clinically evaluated. This is an expensive drug that has not been clinically evaluated. We should not rush into allowing its general use in the national health service.

I have raised that point before with the Secretary of State. He says, as do Scottish Office Ministers, that such matters should be decided locally. That is their first line, but it is a dangerous road to go down. The Secretary of State himself recognises that fact; *The Independent* on 9 January reported his speech to the Manchester business school in which he made the point that there should not be variations in treatment and practice in different areas. He said:

"We must recognise, in the first instance, that this is a national health service"

and prevent variations. I agree. Guidance on the matter must come from the centre. That principle should apply to all treatments in the national health service.

It is not appropriate for separate authorities to make differing decisions about treatment or its allocation. It is not appropriate that people who live on one side of a street are deemed to need treatment but that people who live on the other side are not. The system to decide whether treatment is necessary must be national.

The Secretary of State will say that different areas must decide on their own priorities. If an area requires increased resources for some disease such as, in my area, carcinoma bronchus ischaemic heart disease, it requires additional resources and not to start cutting back on other necessary treatments. I implore the Minister to consider the matter and give national guidelines.

The Secretary of State will also say that doctors must be left to make their clinical judgments. I accept that. On a day-to-day, face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball basis, doctors should make clinical judgments. However, we do not give doctors total freedom in their clinical judgment. That has never been appropriate and has never been the case. When cardiac surgery came in, we did not make it universally available to anyone who wanted it. It was evaluated nationally and properly. When it became clear that it was of use, we set up, using national guidelines, units throughout the country. That is the way forward.

Beta interferon is a test of the way in which the NHS works at its best. In other words, we respond to need; we evaluate that need; consider the methods of dealing with it; and, if a treatment is shown to have an effect on that need, we provide it. We must not get into the situation that exists in the United States, where the system is demand led. There, a drug, merely because it has become available and is being pushed by a drug company, suddenly acquires a demand and is prescribed all over the place. The NHS faces a test

*[Mr. Galbraith]*

with beta interferon to ensure that it is prescribed only if it is shown to be effective. We should not duck that through doctor's choice or local choice. It is a decision that only the Government can make.

**Mr. Norman Hogg** (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I am grateful to my hon. and technically qualified Friend. How can we deal with people who suffer from dreadful illnesses such as multiple sclerosis who are hoping for some remedy? I have seen a great deal of written information that seemed to make claims for beta interferon, but he says that they have not been substantiated by tests. How can we get over the problem of information being published in what seems to be a learned way when it is not true?

**Mr. Galbraith:** In this case, we can get over it by allowing it to be prescribed only in the context of a clinical trial. The authors of the *Neurology* study said that the drug required further study. That would mean a phase 3 study which would be a proper double-blind, crossover controlled trial with proper end-point evaluations. If it were done in that way, we would discover whether the drug was effective. That is the way forward.

The Secretary of State realises that that is part of what is known in the current phrase as evidence-based medicine. Most people thought that we have always had evidence-based medicine and that it was good medicine. Not everyone practised it; some people practised bad medicine. Evidence-based medicine is not new. If we are to use evidence-based medicine in clinical practice, we must use it in managerial practice in the national health service. We have singularly failed to do that, and it has led, in large measure, to the beds crisis that has occurred this winter.

The Minister pretends that somehow the beds problem is different. Every year, from time to time, there are beds crises in the NHS. The Minister maintains that it is worse this year than it has been in others. I am not sure about that. I am always wary of figures. Patients get redesignated and reclassified. I have been around several hospitals and I have seen no greater crisis than usual. There simply were not enough beds available.

That is not a problem by which we should have been surprised. Everyone predicted it because, in making managerial decisions, we had not considered the evidence properly and had made too many snap judgments. We should not have had a winter crisis, because hospitals are usually especially quiet at that time. Patients are decanted from beds over the holiday period and are not taken in for elective procedures. There ought to have been plenty of beds, yet we failed patients. We should examine the reasons behind that. We have closed far too many beds—a decision that was based on a model of bed numbers that was flawed and never subject to decent analysis but propagated on the one principle that we must close beds. Anything that challenged that assumption was ignored.

It is proper to consider how we can improve the model. That is happening in the Scottish Office and I hope that the Secretary of State will undertake to consider it for the whole United Kingdom. Let me suggest some of the things that went wrong. We have reached the stage where there are not enough beds. It is no good talking about redesignation and having bed managers.

Please save us from Philip Hunt of the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts who came on radio to say that the way to solve the problem of the lack of beds was to appoint another manager. That is the last thing that we need. We need another manager like we need a hole in the head. We need someone to examine the problem. Does the Secretary of State realise what redesignation of beds means? It involves moving patients around the hospital over two or three days. They are often taken out of the ward in the middle of night and placed elsewhere. That is bad medicine for patients and doctors.

Let us return to the possible causes of the mistake with the beds. First, we did not properly take account of the demographic shift and the fact that older patients suffer more disease. Those diseases add to the number of emergencies.

Secondly, we did not take account of the effect that community care would have on emergency admissions. The principle of community care is right; I am not going to challenge that. However, many people in care in the community fall sick who would previously have fallen sick in hospital beds, where they were attended by surgeons and physicians in their hospitals and managed in their beds. Now, however, those people present at hospitals as emergencies, which is another factor that was not taken into consideration in the bed model.

The third factor that was not taken into consideration was early discharge from hospitals. The re-admission rate was simply not included in the calculation.

**Mr. Malone:** There is no evidence for that.

**Mr. Galbraith:** I hear the Minister of State saying that there is no evidence for that, but I should like him to present me with the facts.

I am not opposed to early discharge from hospital, which is correct and proper, but we must consider the re-admission rate that is associated with it.

The fourth factor that was not taken into account was the changing nature of the practice of medicine. In the past, myocardial infarctions and strokes could be managed at home; now they are not and, instead, the patient is taken to hospital. We should have taken all those factors into account.

The current crisis has come about not because of a lack of emergency beds but because of a lack of beds generally. In our acute strategies, we forgot to take into account all the necessary procedures. There is a similar shortage of intensive care beds. That shortage is not simply due to the fact that there are too few intensive care beds; there are too few acute beds. The way to free an intensive care bed is to move its occupier into a second-line bed. If there are no second-line beds, the patient cannot be transferred from the intensive care unit to a second-line bed. We must reappraise the number of beds; we cannot continue to close them.

The Government should have a moratorium on all bed closures until we reconsider the bed model and decide on the number of beds in the national health service. In that period, we should undertake a proper study in which we listen to everyone involved and base our decisions on evidence, and only evidence. We shall not base our decision on any prejudice, on managerial diktat or simply on financial grounds. We shall make our decision on the

evidence. If evidence is good for clinical practice, it is good for every practice in the NHS and we should follow it through to its limit.

6.1 pm

**Sir Norman Fowler** (Sutton Coldfield): I have been taking part in health debates for the past 20 years or so. The speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was one of the nastiest speeches on health that I have heard during those 20 years. When the hon. Lady says that the national health service is being "torn limb from limb" by this Government, she is talking the most contemptible nonsense—what is more, she knows it. The hon. Lady's allegation that the health service is being "privatised" and sold off to the private sector is ludicrous, and known to be ludicrous.

The hon. Lady has succeeded in showing us something else entirely: that the words of the Labour party do not match up to its action—its present action, its action when it was in power or future action that it might take if it were in power. I talk specifically about health, as I believe strongly that the sort of attack the hon. Lady pursued on the Government this afternoon was not only inaccurate, but hypocritical.

When we debate health, the public are not impressed when the political words do not meet the needs. The pubic want frankness about health care, and a recognition of the problems encountered in any health service system. The public want an explanation of constructive policies. The public wanted more this afternoon than the same depressing mixture of scare and stridency that we received. All we were given was the unappetising sight of the hon. Lady trying to work her passage back into her own political party.

The hon. Lady was trying, once more, to exploit the health issue. Despite the denials over the past 15 years by successive Secretaries of State for Health, the hon. Lady attempted to suggest that the Conservative party wants to privatise the health service. Attacked for her own double standards, she ascribes double standards to others. I reject that claim, and I return to the division between the Labour party's words and its actions. Let us compare the words that the Labour party now uses on health with the action that it took when it was in power.

**Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Norman Fowler:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has strolled in. I shall not give way to him, as he has not listened to the argument—I doubt whether it will affect his argument much, but it affects the House.

I accept that today there are problems involving the accident and emergency units and the demand they face. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister of State know, I have raised that issue in the House, as well as the subject of the Good Hope hospital in Sutton Coldfield, to which I shall turn in a moment, as it was raised by the hon. Member for Peckham. I have made criticisms of the current position, and I have welcomed the action that has been taken—including the creation of new operating theatres and the modernisation of the unit. I hope that, in due course, there will be a new admissions unit, provided by the Government.

When I intervened in the speech of the hon. Lady, she appeared to cast doubt on the importance being set on that issue at the Good Hope hospital. She quoted a few words from what Tom Dean, the chief executive at Good Hope, had said. As it happens, I have with me the press statement that Tom Dean issued on 12 January, when the Secretary of State and I were at the hospital. The Secretary of State will confirm that his words were not part of our press release, but his own.

The headline in the press release is "More beds opening at Good Hope". It continues:

"Tom Dean . . . said: 'We are continuing to take positive steps to deal with the rise in emergency medical admissions by opening more beds on various wards at Good Hope.

'Thanks to our recruitment drive for more nurses, we have been able to open another 18 medical beds and six surgical beds this week.

'Building on the recruitment drive, we expect to open a further 39 beds next month to assist with meeting the emergency needs and to help us catch up on non-urgent surgery.

'We are looking at ways of increasing yet further our operating lists, particularly for those patients for whom day case surgery is appropriate."

That press release gives the flavour of what Good Hope hospital and its chief executive seek to do much more than the selective couple of words used by the shadow Secretary of State for Health. We shall want to see the full letter, from which she took just three or four words.

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will accept that I find it difficult to take the implication or charge that came through in the hon. Lady's speech this afternoon—that the problems of the health service and of the Good Hope hospital have all emerged during the lifetime of the Conservative Government. Anyone who knows the position knows that that is not true.

In the 21 years that I have been Member of Parliament for Sutton Coldfield, the most agonising health meeting that I have attended—and that I ever hope to attend—was when a consultant at the hospital gathered together his entire waiting list in a local hall to confront the authorities. The authorities that he confronted to protest about waiting lists were not the Conservative Government, but the last Labour Government.

The biggest problem we have faced in the past 21 years in Sutton Coldfield has been what happened over the much-needed hospital buildings. Those buildings were cancelled because of the capital cuts made by the last Labour Government, which were brought about by the economic crisis. It is all very well to call—as the motion does—for new beds to be opened, but if the Labour party's practice had prevailed, there would have been no question of bringing back beds, because those beds would never have existed. The wards would not have been built. The Conservative Government built the wards in Good Hope hospital.

That is only one local hospital, but it illustrates the general position. Those of us who remember the health policies of the last Labour Government remember perfectly well that their actions did not remotely match the words that Labour Members use today.

What about future action? I listened to what the hon. Member for Peckham said this afternoon, and I listened to her in Birmingham town hall in a debate with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—and many other people, as it happened—and an audience of about

*[Sir Norman Fowler]*

1,000 people. Naturally, the hon. Lady was asked about resources. The only answer she gave was one similar to that which she gave this afternoon—an assault on managers in the health service.

I am the last person to defend bureaucracy. Indeed, I believe that removing the regional health layer, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is doing, is probably the best way of tackling bureaucracy. Although I oppose bureaucracy, I am emphatically in favour of strong management.

The general managers that I introduced in the 1980s, following the report of the late Roy Griffiths, were the real start of the health reforms of the present Government. I shall tell the House why those reforms were important.

In the summer of 1984, there was an outbreak of food poisoning at the Stanley Royd hospital near Wakefield. Perhaps one or two hon. Members remember it. It affected more than 800 elderly patients, and caused 19 deaths. I appointed a public inquiry into the outbreak, and the crucial message that came back was that we needed more hands-on management.

There was a gulf between those who were meant to be in charge and those who were carrying out the work. According to the report, the so-called managers at the time "passed through rather than spent time in the kitchen".

In other words, what were needed were managers who took responsibility for securing the best service for the patients and who could be held to account if there was failure. That was the overwhelming logic of the Griffiths report.

At the time, we were opposed all the way by the Labour party on that proposal. We were told that the health service was different from business, and therefore did not need the benefits of management techniques that had been developed in business and in industry.

Of course the delivery of health care is different from producing cars or selling food, but there are very many common problems that any manager shares. He must be concerned with the quality of service and productivity. He must motivate and involve all his staff, and he must live within his budget. The health service should not be run in any way on a commercial basis, but it certainly must be run in a businesslike way, because that is the sensible way to manage a service of that size.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman's experience leads him to the conclusion that, however much one might devolve management, the only person publicly accountable by election for the health service in this country is the Secretary of State, so it is the Secretary of State who ultimately must ensure that, when the health service is needed, for example to respond to emergencies, the services are provided—the buck stops there, not with the local management.

**Sir Norman Fowler:** The buck ultimately does stop with the Secretary of State. As someone who was Secretary of State for six years, which I believe is longer than most, I bear the scars of the buck stopping with the Secretary of State.

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** You can see them.

**Sir Norman Fowler:** Indeed you can.

I agree with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that the buck stops with the Secretary of State, but, before general managers were introduced, we had the totally unsatisfactory position in which, all too often, no one was in charge at the health authority level or the hospital level. That is not the way to run anything, let alone a health service as important as ours.

I predict with certainty that, if by some mischance there were a Labour Government, they would not abolish general managers. Labour Members have opposed them, but they would continue with them, because no serious figure inside or outside the health service wants us to return to the old system.

It is not only in the past or the future that the words of members of the Labour party do not match their actions. The Secretary of State was at the Good Hope hospital when it was announced that more beds were being made available. However—this really is an argument for the hon. Member for Peckham—a couple of miles away, in another part of Sutton Coldfield, the Labour-controlled Birmingham city council is closing altogether a 40-bedded, purpose-built residential home for old people, the Frances Withers home. It is transferring to other accommodation, if it can, residents aged, on average, in their late 80s and 90s.

The read-across from that is quite clear. Elderly people account for more than 40 per cent. of the cost of the national health service. If the council takes such facilities out of operation, we all know what will happen—sooner or later, the strain will be taken by the national health service.

I am not the only one who opposes that policy. It is opposed by the residents, it is opposed by the relations of the residents, and, perhaps most vociferously of all, it is opposed by the trade union Unison on behalf of the staff.

Why is the home being closed? Birmingham city council has a budget of about £1.2 billion. It spends almost £190 million on social services, yet it cannot find a small cost to keep that home open. It has wasted millions of pounds—there is no doubt about that—on maladministration in the housing benefit system. It is unable to find the modest resources necessary to keep open a purpose-built home, built only 20 years ago, with good single rooms for residents, an exceptionally quiet and safe position, and an excellent sheltered garden, which is in every respect an excellent place for elderly people.

I find the arguments for that policy extraordinary. The council says that, together, Sutton Coldfield and Erdington constituencies have the second greatest provision of residential accommodation in the city of Birmingham, and that has become an argument for closing down the home. The council cites the cost of refurbishing the home, yet—I toured the home myself again last Friday—there is considerable doubt whether any refurbishment is required.

The television cameras and the media have camped outside Good Hope hospital, and I make no complaint of that. I have, as the Secretary of State knows, been outspoken on behalf of my local hospital. I hope that the same television cameras will portray what is happening in the Frances Withers home. I hope that they will portray a home being broken up. I hope—

**Mr. Connarty:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Norman Fowler:** I will not give way, as I am just ending.

I hope that the cameras will portray how old people are being transferred from one part of the city to another, often far from their relations. I hope that they will portray the way in which a purpose-built home is being vacated. Let no one ever forget that that policy is being instituted and carried out by a Labour-controlled council.

So the hon. Member for Peckham—

**Mr. Connarty** *rose—*

**Sir Norman Fowler:** I will not give way.

If the hon. Member for Peckham wanted to interrupt me, she might have remained in the Chamber. I regret very much that she has not done so.

The hon. Member for Peckham has succeeded in opening a debate. It may not be the debate that she intended to open in the glad morn of last Wednesday, when the subject was decided for today's debate. The debate that she has opened is about the difference between the Labour party's words and its actions. Conservative Members look forward with enthusiasm to joining that debate.

6.19 pm

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): The first two speeches in the debate today have shed much heat but very little light on the subject. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) moved the Opposition motion on the national health service. It contains some good ideas, including the suggestion that each health authority should nominate a person to identify bed shortages, that there should be a regular report on bed numbers, and that national guidelines should be introduced to clarify who pays for continuing care. The motion is strong, according to the hon. Lady's own diagnosis, but we know that we seek a diagnosis only in the hope that we shall receive a prescription, and the hon. Lady certainly offered very little in that regard.

The Opposition have many questions to answer. For example, the hon. Lady referred to the difficulty that people have securing dental treatment, but she did not tell us whether Labour is committed to restoring free dental checks. The hon. Lady and her colleagues regularly refer to the difficulties facing opticians, but she did not announce that the Labour party is committed to providing free eye tests. The Opposition complain every year when prescription charges increase, but they never confirm that they would freeze or reduce those charges.

The Secretary of State is correct when he says that we do not know whether the Opposition are for or against fundholding, the private finance initiative or increased money for the health service. Until Labour Members answer those questions, there will be no prescription—which is always more difficult to provide than a diagnosis.

The Secretary of State conceded that the health service has experienced some problems recently. He conceded that the demands on the health service have increased during the winter months, but he did not tell us whether the health service is coping with that demand, and he certainly did not tell us how he will ensure that it copes in the future. The Government amendment congratulates NHS staff on their hard work and dedication. The staff are certainly working hard, but I intend to cite some facts which show that they are not very happy about their status or about the work they are asked to perform.

The number of practitioners has increased in some areas, but decreased in others. In some areas, there is a dearth of people who are ready and willing to do the necessary work. The Government's figures show that their commitment to a year-on-year increase in real resources—we have debated the subject twice in this place in the past few months—will be barely attainable in future years.

The health service needs to develop three fundamentals in order to secure its future. It needs a working structure which will hold the health service together; it needs adequate funding to do the job; and it must be run effectively in order to improve staff morale. Although we do not need many further significant administrative changes within the health service, many areas that are clearly unsatisfactory could be vastly improved without uprooting or disrupting the service as a whole.

For example, from April we shall have regional outposts and regional civil servants, but no regional health authorities. The Liberal Democrats have long argued against separate regional health authorities. We believe that elected regional representatives should operate the strategy that determines the health service at a regional level. At a local level, the health authorities are appointed by the Secretary of State. That is not a democratic process, and my party has now agreed that health commissioning should be carried out by local government, in the same way as it carries out the commissioning and practice of social services.

Change is necessary in order to democratise the health service. I make it clear to the Minister that that does not mean any alteration in the purchaser-provider split; nor does it signal an end to fundholding. We believe that everyone should be a stakeholder in the fundholding and a partner who is able to buy the service—

**Mr. Charles Hendry** (High Peak): Barmy.

**Mr. Hughes:** It is not barmy, and it is not a new idea. It has been advocated for a long time by eminent people on both sides of the House, and by others such as J. K. Galbraith.

Having improved the structure of the NHS, we must then address the question of funding. Whatever the complex causes may be, the perception on the ground is that the funding and resource needs of the health service cannot be met only by the redistribution of resources within the service. It is not sufficient to cut the high salaries and the perks of managers, although that should be done. It is not sufficient simply to reduce the number of managers and put more staff on the front line, although that must occur also. The health service has a more fundamental need, as has been evidenced in the past few weeks by a shortage of doctors, nurses and support staff.

Elements of the recent crisis have been publicised in the newspapers, which carried stories about people being flown around the country in search of hospital beds—in one case, it involved an airman from the east coast. It was clear that emergency services were not available. I was told at the beginning of the week that Guy's hospital in my constituency needs 40 intensive care nurses.

*[Mr. Hughes]*

In practices all over the country, people are being told that the resources are simply not available, and that they cannot be recruited.

**Mr. Hayes:** I accept that the hon. Gentleman is totally sincere. However, I refer him to his suggestion that persons elected from local authorities should serve on health authorities and trust boards. That idea was declared unworkable by Nye Bevan, and the leaked document describes it as "barmy". I suspect that it was declared unworkable and barmy because, under the present system of appointment—there are many Labour and Liberal Democrat as well as Conservative appointees—party politics is buried once the parties are around the table taking decisions. That is good for health care.

**Mr. Hughes:** I know that the argument is not cut and dried. No one wants to see health authority policy hijacked for party political aims. I shall conclude my speech by suggesting how we can behave slightly more intelligently in that area than we have of late. We should not shout at each other across the Floor of the House. The people are not well served by party political appointees who seek to advance an imperfect manifesto. No one has the benefit of complete wisdom.

However, I do not accept that no one should be elected, and that all members should be appointed by the Government. Of course they will appoint people of different political persuasions in order to make it appear a balanced exercise, but at the same time they will continue to appoint their own people and those who are politically neutral. That gives the Secretary of State enormous power and leads to a lack of accountability to the patients, which is entirely inadequate in the case of a public service. The service is funded with taxpayers' money, and people expect to have some control over that expenditure.

Many problems remain in the family doctor service, including inadequate out-of-hours service and inadequate deputising services in many areas. Doctors cannot be recruited in many urban areas, and the quality of doctors is also an issue. People often find it difficult to register with a doctor, and they may be thrown off a doctor's list even though they have not found a replacement GP. We have not yet resolved the controversial issue of how often doctors should be allowed to dispense.

Doctors certainly believe that they are under increasing pressure. My colleagues have surveyed doctors around the country, and I shall refer to the views of doctors in three areas. My colleagues in Hazel Grove—an area south of Manchester, which I know well—conducted a survey of general practitioners in the autumn, and discovered that 70 per cent. of those who replied wanted to change profession or take early retirement. Eighty per cent. of GPs said that they were unhappy with the state of their profession.

Colleagues in Cornwall made a similar survey, and in Devon morale among GPs was so low that new jobs in Torbay are attracting only two out of three applications, compared with 40 out of 50 a few years ago. In Cornwall, the county of the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), the local medical council chairman, Dr. Andy Stewart, said in response to a survey by the hon. Gentleman's prospective Liberal Democrat opponent, Terry Jones, that 20 out of 320 GPs surveyed were receiving psychiatric care because of the stress caused by long hours and other work-related problems.

My colleague in Liverpool, who is a prospective candidate, also undertook a survey.

**Mr. Malone:** Was it a similar survey?

**Mr. Hughes:** Of course, and it comprised straightforward questions. I shall willingly show the Minister the results. When all the results are collected, I will let him have those because the issue is hugely important. Thirty per cent. of Liverpool's doctors are thinking of earlier retirement. Morale among GPs at the front line of the health service is severely low; that bodes ill for the future unless immediate action is taken to remedy it.

**Mr. Sebastian Coe** (Falmouth and Camborne): I hope that the survey by one of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues in my constituency had slightly more intellectual and numerate rigour than the Liberal Democrat survey in Devon and Cornwall. Under scrutiny in a debate in this Chamber only a few weeks ago, the Liberal Democrats had to accept that the response rate barely bordered on 25 per cent.

**Mr. Hughes:** I am perfectly happy to deal with the figures. I remember that debate, and I have read it. Various surveys have been undertaken in large areas, if not throughout the country. The response rate varied. In some places it was one quarter, and in others well over 50 per cent. There is no secret—I can give the hon. Gentleman the figures. I hope that he shares my concern that the trend, which is identical or similar throughout, is for large numbers of general practitioners to say that they are overworked, over-stressed and thinking of retiring early, and cannot recruit to their practices.

A practice just around the corner from my house is having great difficulty recruiting. I asked another practice in my constituency today, so that I could not be accused of giving outdated information. It stated that it is under huge pressure because of lack of resources. It was told that there would be adequate resources for care in the community, but there are not.

The practice informed me, for example, about a lack of bathing facilities and care assistants. It knew of more than one person who has been waiting three years for a bath seat. Standards of care are often considerably reduced because there are not the people to deliver them.

I do not rejoice in that situation, but state facts rather than speak rhetorically. Those facts suggest that something is substantially wrong. We all have a responsibility to respond.

**Mr. Ray Whitney** (Wycombe): We all want facts, not rhetoric. Does the hon. Gentleman have any comparable statistics of that claimed low morale in the medical profession during the Lib-Lab pact, when morale was distinctly low? I do not have any such figures, but it would be interesting to compare them. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in the past 10 years, the average GP list has been reduced by 9 per cent, which is difficult to square with the high stress to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

**Mr. Hughes:** I was not here in the time of the Lib-Lab pact, but I remember the issues and debates. The former

Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), said that the health service suffered significant cuts and waiting lists under the Labour Government at that time. That is a matter of record, and I remember it well. I do not doubt that the health service in the late 1970s was badly sapped of morale. We are debating the health service today, and I want to respond positively because we have an obligation, between us, to prepare the service for the next century, when there will be more demands than now.

There will be no bottomless pit, no matter which party is in government and who is Secretary of State, any more than there is now. The Secretary of State was right to point out that there will always need to be rationing of health care, and we would be fools to ignore that fact. Rationing has always happened—at some times by long waiting lists, at others by clinical choices. We owe a duty collectively to our citizens to resolve three questions—as the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), who chairs the Health Select Committee, knows.

First, what are the health service's boundaries of responsibility? The original legislation and current legislation do not accurately define them. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield gave an example of care in the community, where free service at the point of delivery may no longer be available. We may enter the area of community care or social services. Redefinition is a difficult debate, but we must address it.

Secondly, we must address how we make choices among competing priorities for funds that will always be insufficient to meet the needs to which the NHS would like to respond. We may need to be rigorous about eliminating work that does not have proven clinical value. If I may be controversial, the famous case of Jennifer's ear was probably an example of work that did not have proven clinical value.

Thirdly, we should seek to agree the minimum public funding needed to guarantee a comprehensive health service in all four countries of the United Kingdom that is free at the point of delivery and accessible to all our citizens.

Those difficult-to-answer questions are ideally suited to the exercise of that which, from this week, I am required to call partnership politics. The people—patients, actual and prospective, professionals and politicians—should begin a dialogue to reach agreement. Just as there used to be bipartisan agreement on pensions policy, if we are to hold on to a national health service we will require a bipartisan or multi-partisan agreement on health service policy.

The best guarantee for the future of the health service in the next century, with more older people to be treated and more high-cost medicine, is renewed commitment to the service's principles and agreement on paying for its practice in a way that accommodates those greater demands. I hope that the Secretary of State and his colleagues, and those who speak on health matters for Labour, agree that they should have such a dialogue with me and my colleagues and others in the House. Otherwise, we shall have the same sort of shouting match as we have seen this afternoon, which does not advance the cause of patients one jot.

6.37 pm

**Mrs. Marion Roe** (Broxbourne): I am pleased that the House has the opportunity to debate the state of the national health service because I want to draw attention to the work that the Select Committee on Health, which I have the honour to chair, is currently undertaking in respect of long-term care—an issue of enormous importance in future policy and direction and to the public.

How the disabled elderly are to be cared for and who is to pay for that care is a question that affects us all potentially. Last November, the Committee published the results of phase 1 of its inquiry, which considered the implications of Department of Health guidance on NHS responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs. That report was unanimous, and I thank all my colleagues on the Committee for the constructive way in which that topic was discussed. It was a very good advertisement for the Select Committee system. We are now well into phase 2 of our inquiry, which is considering the potential demand for long-term care in the future and the possible consequences of funding arrangements.

I shall begin by outlining the main conclusions in our report and the main points of the Government's response, which was published yesterday. The Select Committee has not yet had an opportunity to discuss the response, so I shall give my own personal view. I will also touch on the main issues that we are considering in phase 2 of the inquiry.

The Select Committee was pleased that the Department of Health had recognised the need to clarify NHS responsibilities for continuing health care services. We commended the Department for the extent to which it was able to accept views expressed during its consultation period. Nevertheless, there were some areas where we thought that further clarification would be helpful for the NHS, for local authorities and also, of course, for the users of those services.

The guidance calls on health authorities to develop local policies for purchasing continuing health care services. All the members of the Select Committee were struck by the desire of witnesses that health authorities should not focus solely on the important question of defining eligibility criteria for NHS continuing health care, but should also ensure that the full range of high-quality continuing health care services is available to support people in their own homes for as long as possible. I am pleased to note that the Government strongly agree with our sentiments.

The Select Committee shared the concerns of many witnesses who argued that locally set eligibility criteria might create unacceptably wide variations in the provision of NHS services. We recognised that the Department of Health's guidance provided a framework which went some way towards meeting those concerns, but on the grounds of equity we recommended that the nationally set framework should include eligibility criteria for long-term care so that it is absolutely clear what the NHS, as a national service, will always provide.

I am also pleased that the Government, in their response to our report, agreed that the current variation in continuing health care arrangements needs to be addressed. The Government have also committed the national health service executive board to reviewing, during the coming year, how eligibility criteria are operating in practice and to issuing further guidance on priority issues relating to eligibility criteria, which may, in effect, lead to the national criteria that we called for in our report.

*[Mrs. Marion Roe]*

The Select Committee felt that it was important that patients, together with their families and carers, should be left in no doubt as to the circumstances in which health authorities rather than local authorities will be responsible for purchasing continuing care services, especially nursing home care which, as the House will be aware, can be purchased both by health authorities and by local authority social services departments. We were not convinced that the Department of Health's refusal to provide information on the types of cases that might be expected to come within the eligibility criteria was justifiable. We therefore recommended that the Department of Health should prepare illustrative case studies and widely disseminate them.

I am pleased that the Government have recognised the strength of our case by accepting in their response that there is value in health authorities testing their eligibility criteria against case studies. I fear, however, that the members of the Select Committee will be disappointed that the Department of Health is still only considering whether it would be helpful to issue the kind of illustrative case studies that we call for. In our view, those are clearly necessary to help members of the public to understand their position.

Our report also recommended that the Department of Health should introduce a national long-term care charter, which would specify the minimum levels of provision that people could expect from health authorities, NHS trusts, GP fundholders and local authorities. It would also specify access to a named range of services, a minimum list of specialist equipment and home aids, time limits for assessment, and provision of services where need is identified.

The Government have told us that they have not reached a final decision on whether to issue such a charter, which would cover some of the ground already covered by the forthcoming local community charters, but that before April they will issue a national leaflet on long-term care. We look forward to seeing that.

The guidance issued by the Department of Health also deals with hospital discharge arrangements for patients who are assessed as not requiring further NHS-funded continuing health care. The Select Committee recommended that health authorities and NHS trusts should not discharge patients home without a package of care being prepared, which can be demonstrated to meet their assessed needs fully and, as far as possible, agreed in advance with them and their informal carers. We also called for NHS-funded patients entering a nursing home to have the right, subject to the necessary clinical and financial conditions, to choose their nursing home—a right which currently exists for local authority-funded patients in nursing homes.

The Select Committee welcomed the proposed establishment of independent panels to which patients being discharged from hospitals, who are not to be funded by the NHS, can appeal. Those panels will provide an extra safeguard for patients facing important and sensitive decisions about their future. We also urged the Department of Health to clarify the arrangements under which those panels would seek independent clinical advice. We also recommended that the right of appeal to the review panel should be extended to all patients assessed as requiring nursing home care, wherever they live, when that care is not to be funded by the NHS, and that the right of appeal should not be restricted to those being discharged from hospital.

I am pleased that the Department of Health's further guidance on the review procedure makes it clear that patients, families and their carers have the right to request a second clinical opinion, which should be offered routinely before their case reaches the independent review panel. However, it is disappointing that the Department of Health has not clarified our concerns about how the provision of independent clinical advice to the review panel can be conducted fairly from the patient's point of view, if an opinion is to be given only on whether the clinical judgments made match the health authority's eligibility criteria, rather than on the clinical diagnosis, management or prognosis of the patient.

The Select Committee warmly welcomed the decision that implementation of the new guidance should be one of the six national priorities set by the Department of Health for the NHS over the next three to five years. We called upon the Department of Health to set firm target dates for the completion of NHS reinvestment programmes by all those health authorities whose reviews indicated a need for such a programme. We also considered that to aid public confidence in the equity of access nationally to NHS-funded continuing health care, the Department of Health should publish the outcome of its review of individual health authorities' policies and eligibility criteria and outline the action that it would take against any authority which significantly departed from the national framework. I welcome the Government's assurance that health authorities will have to publish plans clearly setting out the target dates for completion of any necessary reinvestment programmes; and the Committee will look to the NHS executive to monitor health authorities closely to ensure that the policies are fully implemented.

I should like now briefly to outline how the Select Committee is taking forward its work on long-term care in phase 2 of the inquiry. Many of our witnesses have commented on the need for the Government, Parliament, providers and the public to participate in a far-reaching debate about the future of long-term care provision and funding. We hope that our Committee is currently stimulating that debate. We are considering what models of care exist for long-term care services, and we are further examining the differing models of care which can meet future demand for long-term care.

Some of our earlier witnesses stressed the potential impact that health promotion might have on reducing demand, while others drew attention to the potential offered by further investment in rehabilitation services. We are also considering who should manage long-term care.

An aging population is a widely recognised phenomenon throughout most of the developed world, including the United Kingdom. The state of health of older people is also a key determinant of the need for, and hence the cost of, long-term care. We shall therefore be considering the cost implications of long-term care, given projected demographic trends, and whether talk of a demographic time bomb is realistic or alarmist.

We have been exploring the question of whether longer life expectancy is likely to lead to longer periods of illness and disability, in addition to other factors which may impact on the demand for long-term care, such as changing social and demographic conditions.

Whatever the scale of the likely increase in demand for long-term care, one thing is clear: it will have to be financed from one source or another. Where the balance of responsibility for funding as between the individual and the state should lie is being debated in just about every western country, as well as in many Asian countries. It is probably true to say that this issue potentially eclipses in its future importance every other issue that we daily discuss in this House. I hope to be able to address the House on this subject again in the near future, when the Select Committee has produced its final recommendations.

6.52 pm

**Mr. Joe Benton** (Bootle): I begin by thanking the shadow Secretary of State for Health for her excellent exposé of the state of the health services as they affect my constituents in Bootle and Merseyside. She particularly drew attention to the shortage of beds—a factor highly relevant to my part of the world.

I could not help pricking up my ears when I heard the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) refer to case studies. As she is Chair of the Select Committee on Health, I would like her to consider three case studies that I shall offer the House tonight, if the House will bear with me. I shall use them to illustrate and identify what is going on in hospital care in my part of the world. That is why I am asking the hon. Lady to take my case studies forward.

The first concerns Mrs. K. Larkin, who was diagnosed as having cancer and taken to Fazakerley hospital on 26 October. She was admitted at 2 pm and remained in the reception area until 8 pm without food or drink. Her daughter had to ask for a blanket to cover her up. Only after repeated requests from her family was she even given painkillers. She was later discharged and eventually died at home.

The second case relates to Mr. J. Molloy, another constituent of mine. On 16 January 1995 he was taken by ambulance to Fazakerley hospital, to which he was admitted at 1620 hours suffering from internal bleeding due to a duodenal ulcer. He was kept waiting in the reception area on a trolley for some seven hours and 10 minutes, before being transferred to a cubicle where he was later visited by a doctor, some eight and three-quarter hours after being admitted. He was then taken to a ward at 0320 hours the following morning.

The third case will take a little longer to deal with, but I should like the House to hear it. Mr. Barlow, now unfortunately deceased, was terminally ill with cancer. He was admitted to Fazakerley hospital, following a referral by Dr. Krasner, for the purpose of alleviating a restriction in his throat. He arrived at the hospital at 1.30 pm and proceeded to ward 12 as requested, where he waited for a doctor. After an hour, he asked the nurse when he would be seen and was advised that the doctor was on his way. Much later, because there was a bank holiday pending, he was advised that there was little point in his staying because he would not be seen until after the bank holiday.

Mr. Barlow arrived back after the bank holiday and was admitted to the ward at about 8 am, only to be told that no bed was available. A computer breakdown was blamed. He was given a trolley bed and placed in the store room of the hospital among boxes of syringes, dressing packs and other medical appliances and equipment. That afternoon he was taken to theatre and given a general anaesthetic. He was assured that he would be placed on a ward on his return from the theatre. Mr. Barlow came round from the anaesthetic somewhat disoriented and found himself back on a trolley bed in the same store room—aware that he still had a blockage in his throat. He could get no clear information about what had happened from nurses or ward doctors.

Those are three real cases: they actually happened. The situation in Liverpool's hospitals has been rightly described as critical. Indeed, so bad is it that my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) went with me to meet the trust. Earlier, the Secretary of State talked about referring cases to Ministers individually. All Merseyside Members have referred individual cases to the Minister, but we have had no satisfactory response: we are always referred back to the trust.

This has caused a terrible crisis of confidence throughout Merseyside. The sad fact is that the older one gets, the less confidence one feels about going anywhere near a hospital. I should be grateful if the Minister would answer today the questions that I tried to put earlier in the debate. The Secretary of State today mentioned certain parts of the country where new beds have been created. Exactly what beds have replaced those lost by the closure of Walton hospital in Liverpool? Will he also say why, when we refer individual cases to the Department of Health—contrary to what the Secretary of State said earlier—he will not deal with them as a matter of urgency, but simply refers us back to the trust, which is self-defeating and gets us absolutely nowhere?

It is clear that there is a crisis in the health service. I am not a dinosaur. I am quite prepared to listen. I know of the problems of funding, and I am prepared to look at that and to have an open mind. What I and my colleagues insist upon, however, is that we have a national health service of which we can be proud. I remember its inception when I was a young boy, and I remember the great relief that it brought to families such as mine. Instead of having to pay for doctors and services, we had the national health service. It is one of the greatest treasures that this nation has and justifies our putting the adjective "Great" in front of Britain. That is what I think of the health service. I am prepared to look at all sorts of ideas so that we eventually come up with a national health service which provides the necessary service at the point of delivery and does not mean people being stuck on trolleys for nine hours at a time in hospitals up and down the country.

Before the hon. Member for Broxbourne leaves the Chamber, I ask her to take to the Select Committee the case studies that I have given. Let us see what the Committee has to say. If any Government fail to provide a proper national health service at the point of delivery, they will bring the country down. I believe in the framework of a Christian state, and that framework means a wholesome national health service that is available to everybody.

When the Minister replies, I very much hope that he will answer the questions that were posed by my hon. Friends earlier. We are dealing with a very serious matter, and we shall be failing many people if there is any further deterioration or exacerbation of the crisis that exists in the health service.

7.1 pm

**Dame Jill Knight** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) is not the only one who seeks to have a Christian basis in life. Nor does any party,

*[Dame Jill Knight]*

on either side of the House, have any right to suggest that it is the only party with a Christian base. It is extremely unfair to expect the Minister for Health, or, indeed, the Secretary of State, when he has had no warning whatever about Mr. Jones or Mrs. Brown having received this or that kind of treatment, to know instantly the circumstances surrounding the case, when there must be hundreds, if not thousands, of hospitals in this country. That would be totally absurd. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has not had the experience, but surely a little thought would have shown him that it is simply not reasonable to expect the Minister, who is in charge of the biggest business in the whole of Europe, to know every last detail about every patient in every hospital. He simply could not do that.

**Mr. Benton:** Of course, I do not expect the Minister to be able to reply in detail to every individual case, but it was the Secretary of State who said earlier that individual cases should be referred on an individual basis. I presume that by that he meant, referred to him. I—and my colleagues who represent constituencies in Merseyside—am tired of referring individual cases. I thought that I made that point clearly and lucidly. We are getting nowhere.

**Dame Jill Knight:** The hon. Gentleman is not being realistic at all. Obviously—I wish that he would listen to what I am saying—no Minister or Secretary of State for Health could possibly be expected to know all the details of all the patient cases in all the thousands of hospitals in this country. When a single case is referred to a Minister, he has no alternative but to make inquiries of the health authority that covers the hospital where the patient is having treatment. There is no other possible way to deal with the matter. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman is being a little unreasonable to suggest otherwise.

I did not, although many hon. Members did, seek to intervene during the opening speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). It was not because I was not burning to do so—indeed I was—but because I did not know which point to pick her up on. A clear reply could have been given to every single one of her questions. I shall not prolong my speech by answering all the points that she raised, but I wish to raise a particular point.

The hon. Lady poured scorn on the Government's interest in involving the private sector and competition in the health service. Only last week—this is not old hat, either—I tabled a question, which, sadly, was not reached during oral questions, and how many of us have had to deal with that disappointment? My question read:

"To ask the Secretary of State what estimate he has made of the annual saving to the NHS arising from compulsory competitive tendering."

The written reply was:

"As a result of market testing, it is estimated that since 1983 the national health service has been saved a total in excess of £1 billion".—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. *548*.]

That saving is the result of competition being introduced and the private sector being utilised. What interests me about that is that every penny of that sum has gone to patient care. Had that action not been taken, there would have been £1 billion less for patient care. We can assume only that were, God forbid, a Labour Government to be elected and to take control of our health service, we would no longer have such savings. I have no doubt whatever that patients would suffer badly. It should be clearly on record that the Government's determination to save money and to use every sensible method of competitive tendering is a good idea.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dame Jill Knight:** Other hon. Members want to speak, so if the hon. Lady will forgive me, I shall hurry along.

I am putting this on record, because it is true. Our health service has never been as good as it is today. For every one of the cases that the hon. Member for Bootle mentioned, I can tell him of 10, 20 or 30 patients who were very satisfied with the care that they received. Many of them have written to me about it. I have a file from people who wished to tell me how satisfied they were with the care that they received. Never in our history have so many doctors treated so many patients for so many ills with so few failures. Indeed, they are carrying out miracles, when I look at some of the cases of tiny babies being operated on today who would have died only a few years ago.

There are such cases not just in Birmingham, but throughout the country. Hip replacements are now carried out as a matter of common practice. Twenty years ago, transplant surgery was unheard of on its present scale, but it is now widespread. Consider how miraculous that is and the benefits that it gives. Nowadays people have not one heart bypass but triple or quadruple heart bypasses in one operation. Our clever doctors have never served the people so well. Our health service has never been as miraculous as it is today.

The second basic truth to which Opposition Members should listen carefully is that no Government of any political colour will ever be able to ensure that every single patient is treated for every single ill, in the hospital of his choice, by the consultant whom he prefers, the instant that the need arises. That may be a good goal for which to strive, but it ain't gonna happen because it is impossible. We can work towards it, but it is unlikely to be achieved, whoever is in power.

In Birmingham, we are grateful for the excellent health care available. However, Opposition Members have taken care to dwell on the few times when things do not go right rather than the thousands of times when they do. The newspapers are the same. I am aware that editors believe that only bad news sells papers, but I wish that they would not lie. A recent story in Birmingham referred to the huge loss of beds in Birmingham hospitals.

Incidentally, I was worried to deduce that the hon. Member for Peckham must have misled the House when she read a portion of a letter this afternoon. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) will have been disappointed that she was not present during his speech, because he also had information from the same official. The information that my right hon. Friend gave me was almost directly opposite to that given by the hon. Lady, so one of them must be wrong and we should be told which one. My right hon. Friend, who has been a Secretary of State, had the information in front of him and he read some of it.

I do not believe that the Birmingham health authorities are lying when they say:

"Claims in the local press and elsewhere, that there has been a huge loss of beds across Birmingham hospitals are not true."

We should at least have the truth, and the authorities that are in charge say that such claims are not true.

It is right to recognise—nobody referred to this when talking about the lack of hospital beds—that many patients today are dealt with in day care facilities. Surely we do not need the same number of beds when thousands of patients are dealt with in the course of a day. I also welcome that advance, which medicine has given us.

The substantial investment in our Birmingham hospitals should be acknowledged. The Queen Elizabeth hospital has had a new neuro-science unit at a cost of £7.2 million, a cancer centre will open shortly at a cost of £8.5 million and there is a £30 million budget for improving theatres and wards. At Selly Oak hospital, £7.5 million has been spent on a new accident and emergency trauma unit and £2 million has been allocated for upgrading the outpatients' department. That was certainly needed, but £2 million is a lot of money. City hospital has had £7.2 million for a high-tech eye unit and £1.4 million for the upgrading of the accident and emergency unit, and it is also to have a new dermatology unit. Such figures are exceedingly encouraging.

Birmingham Heartlands, Good Hope and the Children's hospital have had £34.7 million between them. We also have a miraculous new women's hospital costing £17 million, for which we in Birmingham are grateful. All in all, Birmingham health authorities now have a budget of £600 million. That is one city—an important city, but one city.

Why will the Opposition never tell us whether they will put any more money into the health service, or even whether they will put as much money in? We just do not know. But those are the cold, hard facts and they are true. Of course, difficulties and problems can arise and they do, but there could not be a better sign of Government commitment to the health service than the fact that one city alone has had £600 million for the improvements that are needed.

I am rather tired of the unjustified criticisms made in the debate, which are constantly made, for reasons that can only be political. A favourite grumble is that too much is spent on management. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield pointed out that inefficient management in the health service leads to bad patient care. However, I want to put on record the fact that Birmingham spends less than 3 per cent. of its resources on management—less than 3 per cent. That is not a waste of money on large cars and all the rest of it. In addition, there is no trace of self-congratulation when Birmingham says:

"We know there is further room for further improvement and we will go for it."

I am sure that the Government feel the same.

Finally, I want to make two suggestions for the improvement of health care, particularly for the elderly. Too often in hospital, the elderly are robbed of their dignity. That occurs in two particular ways, which have been brought home to me, about which the previous Secretary of State tried to do something.

Many people hate being in a mixed ward. We understand that intensive care is a different matter because people are often unconscious. But men and women do not want to be mixed up in an ordinary hospital ward, and they should not be. It takes away their dignity and it is wrong.

There is also far too much taking away of elderly people's dignity by immediately referring to them as Betty, Jim or Bill. That may seem a small thing, but it is not. That surprises younger people, but I have known many elderly people—hon. Members know that there is validity in what I say—who feel a loss of dignity if they are addressed by their Christian name, often by nurses and doctors young enough to be their grandchildren, if they are not used to it. That is hurtful and there is no need for it. Surely to goodness we could recognise that every scrap of help that we can give our patients to preserve their dignity as well as their health should be made available.

With those two suggestions, I strongly support the amendment and I hope that it is carried.

7.18 pm

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley): Listening to some Conservative Members, one would think that the health service was safe in their hands, but the complaints that I have received and the troubles about which I have heard during a number of years under this Administration suggest otherwise. As a member of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, I know that there has been a large increase in the number of complaints about the health service.

I recognise that more operations are carried out now than ever before as a result of improved techniques. A person can go into hospital one day and come out the next, whereas a few years ago, he might have had to stay for a week. That, however, does not account for some of the horror stories that my hon. Friends have told. I have heard such stories myself, particularly in relation to a hospital in my area, the Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital.

Originally, a hospital was built in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson), at considerable cost. Another hospital existed on another site, but, although still operational, it was run down and in a decaying state. The new hospital became a trust shortly after being opened, despite suggestions that it should not take that step too quickly. Lo and behold! In that first year of its existence, it was in debt to the tune of £2.5 million. That is when the problems started.

Two mothers are currently taking legal action against the hospital because they lost their children, which was undoubtedly due to neglect on the part of the hospital and, in particular, the maternity ward. I do not know what progress their cases are making, as legal action is a lengthy process. One of those patients is a constituent of mine; the other is a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck. My constituent was left in the maternity ward. After her waters broke, she was left again. Although obviously in labour, she was left for hours with no one to tend her. Finally, someone came along and found that she was in labour—as she had been for some time. As it was her first child, she did not realise what was happening. The child was born, and taken from her; when she woke up, the doctors told her that it was very ill and that there was not much hope. The baby subsequently died.

The moral of that story is simple. As I said, the hospital had been advised not to become a trust yet, but it did so under pressure from the Government. It was £2.5 million in debt. It had cut the number of midwives on its staff to save a few bob: it had to save money in some way.

*[Mr. Ronnie Campbell]*

Because of the cut, the midwife who was looking after my constituent was having to do 32 other things at the same time. She was under enormous pressure.

The chief executive, chairman and finance officer of that hospital have all left. I thank God for that, because it was they who made a mess of things. I must admit that those who took over are doing a pretty good job at present: at least they have clawed back £1 million, and patients to whom I have spoken seem fairly satisfied. I have not received many complaints.

I see that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), who chairs the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, is present. The Committee often investigates the health service, and we repeatedly find that trust managers and chief executives are not taking seriously their responsibility to deal with complaints. When serious complaints are made, they ignore them. The health service ombudsman is said to have renewed his attack on national health service managers' handling of complaints, and the way in which they ignore the necessary procedures. I wonder how many complaints are received by the Parliamentary Commissioner, and whether any of the complaints cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) have been investigated.

My local practice in Blyth Valley has 12,000 patients. The practice, which is one of the biggest in the area, refused to adopt fundholding, although other local practices have. I have heard stories and tried to gather evidence, and I questioned the Parliamentary Commissioner some time ago when he was giving evidence to the Committee. I had an inkling that fundholders were beginning to receive preferential treatment, although that has always been denied. I asked the Commissioner whether, if someone told me that a patient in a fundholding practice had been seen before them, that would constitute a legitimate complaint. The Commissioner said that he would investigate the matter.

I am examining the position carefully, and I have written to the executive at the Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital to that effect. Of course, those involved may have smartened themselves up because they know that I have my eye on them. I ask other hon. Members who obtain any relevant evidence to write to the Commissioner, and to inform my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth and me. As I said, however, the hospital is getting back on its feet, and I hope that phase 3 will proceed successfully.

Only last year, Gallup conducted a survey among NHS workers. I doubt that the Minister has seen the results, but I shall provide him with a copy if he would like one. The survey found that nurses were leaving the NHS in droves, piling pressure on those who remained. I remind hon. Members that Gallup is entirely independent.

When workers were asked whether they would consider leaving the NHS if they could obtain another job, 62 per cent. said that they would—an increase of 48 per cent. since the last survey in 1993; 75 per cent. of ward sisters and charge nurses said that they would leave, and 74 per cent. of staff nurses, 70 per cent. of health visitors and 69 per cent. of midwives said the same. When asked for their reasons, they cited falling standards: 62 per cent. mentioned having to compromise in regard to standards of care, while 63 per cent. referred to acute staff shortages and 75 per cent. said that they felt undervalued. If that is the reaction from health service workers, no wonder my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle and others are receiving complaints. Sixty per cent. said that their reason was the treatment by management. Of course, management is hard on the heels of the poor unfortunate people working in the health service. The service is being cut and those people are under pressure, understaffed and under great stress, and they are doing more work now than before. Of course, they are sick of it, and managers are always on their back—that is what they are for.

Fifty-one per cent. of nurses said that their reason was level of pay. They were concerned about the Government's policy of breaking the national agreement and bringing in local pay. Many of them thought that that was just another way of devaluing their pay in different regions, so a nurse in one region would get less than a nurse in another region doing the same job. If nurses want to work in a rich region, they are "Okay, mate," but if they want to work in a poor one, they are not.

There was a good article on health in one of the national newspapers in the north-east. Newspapers are newspapers, but I have heard this before and it was not far from the mark. In the north, the number of nurses has fallen by 4,000 in five years. It was interesting to read that Scottish and Newcastle Breweries is luring nurses to pull pints. One of its executive members said:

"In our experience, trained nurses make superb pub managers".

That is obviously because nurses are tolerant and understanding—that is all people want in a pub manager. Breweries are luring nurses and nurses are going to work for them.

This year, the *Nursing Times and Nursing Mirror* carried 1,000 job advertisements for nurses—there were five pages of them. More than 100 nursing posts are vacant in the north-east of England. There must be something wrong, unless all nurses go to a bank—as an agency is called. Apparently, nurses who use them get more money. A hospital or a trust can sack a nurse tomorrow and she can join a bank, come back to that hospital and cost the hospital more. I cannot fathom that out for my life, but it happens.

There are short-term contracts for nurses now. When a nurse is employed, she is put on only a one or two-month contract, so she has no job security. In the health service, hospital trusts can float people out and float them in at a whim. It is a pity that we cannot do the same with some of the executive members and chairmen of the trusts, although I must admit that I did pretty well in achieving that in the Cheviot and Wansbeck NHS trust, getting rid of three of them in almost one go.

Staff shortages and a growing work load cause great stress. At least 87 per cent. of nurses interviewed in the Gallup poll said that they were overworked and under great stress. That says a lot. I hope that the Minister will take note of the fact that people are under stress. We must ask why that is happening. It might be because they see all these people on trolleys. They might be seeing the things that my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle has made complaints about, and they cannot do anything about it because they are overworked and overstressed.

In the past few years, complaints about the health service have increased by 55,000. There is a serious fault somewhere. If we do not get to grips with it, and if we do not give nurses a decent wage and make the job worth their while, problems will pile up.

How many times have we heard a patient say how wonderful it was being in hospital, seeing nurses at work and seeing their dedication to the people whom they are there to serve? I have heard that many times in hospital, yet nurses' wages have fallen and, as the survey showed, many want to leave the health service. That counteracts all that. If those things are happening, big accidents will occur and complaints will be made.

In relation to the case involving my constituent—the mother who lost her child—it was not the midwife's fault. I do not blame her. It was the fault of the system. I forgot to mention before that the trust brought the nurses back after making them redundant, when it found that it could not do without them—I do not know for how long. That is the system that we have now. That is what causes deterioration in the health service.

The health service is a wonderful thing. There is no doubt in my mind that the Government's idea is to have a two-tier health service, whereby some people pay and some people wait in the corridor. That is the service which the Government want. I say to the Minister that, if the survey means anything, it means that people who are working in the health service are as sick as we are at the state of it.

7.34 pm

**Mr. Ray Whitney** (Wycombe): What the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) says about the health service in the north-east bears no relation to my experience in the health service in Buckinghamshire and in many other parts of the country. For example, he referred to nurses' pay declining. That is contrary to the facts. If my memory serves me well, since 1979 nurses' pay has increased in real terms by 45 per cent. Nurses' pay dropped only once in real terms and that was during the time of the Labour Government.

The hon. Gentleman seems to have trouble with the service he gets from his trust. He does not like fundholding. He suggests that nurses are leaving the health service in droves. The South Buckinghamshire NHS trust gives excellent service to my constituents. GP fundholders give excellent service too.

The hon. Gentleman seems to get no proper answers when investigating complaints about his chief executives. Again, that is contrary to my experience and, I suspect, to that of most hon. Members.

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Whitney:** Very briefly. The hon. Gentleman had a pretty good innings.

**Mr. Campbell:** I did not say that I did not get proper answers; I said that the health service ombudsman said that he did not get proper notice from health executives.

**Mr. Whitney:** I can repeat only that that is certainly not my experience and I would be surprised if colleagues had a similar experience.

What the hon. Gentleman produced was on a par with that produced by his hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). As someone who has been interested in the health service for many years, I have grown accustomed, over the years, to hearing a litany of complaints and—as the cliché has it—to seeing this shroud waving. We have had that this afternoon, particularly from the hon. Member for Peckham, who always—she, too, has been involved in the health service for a number of years—comes to the House and reads out her essay, which is one long dismal dirge quoting individual cases.

Invariably, Conservative Members become deeply angry about that misrepresentation of the health service and about the total farrago of misinformation. It is based sometimes on ignorance and sometimes, one is moved to believe, on malice. The standard attacks are normal. Sadly, part of the reason for that is that the national health service has become a political football—a lamentable feature of British politics. I may not have agreed with many of the things that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, said, but I join him in this: if only the Labour party grew up and stopped believing in the myths that it has created about what did or did not happen in 1948, we could have a genuinely adult approach to tackling the challenges of health care.

Everyone knows what those challenges are. With the discovery of new treatments, the aging of the population and the wonderful opportunities that are available, added to the inevitable and inescapable pressures of funding, there are and will always be challenges, but we shall get nowhere as a nation while we have the pettifogging, narrow-minded and idiotic approach that was personified by the performance of the hon. Member for Peckham. It is a matter of great regret that her participation in the debate and her presence in the Chamber seemed to be of such brief duration. We have seen little of her. She would have at least learnt something if she had stayed.

**Mr. Alan Milburn** (Darlington): What about the Secretary of State for Health?

**Mr. Whitney:** My right hon. Friend was here a great deal longer than the hon. Member for Peckham. She is in much greater need of learning what is happening in the health service than is the Secretary of State.

The approach of the hon. Member for Peckham seemed to be based on one or two minimal propositions. The first was the usual litany of individual cases—we heard the same from every other Labour Member who has contributed—in which the NHS may or may not have failed. As up to 1 million patients a day are treated by the NHS in hospitals or GP surgeries, it is not surprising that there can be one or many more mistakes. Of course, that is not the story of what is really happening in the NHS. The lie is given to those statements by Labour Members—or would be if they thought, for only a moment—by the situation into which they plunged what they are so fond of calling their national health service.

In relation to other issues, such as what happened in 1979 and before, I am almost prepared to let bygones be bygones—but not about the NHS. The Labour Government's record was criminal, and Labour Members should never forget it or be allowed to forget it. They speak as if they are completely ignorant, which is the most

*[Mr. Whitney]*

charitable thing that I can say. They do not know how bad it was when they ran it. They seem to have no idea of the fact that we have increased spending on the NHS in real terms by 66 per cent.

The average spend has increased from £433 to £697 a head, which is a terrific achievement. Of course, any fool can spend money badly; the great challenge is to spend money sensibly. That is what is happening. It has not been universally successful, because that is not in the nature of life, or certainly not in an enterprise as big as the NHS. We heard no recognition of that fact from the hon. Member for Peckham.

We heard from the hon. Lady that fatuous attack on management. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said, Conservative Members, far more than Labour Members, would lead the charge on bureaucracy. When one is dealing with £41 billion of taxpayers' money and when there are more than 8 million hospital treatments every year, one needs that money and that enterprise to be managed. To spend 3 per cent. on management charges strikes me as entirely reasonable.

The one concrete point—if it can be so dignified—made by the hon. Member for Peckham was that, in relation to resources, she had allegedly discovered £1.5 billion that was spent on management that she would transfer to front-line care. How will she manage that? What will she do? If 3 per cent. for management charges is too much, is 1.5 or 2 per cent. the right figure? We never hear anything like that from the Labour party, and least of all from the hon. Lady.

There was some suggestion that the NHS was being privatised, which of course is complete nonsense. It is true that we do not share the hon. Lady's opposition to private medical care. We believe in choice. I shall not go over the issue of choice, which has been so familiar over the past few days in relation to the hon. Member for Peckham, but it should be recognised that the private medicine sector is not in competition with, but is an adjunct and addition to, the health resources of the nation. I hope that the Labour party is clear about that.

The Member for Peckham seemed to object strongly to any increase—she greatly exaggerated what it has been—in private medical provision. I must tell Opposition Members that the final years of the previous Labour Government were one of the bonanza times for the private medical industry. They were the great recruiting sergeants for private medicine because the health service was in such a mess. The hon. Member for Blyth Valley would have had something to complain about then. That was when people, including the unions, flocked to sign up by the cartload for private medicine. Union leaders were working hard, and why not, to provide private medical services to their members in case it was needed.

We heard that great litany, which completely disregarded the achievements of the NHS which include the fact that 3 million more people receive treatments every year in NHS hospitals, and we have thousands more doctors and tens of thousands more nurses. It was the same old litany that we have heard so often.

I believe that a great disservice is constantly done to the 1 million people, or whatever it may be, who are now working in the health service and giving a first-class, international-quality service. The litany has completely devalued and debased that service. I hope that the Labour leadership will look at itself and try to adopt a more positive attitude and constructive approach. Perhaps then we will be able to conjure up some meaning out of the term "stakeholding". That would be better than a diatribe, of which the hon. Lady gave us the most classic example.

The hon. Lady said, for example, that some treatments were no longer available. Does she not know that there are vastly more treatments available now than were dreamt of in 1979, not because of the Conservative Government but because of medical advances? The Government have generated an economy that is successful and strong enough to bear the necessary increase in resources that are devoted to the NHS to bring those new treatments to the service of our constituents. The hon. Lady's statement that treatments are no longer available is a grotesque misrepresentation of reality.

The hon. Member for Peckham, finally, tried to attack the private finance initiative, and again she seemed to be at odds with her leader and protector, the Leader of the Opposition. In the Budget debate he said:

> "The PFI is right in principle. We have supported it, and in many ways we have been advocating it."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1077.]

Not so the hon. Lady.

The PFI has great benefits to bring to the NHS. I am delighted to say that Wycombe general hospital and Amersham hospital in my constituency and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) are benefiting as some of the first examples of funding from the PFI. They are benefiting to the tune of £35 million. Because of the PFI, a wonderful hospital development is coming to us much more quickly than it would have done. There is a great story to be told. A great record has been achieved. It is one more great British achievement that the Opposition concentrate on denigrating. They should stop.

7.47 pm

**Ms Janet Anderson** (Rossendale and Darwen): The speech we have just heard from the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) accused my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) of peddling misinformation about the NHS. I was present for both the opening speeches in the debate and was impressed by my hon. Friend's detailed knowledge of the problems facing the national health service, unlike the Secretary of State for Health, who devoted a great deal of his speech to matters that had nothing to do with the NHS. In fact, he seem to be much more concerned to find out what we were going to do in government rather than to tell us what he had done in his post.

The hon. Member for Wycombe talked about the number of patients being treated in the health service and I think that he said something like, "It is hardly surprising that there is a mistake a day when millions of patient are being treated." That is not much consolation to my constituent, Mr. Craig Yates of Darwen, who is fighting for his life in hospital because he was denied a brain scan at Blackburn royal infirmary.

I put it to the hon. Member for Wycombe that, if one out of 10 planes that land at Heathrow airport were to crash, we would not say that that was all right because nine out of 10 had landed safely; we would find out why

one had crashed and do something about it. It is a great pity that Conservative Members do not apply the same test to the national health service.

I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this debate. I shall concentrate on the future of the hospital in my constituency. I say "the" hospital because we have only one hospital, the Rossendale general. It is situated high on a hill, partly still housed in what was once a workhouse, with beautiful views over the Rossendale valley. It is dear to all our hearts, and is part and parcel of our valley community.

At times, Rossendale general has seemed to be under threat of closure and some of the services that we wanted retained have now gone. We have no accident and emergency facilities and no maternity unit. If people need accident and emergency facilities or want to have a baby, they must go to Bury, Burnley, Rochdale or Blackburn. We fought hard against those changes at the time, but when we lost the fight we consoled ourselves with the thought that at least we still had our hospital. We were further encouraged when antenatal facilities were restored and the Burnley Health Care NHS trust decided to invest £5 million in the hospital over the past four years.

Our satisfaction at having retained the hospital, however, may be short-lived. The bombshell was dropped last week by Mr. David Chew, chief executive of Burnley Health Care NHS trust. A week ago today, he met staff at the hospital and told them that 31 beds would be axed, a ward would be mothballed and 60 to 70 staff, mainly nurses, would go. He said:

"I hope that we can find jobs for everyone and that no staff will go".

The local Unison representative, Susan Holmes, said:

"We are concerned about job losses. In spite of management assurances, there are a number of people on temporary contracts who are very worried about their position. Mr. Chew tried to assure us that this was the way forward".

It may be the way forward for the trust, but it is not the way forward for the people of Rossendale, whom I am proud to represent in the House. Nor is it the way forward for the 60 to 70 staff who stand to lose their jobs, or for those patients who, according to nursing staff, have been sent packing because of insufficient beds.

The proposals also mean that elderly women will be forced to endure the indignity of mixed wards, to which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) eloquently referred. She is right. Many patients, especially the elderly, do not want to be forced into mixed wards and I am deeply saddened that that will happen to my constituents to save money.

Anne Parkinson of the Royal College of Nursing said of those proposals:

"The beds we have been operating with have been full and we have been turning patients away recently. Goodness knows where they have gone. This seems a drastic step at a time when there is a national shortage of beds.

I am sure the trust will handle redeployment sensitively but they cannot promise there will not be any job losses. Staff are worried about losing their jobs. Some who have not got any transport are also worried about where they will be redeployed. Fewer beds will also force more and more people to travel further afield for treatment. There has been a gradual decline in in-patient facilities here during the past 10 years and there is a real feeling among staff that the hospital is being run down."

Patients are being turned away through lack of beds, yet the trust is axing 31 beds. Hospital staff whom I met last weekend told me that someone turned up at the hospital last week claiming that he had bought 18 beds from the hospital and was there to collect them.

If the proposals are not the way forward for my constituents, hospital staff and patients, why should it be the way forward for the trust? Mr. Chew made it plain last week that the decision was to do with cash, not patient care, and claimed that it would save the trust £200,000 a year. I wonder why the trust seeks to save that sum of money. Just over a year ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who was present earlier in this debate, secured an Adjournment debate on the state of chaos in the Burnley Health Care NHS trust. He read out a headline from the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*:

"Scapegoat: 'Health chairman asked me to resign to save his own neck'.

The chairman and chief executive of the troubled Burnley Health Care Trust each called for the other's resignation today in an astonishing bust-up."

We learned from the Minister's winding-up speech in that debate that, because the chief executive had fallen out with the chairman and wanted rid of her, the pay-off was no less than £245,000, which is the sum that the trust seeks to save today.

A moving article appeared in my excellent local newspaper, the *Rossendale Free Press*, which many of my constituents read. It sums up the position by saying:

"Desperately sick and dying people are shunted all over the country in search of hospital beds and Burnley Health Care NHS Trust's reaction is to close 31 beds at Rossendale General Hospital. How can it possibly make sense?

They are not the right sort of beds, says Burnley Health Care Trust. There's no emergency intensive and coronary care back-up at Rossendale, which is to be turned into 'an important out-reach post for minor surgery', catering for short-stay and day cases.

You'll get your ingrowing toenails, your hernia or your piles fixed at Rossendale and be home again in a jiffy. But who wants to be home again in a jiffy, walking wounded and thrown on the mercy of that well-known euphemism, Care in the Community? Try telling Rossendale's old people, stripped of their home-helps by financial cuts, what a marvellous service that is.

A mixed-sex ward will replace the existing male and female general medical wards despite public inhibitions and sensibilities. When a woman is stripped of her dignity, in pain, and sitting behind a curtain on a bedpan, the last thing she wants is a bloke in the next bed. And vice versa.

Letters heaping praise on Rossendale General and its superb nurses and doctors appear regularly on the Free Press Viewpoint page.

The maternity unit was closed in the face of massive opposition. Ante-natal clinics were clawed back after public outcry. Trust chiefs are at pains to stress, yet again, the hospital is not in any danger of closing; . . . Yet they can hardly be surprised that Rossendale folk"—

and their Member of Parliament—

"are unable to resist the doubts and now will be even more perplexed, agitated, defensive, protective.

Must we now stand by while more excellent services are amputated like limbs, until the trunk is no longer a hospital, but becomes an 'out-reach post'?"

It is vital for the patients and staff of Rossendale general and the whole community of Rossendale that there are no further cuts. I hope that when the Minister responds to this debate he will tell us how the Burnley Health Care NHS trust's latest proposals will improve health care for my constituents.

7.58 pm

**Mr. Jerry Hayes** (Harlow): I begin by declaring an interest. I am an adviser to the Western Provident Association, which, as the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) should know, is a non-profit-making organisation.

**Mr. McLeish** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Hayes:** I am glad to have the hon. Gentleman's nod of approval.

When I first saw the Leader of the Opposition sitting next to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), I thought, "There is decency in the man after all. He is there to protect the hon. Member for Peckham. God bless him, what a brave man he is." Then I realised that I had got it wrong because she was there to protect him, and to act as his human shield. They are the Siamese twins of British politics, but I suspect that, even now, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) is working on a surgical separation. The hon. Member for Peckham should be very careful.

I was having a drink the other day with a member of the shadow Cabinet, who said, "We have a saying in the Labour party—beware of left-wing toffs." Looking at the Opposition motion today, one sees that he was right. It could have been cobbled together by guests at a Pinter soirée discussing their view of the health service while being served Nicaraguan coffee by Filipino maids.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central must, I am afraid, pick up the wreckage from the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham later tonight, and we expect some answers from him. The hon. Lady's speech was not so much a policy statement as a cry for help. The speech from the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), however, was remarkably honest—although he did go off the rails towards the end. The hon. Gentleman admitted that we now have the lowest number of people waiting for treatment in the history of the health service. He also admitted that he had no evidence that there is a two-tier system, although he is investigating the matter. If the hon. Gentleman finds some evidence, I hope that he will report it to the House. I suspect, however, that he will find no such evidence.

I spent a little of this morning reading through all of the speeches that the hon. Member for Peckham has made on health. The hon. Member for Fife, Central saw me do it. It was not a happy task. One interesting thing that the hon. Lady did say was that in vitro fertilisation was a lottery and that, "It depends on where you live." Oh dear—that has a familiar ring.

One of the points that cropped up over and over again in the hon. Lady's speeches since 1987—I have listened to many of them in the House—was that the health service reforms that had been put into operation would have to be abolished. She has also said that GP fundholding was a wickedness that led to a two-tier system, and that, too, would have to go. NHS trust hospitals and the internal market would also have to go. It is all very different now, however.

We just do not know precisely what Labour's policy on health is, and there is tremendous confusion. About 41 per cent. of the population are now covered by GP fundholding, and more than 10,000 GPs have voted with their feet because they know that the scheme provides good service. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Fife, Central is making a gesture with his fingers—a pleasant one, as one would expect from him—to indicate money. He is right. The fundholders are getting more money to spend on patient care, and that is quite apart from the money coming from the Government. I can give the hon. Gentleman an example—the £64 million made from efficiency savings has gone directly to the patient to provide services that have never been seen before.

**Mr. McLeish:** Would the hon. Gentleman like to extol the virtues of the 59 per cent. of fundholders throughout England that are commissioning groups?

**Mr. Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman refers to commissioning groups, but I understand that one of Labour's policies is that the internal market, or the split between purchaser and provider that has been denounced over the years at the Dispatch Box from which the hon. Gentleman will shortly address the House, will continue. Does the hon. Gentleman deny that? Of course not, because he knows that it works.

GP fundholders have been a great success, offering more services than ever before. There are now some 10,000 of them, covering 41 per cent. of the population, and it is expected that there will be an additional 660 by next year. If there is—heaven forbid—a Labour Government, the majority of people in the country will be covered by GP fundholders that work. According to GP fundholders in my constituency and elsewhere, it would be a grave mistake if they were not to continue.

That is why the fudges are beginning. I mentioned in an earlier intervention on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)—Labour's previous health spokesman—extolled some of the virtues of GP fundholding in October 1995, but had added that she hoped that they would be abolished in the first year of a Labour Government. I assumed that that would again be a Labour manifesto commitment as it was in 1992, but oh no. We now hear something totally different from the hon. Member for Peckham. The policy is now shrouded in secrecy, and I hope that the hon. Member for Fife, Central—as this is an Opposition Supply day—will tell us what that policy is.

What is a "comprehensive health care agreement", and how would it differ from the contract that we have at the moment? The hon. Gentleman knows that the contract system works because it gives incentives. Clive Wilkinson, chairman of the Wolverhampton NHS trust, said on BBC television:

> "You do have to have in the final analysis, don't you, the ability to take the contract away. Otherwise, if you don't have that, then all the incentive to the provider to deliver what they are asked to deliver disappears. We know from past experience that just cajoling public servants to do better is not effective".

I cannot see how the hon. Gentleman can possibly disagree with that.

There is total confusion among Opposition Members about the private finance initiative. On the day when the virtues of the PFI were extolled by the Opposition Treasury team—I can give the hon. Gentleman the quotations, although I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister of State will do so when he winds up—the hon. Member for Peckham

was calling it "creeping privatisation". Yet the PFI was extolled by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who said it was a Labour party invention. Again, there is confusion and division in the Labour ranks.

Hon. Members should cast their minds back to before the reforms, to the time when no one knew the price of anything at all. If one does not know the price of a treatment, a medicine or a bandage, how on earth can one plan for the future? We must spend the money wisely. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) reminded the House that the Government were castigated when we introduced sensible management programmes.

I shall deal now with the Labour accusation of bureaucracy. The hon. Member for Fife, Central nods his head, and I suspect that he will later speak against bureaucracy with the eloquence of Satan denouncing sin. What does Labour want to do? It wants another tier of regional health authorities, which some of us have been trying to get rid of for years. That would cost £100 million, money that would be removed from patient care. The hon. Gentleman would have to get that £100 million from the Treasury if Labour were in government. The hon. Gentleman also wants a minimum wage—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps he does not want a minimum wage.

**Mr. McLeish:** I do want it.

**Mr. Hayes:** According to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the minimum wage would cost the health service £500 million, and that money will all be taken away from patient care. The Opposition's policies are all about centralisation, whereas the Government's policies on health are very simple—we have decentralised, and brought better patient care to ordinary people. Since the introduction of the "wicked" reforms, 1 million more people have been treated, and the House will have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) give the figures. Some £41 billion is being spent—66 per cent. above the rate of inflation. We have the lowest waiting lists ever, and we have the citizens charter. Did one hear anything about a citizens charter under the previous Labour Government? It was derided by the Opposition as a rather sick joke—*[Interruption.]*—as a citizens anthem, I am grateful for the correction.

**Mr. Edward O'Hara** (Knowsley, South): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the citizens charter concept was invented by Labour local authorities long before the Prime Minister ever dreamt it up?

**Mr. Hayes:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I wish that he had told that to his hon. Friends on the Front Bench at the time, who were so vehemently opposed to the concept. That is yet another division in policy in the Labour party.

Under the patients charter, we set down clear times for operations and for when ambulances should arrive at the scene, and we introduced checks and further checks.

**Mr. O'Hara:** The Labour party criticised not the concept of the citizens charter, which it applauds and preceded the Government in thinking about, but the lack of resources to implement the set targets, which were utterly unrealistic.

**Mr. Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman has highlighted the exact problem I was about to consider. In the past, all the speeches from the Opposition, including those from the hon. Member for Peckham, which I read over again this morning, concentrated on the underfunding of the health service over the years. They claimed that hospitals had been starved, and promised £1 billion for them in their manifesto at the last election. Of course, the Treasury gave us an extra £1.3 billion just for 1996-97. Expenditure has greatly exceeded that manifesto pledge within just the first year of the present Parliament.

How much money will the hon. Member for Fife, Central pledge for the NHS? How much extra money will it take to get people off the trolleys? The Opposition have not pledged to the British people one single extra penny for the NHS. How do they intend to improve the health service, apart from the added bureaucracy of which we have heard, if they do not intend to spend any more money? Will they claim to be better managers of the NHS than the Conservative Government and NHS experts?

Let us destroy another little myth. We hear that the health service is overmanaged, but for every 26 front-line staff, there is one manager. Opposition Members should compare that with the relevant figures in France, Germany, the United States and the rest of Europe. They should check those figures and note that those managers account for just 4 per cent. of the NHS wages bill. We are very lucky to have such a management in the health service. Of course the Secretary of State is absolutely right to ensure that there is no waste and inefficiency.

**Ms Janet Anderson:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in North East Thames region, which covers his constituency, in the past five years, the number of managers has increased by no less than 260 per cent.? Does he think that that represents an efficient use of resources?

**Mr. Hayes:** If the hon. Lady looked at the figures, she would understand why that has happened. There has been an increase in managers all over the country because we happen to believe in a good role for women in management.

**Mr. McLeish:** Oh, come on!

**Mr. Hayes:** I thought that Labour was a politically correct party. Because we recognise the value of women and the value of nurses, we have re-registered many of them as business managers.

**Ms Anderson:** Is the hon. Gentleman talking about nurses or about managers? Is he saying that all the extra managers are women?

**Mr. Hayes:** There are nurses of both sexes. The hon. Lady can check the accepted facts in the Library, which show that many nurses have transferred to management posts. That is all that has happened. I note that the Minister of State, Scottish Office is nodding in agreement. The figures can be sorted out another time, but I promise the hon. Lady that what I say happens to be the truth.

If anyone wants to see decent health care, he should come to my constituency. I spent a long time fighting with respective Ministers because Harlow was genuinely underfunded under the RAWP—resource allocation working party—system. It was desperately unfair to my

*[Mr. Hayes]*

constituency because so much of our money was sucked into London and elsewhere. We had some of the longest waiting times in the country and the three accident and emergency departments did not operate terribly efficiently. The service was a catastrophe because we were constantly in debt.

I am not saying that health care in Harlow is perfect—it never will be anywhere because people's expectations are, rightly, so high. Errors will always be made. It is no use hon. Members shroud waving. *[Interruption.]* It is true. We all have dreadful cases that we all want to see investigated; they have arisen under every Government, and will continue to do so as long as the health service is run by human beings, not by robots. Mistakes are made, and all that we can do is institute various checks such as medical audits and clinical directorates to try to ensure that the minimum amount of errors are made in the future.

It is not particularly helpful to read out constituency cases in the House. The best thing to do is to deal with one's NHS trust chairman or chief executive. If one does not get satisfaction then, there is always the ombudsman and, if that fails, that is when one goes to see a Minister.

**Mr. McLeish:** What happens if people do not get satisfaction from anyone?

**Mr. Hayes:** Hon. Members who have constituency cases should deal with local managers first. If Members go to a Minister, all that happens is that the Minister asks for a report from the region, which then asks for that report from the local hospital. It is much quicker to go direct to the manager. Every time I have had a problem, I have always had a full and frank inquiry, and I have always been able to get the answer for my constituent.

I hope that the hon. Member for Fife, Central will come to Harlow in the run-up to the next general election, whenever that might be. He will see that in the last few years we have got a new computerised tomography—CT—scanner and a new MRI scanner. A new day surgery centre has just opened, along with a brand new £10 million accident and emergency centre. All that is good news for my constituents, but it is indicative of what is happening all over the country.

**Mr. McLeish:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his invitation and I will certainly take it up if I am successful and become a Minister, but the problem is whether the hon. Gentleman will still be in Harlow to see me.

**Mr. Hayes:** I look forward to welcoming the hon. Gentleman, when I hope he will be number two in the shadow health team as opposed to number three.

Health care has improved not just in Harlow but throughout the country. Every week, a multi-million pound capital project is announced for the health service. Compare that with the record of the Labour Government, who cut capital expenditure by one third. The hon. Member for Fife, Central should consider that.

8.16 pm

**Mr. George Mudie** (Leeds, East): The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) spoke about money. I want to talk about the necessity of doubling the number of acute beds for youngsters in Leeds. Those beds are desperately needed, and they would cost £2 million to provide. They could mean the difference between life or death to youngsters in Leeds and West Yorkshire, but the hospitals cannot use those beds because they are in debt. They cannot find the necessary £2 million because of a £12 million debt between the two trusts. To the disgust of other doctors, fundholders in Leeds, at the end of the financial year, are sitting on £2.5 million. That surplus is lying in a bank, doing nothing but earning interest for those fundholders while seriously ill children are being bussed hundreds of miles by ambulance from Leeds to Newcastle for operations. That £2.5 million is sitting in the bank for dogmatic purposes and it is not being used in my city.

Let us talk about money for the health service. This seems to be a debate in which we are accused of waving shrouds, but Conservative Members wave capital receipts. We know where those receipts have come from as we go through Leeds and see hospital after hospital closed, asset stripped and beds closed.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton): That is not true.

**Mr. Mudie:** Not true! Let me tell the hon. and learned Gentleman about Killingbeck hospital and the actions of the Government and the regional health authority. Two years ago, it was decided that that much-loved hospital in my patch should be closed down. It was decided to transfer its facilities to the city centre at the multi-storey Leeds general infirmary. Once opposition from the public became apparent, the community health council decided to shift just the heart unit to LGI and to continue using Killingbeck for other NHS purposes. The people of Leeds still believe that Killingbeck is open. However, behind the scenes, the region—presumably with the Minister's knowledge, before the hospital has even shut and despite the pledge that it will continue to be used for national health service purposes—has sought planning permission for houses and industrial development for the whole 46 acres.

When the Government talk about fresh money and wave capital receipts at Labour Members, we know how they were got—by asset stripping other resources in the city. There is the evidence. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) is not growling at me now because those are the facts from my own back yard.

This is an intriguing and disappointing debate. It is intriguing because hon. Members seem to come from two different worlds. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) made that point earlier when she said that the shadow Health Secretary was saying one thing and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) was saying the opposite. Someone is not telling the truth.

Our motion talks of "overstretched staff", "inadequate patient care" and the

"relentless cuts in NHS beds".

It goes on to condemn

"the increased amount of money spent on internal market bureaucracy".

In their amendment, the Government congratulate themselves on the "NHS continuing to flourish".

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** It is.

**Mr. Mudie:** Before the hon. Lady gets over-excited, let me say that I do not for a minute think that Members

such as the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) do not see the health service in their patch. However, I wish that Conservative Members would not accuse us of shroud waving when we quietly, and in debates such as this, legitimately, explain the details.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Mudie:** I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will have the patience to hear my speech out. He will have the opportunity to respond.

Which flourishing health service are the Government talking about? It is intriguing that we seem to have two health services, but it is also disappointing. I was always disappointed when legitimate complaints about the health service were made and the previous Secretary of State used to go into her trance and recite all the statistics of buildings built, staff here and staff there, but pay no attention to the complaints. That that disappointment continues is clear both from the motion and from the performance of the Secretary of State today, when he took five minutes to mention the health service.

The Secretary of State is one of the most intelligent and caring Ministers in the Government, but if he cannot support the motion, thinks that he lives in a Britain with a flourishing health service, has little time for my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) describing the ordinary human cases that happen day in, day out and accuses Opposition Members of shroud waving, it is a disappointing day.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Mudie:** I shall give way in a moment. We are not all villains; when I look across the Table of the House, especially at those Conservative Members who are present, I have to say that they are not all villains.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Mudie:** I shall give way when I finish my peroration. Conservative Members are not villains, but I wish that, for one minute, when we are discussing a sensitive and important matter—it is no exaggeration to say that it is a matter of life and death—we would listen to one another. I concede that there have been improvements in the health service under the Government, but I wish that some Ministers would listen to the case for some of the improvements that are needed to make it an even better health service.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Nobody would suggest that Labour Members are villains. We merely suggest that some hospitals are more efficient than others. The hon. Gentleman may be right that there are two health services: those that are exceptionally well run and those that are not. In Lancashire as a whole, the expectation of life is a year below the national average. In my city, the expectation of life is a year above the national average. We are steeped in hospital care. We have the finest hospital in the country. It is funded in the same way as everybody else, but we run it extremely well. The nurses' mothers or fathers were probably nurses as well, male or female. Those families have been in the hospital service for the past 100 years and they care for it. Our services are exceptionally good and they make the best use of every penny that is given to them.

**Mr. Mudie:** I accept that. I live in a city with good hospitals, especially the two that I am going to discuss. I wish that the hon. Lady would listen to their problems. I do not say this of the hon. Lady, but the Secretary of State has been inclined to steamroller them. The previous Secretary of State made a habit of steamrollering genuine problems.

The Secretary of State pointed out that there was growing concern during the winter about intensive care beds. The problem is that he suggested that it was a seasonal difficulty and gave me the impression—in which I hope that I am mistaken—that the Government think that they are well on top of it.

I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) here. As a colleague from my city, he will be able to confirm everything that I say. I am sure that he has come to the Chamber just to do that. This is an important matter. The Secretary of State accepted that, but blithely seems to suggest that the problem is under control. If he thinks that, I hope to give him some evidence to suggest that, at least in the city of Leeds, all is not well.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope):** I came hotfoot to the Chamber. I apologise for not having been here earlier, but I have been watching the hon. Gentleman on my television screen and heard some of what he has been saying about the wonderful health service in Leeds, a city which I am as proud to represent as he is. He has not been very fair to the people who work in the health service in Leeds or to the Government, who as he knows, are responsible for the wonderful new Leeds general infirmary which, even as we speak, is being built. Perhaps he would like to join me in going to see the 14 operating theatres being developed. The very latest technology in the world is being installed for the benefit of the people whom he and I represent.

**Mr. Mudie:** Before the hon. Gentleman came in, I was saying, as did the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), that we had an excellent set of hospitals. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman had shifted channels. I had dealt with how the Leeds general infirmary was funded. If he wants to help me prevent what I described from happening, I hope that he will stay. The wonderful new LGI block is being funded by the sale of 46 acres of land in my constituency on which, at present, is a much-loved hospital.

The people of Leeds are under the impression that they have a pledge from the Government that that site will remain a hospital. Unknown to them, the Government and their agents have applied for planning permission before the hospital has even closed. There is no large LGI block funded by a benevolent Government; it is paid for by the rape and asset stripping of a much-loved east Leeds hospital.

If the Secretary of State, as the rational and intelligent man he is, thinks that the occupancy crisis is over, I hope that he will put in an order for the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, which carried the following headlines:

"A disgrace: How many must more die, Mr. Dorrell?"

*[Mr. Mudie]*

and

"Tragic patient's eight hours on a trolley".

In January, those who were not skiing abroad but working with their constituents will have noted the tragic death of a Bradford pensioner, a retired policeman who worked hard in his retirement for the British Heart Foundation. He was taken to, and turned away from, 12 Yorkshire hospitals. I can see some grins of amusement—I find the subject not amusing, but tragic. The man was flown 70 miles to a hospital in Scarborough where, sadly, he died shortly after arriving at the hospital. Incidents such as that prompt the Conservative newspaper in Leeds to run headlines such as the ones I have quoted for the second year running.

A week later, while some people were still skiing—

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Like the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane).

**Mr. Mudie:** The hon. Lady does get over-excited—she should be careful, as there is a shortage of emergency beds.

A week later, a pensioner—a 70-year-old stroke victim—spent six and a half hours on a trolley and died shortly after being found a bed in one of the Leeds hospitals. The trust is arguing that the pensioner waited on the trolley not for six and a half hours, but for five hours. The same week, another pensioner of 71 was one of 13 patients—one of whom was a lady of 96—who were left on trolleys for eight hours. That pensioner arrived at 1.30 pm and was found a bed at 10 pm.

The newspaper ran a series of articles on those incidents. In December, a 16-year-old lad suffering from a bacterial infection was taken to St. James's hospital and turned away. He was taken to hospital after hospital and died a week after. The same month, a young lad from Stockport was driven 45 miles to Leeds. I could describe case after case involving such incidents. The Secretary of State would say that I am talking about December and January, and describing seasonal matters. Every year, the LGI turns away a minimum of 118 severely ill patients who are looking for acute beds—there is nothing seasonal about that.

St. James's hospital, the biggest teaching hospital in Europe, turns away up to six people every day. Those people are severely ill and they are brought to the hospital to be given acute beds. When no intensive care beds can be found, those severely ill people who need urgent operations have to go from hospital to hospital.

I am not making a joke of that, but I want to make the point in the context of my speech. I am not trying to make political points, but simply saying that if ours is a flourishing health service, it should flourish a bit better. To the individuals or families involved, it is no joke, but a matter of life and death. In several cases, those involved have, tragically, died.

The LGI has five children's intensive care beds, and needs six. The extra bed is currently being run by doctors who work overtime simply to try to meet the demand. St. James's hospital has three such beds and needs six, which would cost £2 million. There is no likelihood of those severely ill children being found those beds.

When I said that I hoped that hon. Members would regard my speech as constructive criticism, there were groans and mutterings that it was a politician talking. Dr. Bodenham works at the LGI in Leeds. He says that the problems have occurred for years—they are not seasonal, as the Minister suggested. He states:

"We have been complaining about the lack of resources for years, even before I started here four years ago.

Basically, nothing happens. They set up working parties then nothing happens. What the public expects is going up and up but resources are not there."

A spokesperson for the Leeds general infirmary trust said:

"There is a national problem of rising admissions to hospitals, which has caused the problem here.

There are more people coming into accident and emergency . . . It is simply that there are more patients than there are beds."

The two doctors who run the intensive care units in both the hospitals undertook a report. It stated:

"Intensive care facilities in Leeds and in Yorkshire as a whole are inadequate.

There are insufficient high dependency facilities in Leeds."

Dr. Harris of Bradford said:

"But the big issue is not what we did at my surgery but the crisis with intensive care bed availability."

I pay tribute to the local paper, the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, which has carried out a good campaign. If the Minister wants to smile, I hope that he will explain why he does so to the *Yorkshire Evening Post*. That newspaper has simply highlighted the fact that people are dying in our city because we do not have enough intensive care beds.

The *Yorkshire Evening Post* received a promise from the present Secretary of State that he would do something about the problem. He set up a review. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* and the people of Leeds are unconvinced by his promise and, in order to be fair to the present Secretary of State, I shall explain why. A year ago, the previous Secretary of State was confronted by a similar campaign after the death of a two-year-old child and an elderly pensioner. The previous Secretary of State said that she would take action; we believe that she did so, but no one can find out what action she took. This month, when she was in the city in her new ministerial capacity, the evening paper asked her where her report was. She refused to comment.

It was not a matter of someone making thoughtless or destructive criticisms; we have raised a genuine problem. The previous Secretary of State promised action, but that has not materialised and people have since died. We have now been given a similar promise by the present Secretary of State and I look for action and sympathy. Ministers must take off their rose-coloured spectacles and realise that, although they may have made achievements in the health service of which they are proud, there is still a long way to go.

8.37 pm

**Mr. Richard Tracey** (Surbiton): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate at last. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may have noticed an anomaly in our proceedings: according to the Order Paper, today is supposed to be an Opposition day initiated by the Labour party, but for most of the past few hours the Opposition

Benches have been almost empty and we have practically been debating with ourselves. I think that Opposition Members may have been drafted in from the Tea Room and the Labour Whips Office to address the House at some length in order to continue the debate from the Opposition Benches.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and one or two other Opposition Members did not seem to be speaking of the health service that I know, and nor does the Opposition motion. The sort of language used by the hon. Member for Peckham, which was criticised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), is exactly the sort of language that puts fear in the hearts of those who hear it. That is particularly true of the elderly people in this country who, on hearing soundbites on the radio and reading accounts in newspapers, seriously fear that the health service is falling apart. In fact, it most definitely is not.

We have a health service which, as various of my hon. Friends have said, is having £41 billion a year spent on it, is treating 3 million more people per year than it was in 1979—1 million more people per year than it was in 1991, when the reforms came in—and which accounts for 3,500 more people per day. That is not a health service which is in decline or falling apart limb from limb, as the hon. Member for Peckham claimed. It is a health service that is growing, and coping with the demands being placed on it. Those demands are considerably greater because there are more elderly people than there used to be. More intricate treatments are also being conducted, and people therefore expect far more to be done for them.

The Labour party criticises what apparently the Conservative Government are doing. Labour Members obviously did not read what one of their colleagues, the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley), wrote in *The Times* last week. He said:

"Labour's health policy will not look credible at the general election if we do not commit ourselves to matching the rate of growth delivered by the Conservatives in recent years".

We need cite no more evidence to Labour Members than that. Those are the words of one of their colleagues, who recognises what the Government have been doing since 1979 and will continue to do, as may be appreciated by the pledges made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Budget.

Rather than telling a grim tale, such as those that we heard from one or two Labour Members, I wish to pay a great tribute to my local hospital—Kingston hospital—which delivers fine service to my constituents and to the people of Kingston. It does so despite the fact that we have many elderly people and some neighbouring councils are not taking elderly people out of hospital quickly enough back into care in the community. We have now put in place a discharge liaison nurse to facilitate the smoother running of those procedures.

Kingston hospital faced what was described by the chairman of the health trust and by the general manager as "an emergency situation"—a serious incident—during the new year period. Many hon. Members will recall that on 31 December 1995 there were extreme weather conditions, with icy rain falling on the pavements. As a result, there were many more emergency admissions to Kingston hospital than might remotely have been expected, and many more than had been catered for.

During the next three days, staff who in the normal way should have been having their bank holidays were drafted in. Operations took place, with double trauma operating lists in the operating theatres. The day surgery unit, which should have been off duty during the bank holiday, was called in and worked constantly. It was reported to me that staff worked solidly between 4 pm on Saturday 30 December 1995 and 5 pm on Monday 1 January 1996. Thirty-five full orthopaedic operations were completed in the main theatres, when usually only five such procedures would have been expected during that period.

I therefore wish to place on the record, here in the House of Commons, a tribute to the staff of Kingston hospital. The chairman of the health trust, Mr. Rowan Cole, wrote to me three days ago:

"The situation we faced over the New Year holiday was very unusual indeed. Our staff, in spite of great difficulties, coped with the situation magnificently, as indeed we would have to do in major incident conditions if there was a local disaster producing similar numbers of casualties."

That is the type of health service that we have gradually begun to expect, and the type of health service to which our Government are committed.

I believe that we are doing a good job. We are producing the resources. Labour Members have read out in the House details of individual cases. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) said, they should take up such cases with their national health trusts instead of describing the details in the House to produce soundbites. By contrast, Conservative Members come to the Chamber to praise the work of the national health service in our localities, and rightly so.

8.45 pm

**Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): I shall not recite a litany of individual cases. In the past year, I have spent many weeks and months writing letters on behalf of many of my constituents, who have been on trolleys for hours or who have been on waiting lists or whose appointments have been cancelled and so on. The Minister knows that.

Last year, I also called for an inquiry into my local hospital following the press reports and the problems that we had but, in typical fashion, the then Secretary of State passed the buck to the North Thames region, which passed the buck to the health authority, which passed the buck back to the trust. That is typical of the way in which the health service is run today.

I shall draw attention to the wider problems of the north-east London area. The Secretary of State, in his opening remarks, referred to "unexpected problems" in admissions to accident and emergency departments in the last two months.

We are in January 1996. Since the end of September 1995, all local hospitals in north-east London have experienced extreme pressure and, to quote the words of a letter to me by the chief executive of the Redbridge Healthcare trust,

"throughout October and November, trolley waits, overnight in A and E have been commonplace at King George Hospital".

As I understand it, almost every night since October 1995, patients have been waiting overnight on trolleys at my local hospital.

King George hospital is not alone. The local newspapers have referred to incidents there, but there have been others in all the other hospitals in our region. On 19 October 1995, the *Ilford Recorder* reported:

*[Mr. Mike Gapes]*

"Hospital crisis sparks bed plea.

Ambulances were asked to avoid taking patients to King George Hospital again on Sunday because there were not enough Accident and Emergency beds.

The call went out from the hospital in Goodmayes to the London Ambulance Service just after 9am asking crews to avoid King George if possible. Blue light cases, ie emergencies, were still allowed.

The situation continued for about six hours."

In November 1995, the local medical committee had a discussion about what had happened at the other hospital in the Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority—Whipps Cross hospital, which is a very large hospital under the Forest Healthcare trust. As the *Redbridge Guardian and West Essex Gazette* of 16 November 1995 reported:

"We're full up, says hospital.

Even some 999 patients are refused admission.

Patients were turned away from Whipps Cross Hospital this week when management admitted hospital resources were stretched to their limits.

The hospital was closed to admissions and victims of major accidents on Tuesday 'to ensure patient safety'"—

*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may think that that is funny, but I am sure that their constituents would not think so if they suffered the same problems.

When we discussed the situation with the local medical committee the following week, it reported that two extra wards had been opened at the hospital to try to cope with the problem. However, there were not enough staff to maintain them and the decision was taken to close the hospital on the ground that nursing practices had become unsafe. No other local hospitals could assist. King George hospital still had 17 patients on trolleys from the previous night. Three ambulances had waited at the door of the hospital, but there were no trolleys available.

The same situation was narrowly avoided in the week of 24 November. Discussions took place at that time between the chief executives of the trusts in Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Newham and Hackney in an attempt to adopt a co-ordinated approach to the problem. That was the situation in October and November last year.

In December, the *Newham Recorder* carried a front-page story on 13 December under the headline, "Hospital Crisis". The article stated:

"Resources at Newham General Hospital are being stretched to the limit according to the Director of Nursing, who admitted waiting times have tipped 14 hours".

In a story entitled "Prescription for Disaster", the *Ilford Recorder* of 4 January stated:

"Health bosses in Redbridge have admitted the overnight closure of Oldchurch Hospital's"—

in Romford—

"accident and emergency department to ambulance cases created chaos in casualty at King George".

The newspaper also carries the story of a 65-year-old woman who waited 12 hours for a bed at the hospital after suffering a stroke and the case of a two-year-old toddler who had fallen and hit his head and did not receive treatment for 12 hours. They are examples of real suffering experienced by real people, many of whom are my constituents, but Ministers and Conservative Back Benchers do not care because they do not use the national health service.

We face a very serious problem in the North Thames region. I asked for an inquiry to be conducted last May, but the situation is now far worse. It is not the fault of the staff—the nurses, doctors and the hard-pressed administrators. It is the fault of the system that they have to try to administer and work with in order to treat patients.

I visited King George hospital's accident and emergency department at 10.30 on a Friday evening at the end of October. I was at the hospital for about six hours, during which I saw unbelievable pressure placed on the patients. People with broken limbs, head wounds and other conditions waited four or five hours to see doctors. There was massive overcrowding and the hospital had no real facilities to cope with families, especially children. That occurs day after day and night after night in the hospitals of north-east London. Families and staff are suffering along with the patients and, regrettably, the situation is worsening.

Conservative Members have wheeled out all kinds of platitudes and statistics, but let us consider what has happened so far in 1996. The hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) referred to the new year period. On Monday 1 January, which was a bank holiday, King George hospital was very busy and on 2 January I was told that it was swamped. More than 20 patients were waiting on trolleys at that hospital and 45 patients were waiting on trolleys at Whipps Cross hospital on 2 January. On the same day, the London ambulance service reported that every hospital in London was full. Nine hospitals were closed and all hospitals were turning away ambulances. Ambulances searched as far as North Middlesex hospital in one direction and Basildon in the other in a desperate attempt to find beds so that people could be admitted to hospital.

Whipps Cross hospital deals with those problems regularly. As it is an old hospital, it has some flexibility in that it can put old, disused wards into service temporarily in an attempt to cope with patient numbers. King George hospital, however, is a new hospital: it has no space and no flexibility, and it is already bursting at the seams. We are told that the winter has been particularly severe this year, but that is not really true: there has been no epidemic.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** Yes, there has.

**Mr. Gapes:** There may have been an epidemic of Conservative Members quitting their party, but it has not been a particularly bad winter in terms of the medical services. What will happen if there is another disaster on the scale of the King's Cross tragedy? How could our system cope with a disaster the like of which occurred on the Tokyo underground?

The Government, who know the price of everything and the value of nothing, have pared our health service and our accident and emergency departments to the bone. There is no flexibility in the system, which is crying out for space and the ability to deal with the unexpected. The Government's policy, which is based on accountancy rather than care, has led us to that situation. We cannot cope now, so how shall we be able to cope if there is a real crisis in the future?

I understand that there is a national shortage of D-grade nurses. We are told that the number of practice nurses assisting general practitioners has increased. That has

taken the pressure off GPs, but it does nothing to solve the problem—in fact, it complicates it—of the nursing shortage in the hospital system.

Why are patient numbers increasing? The population is aging and people are becoming more dependent on the health service, but there is a wider and deeper problem: the failure of the Government's community care policy. Local authorities do not have enough occupational therapists, and local government resources have been cut to such an extent that they are unable to cope. People remain in hospital for weeks or months because there is no social support in the community. But the Government cannot use that as an excuse for hospital bed shortages, because ultimately they are responsible for that problem, too.

The problems in my area are reflected across the nation. However, the north-east Thames area faces some unique difficulties. The Redbridge trust is being asked to treat more patients while receiving 3 per cent. less funding. It currently operates on the target of the 12-month waiting list and it is trying to keep to that target, but the general crisis caused by accident and emergency department closures and hospital closures means that all hospitals in the area—they are in financial deficit from Tower Bridge to Basildon—are in danger of defaulting on that target and incurring financial penalties.

In a public relations stunt, the Government have said that the 12-month waiting list will come into force on 31 March and that trolley waits will be reduced to a two-hour maximum. Conservative Members should try telling that to my constituents who have waited for 30, 24 and 16 hours on trolleys in hospital corridors. If the hospitals have to meet that target, how will they cope with the other targets set for them?

The accident and emergency department at Oldchurch hospital is to be closed. The community health council in Redbridge estimates that the result will be 20,000 extra admissions per year for King George hospital. But that hospital does not have the space to take those patients. It is situated just two miles further along the A12, but it does not have the capacity to deal with extra admissions. So who will suffer as a result? It will be the patients—my constituents—who cannot receive treatment in their local constituency hospital. Financial penalties and the local trust's other difficulties will only compound the problem.

The National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts states that

"hospitals are faced with conflicting national priorities. On the one hand, they are expected to meet the Patient's Charter guarantee . . . At the same time, the Patient's Charter stipulates that nobody should wait for a bed in accident and emergency departments longer than four hours".

That is to go down to two hours, but the association adds:

"A study of 20 hospitals in the Thames region found that only 18 per cent. of patients received a bed within two hours."

The figure for the rest of the UK was 80 per cent., but how can north-east London possibly cope?

The situation is so serious that I fear for the future of many of my sick and elderly constituents. I am not shroud-waving—it is the responsibility of any elected representative to bring to public notice the serious problems that doctors, nurses, administrators, and constituents and their families, draw to our attention. If something is not done in terms of extra resourcing and more accident and emergency beds, and if priority is not given to analysing the problem, the situation will grow even worse for my constituents and people throughout north London. I fear for the future.

9 pm

**Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): The description of doom and gloom by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) to which I listened bore no resemblance to the health service in Leicestershire—the county that I represent. The hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) pointed out a north-south divide in health services. Leicestershire has none of the problems that they mentioned, and I wonder whether we were listening to a severe distortion of the reality of today's health service.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) alluded to problems in his constituency, but the changes in Leicestershire and the midlands since the last Labour Government departed office have been substantial, and represent great improvements.

I want to talk a little about Leicestershire, but I also wear the hat of the long-standing treasurer of the parliamentary group for alternative and complementary medicine. In that capacity, I will refer to trends in Europe and the United States that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should be addressing as demand for alternative and complementary medicine in the UK increases at an exponential rate.

In 1979, the discharge rate at which patients left Leicestershire hospitals was running at 6,500 a year. By 1987, the figure was 12,500—nearly a 90 per cent. improvement during that Conservative period of office. In 1994, the latest year for which figures are available, 15,500 patients were discharged. That shows a threefold improvement in the number of patients being treated in the county.

The hon. Member for Peckham said that the health service was being torn limb from limb. She could not have noted the substantial capital investment in Leicestershire. Major developments at the Leicester royal infirmary include two new phases, the new children's hospital being just one of them. Currently, development work on an oncology unit is being undertaken. At the Glenfield general hospital, £50 million has been spent on development. That hospital specialises in cardiac and general acute services, and it has one of the most modern scanners in the world.

There have been improvements also in the Leicestershire mental health service trust. Approximately £25 million has been invested in new accommodation to replace the old institution, Carlton Hayes hospital. At Leicester general hospital, another £35 million has been spent.

At Hinckley, at the heart of my constituency, Fosse health trust has revealed plans for effectively a new £9 million hospital. Five years ago, the fate of that hospital hung in the balance. I remember meeting the chairman of Leicestershire health authority to discuss whether or not it should be closed and arguing that it was essential for the town, and that it was at an important location on the A5.

Since the reforms that my right hon. Friend and his predecessors have put in place, there has been a rapid development and expansion of improved facilities. It will be for Hinckley and Bosworth borough council to

*[Mr. David Tredinnick]*

consider the planning application that is before that authority, but in principle that is an excellent proposal for the town.

The range of services offered at the district hospital in Hinckley has increased exponentially. It is now undertaking outpatient work and minor operations that could never be performed at the hospital before—principally because of referrals by GP fundholders, the number of whom is increasing all the time as doctors see the benefits of controlling their budgets and having the right to send patients to whichever hospital they choose. If GPs want to send patients to George Eliot hospital in Warwickshire or to hospitals in Leicestershire, they can do so. It will considerably encourage my constituents to know that a larger number of operations will be available at the enlarged Hinckley hospital.

Wearing now my alternative and complementary medicine hat, it may interest hon. Members to be reminded of the range of treatments available. They include osteopathy and chiropractic for back problems; herbal medicine and homeopathy; acupuncture, which originated in China; aromatherapy, which is the use of essential oils to help repair the body; allergy assessments; dietary improvements; and healing, which has been on the edge of alternative and complementary medicine but is now coming in from the cold to be considered as a serious treatment. The public have voted with their feet in respect of alternative medicine, and there is a huge demand for such services.

The growth has been phenomenal. It is not surprising that, on 10 January in another place, there was a three-hour debate on the subject, which was attended by no fewer than 80 peers. That well-attended debate is a reflection of people's interest in alternative medicine. However, out of a total annual health budget of approximately £37 billion, only £1 million is spent on supporting projects and research into alternative and complementary medicine.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that something is out of line, because demand for services has become very great. It is time that the Department of Health considered increasing the amount of money available for research.

In the United States since 1993, there has been an Office of Alternative Medicine, and well funded it is too. In Germany, the Government have been tasked by Parliament to help with scientific evaluations of alternative medicine. In Switzerland, since 1990, there has been a national research programme on alternative medicine.

In Europe, the report produced by Paul Lannoye for the European Parliament's Environment Committee proposed that 10 million ecu should be spent on research over a five-year period. My hon. Friend the Minister should accept the point that other countries are introducing proposals to increase funding, or they have already done so. I respectfully suggest that he should do the same.

According to my European colleague, Giles Chichester, a Member of the European Parliament who spoke to the all-party group recently, the United Kingdom is in many respects ahead on alternative treatments, because we are regulating them in a step-by-step approach. We have had the Chiropractors Act 1994 and the Osteopaths Act 1993, and other Acts will follow.

On behalf of the members of the all-party group, I wish to thank all the disparate practitioners who visit us to give us their views. I also wish to thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues for the sympathetic hearing that they have given to alternative and complementary medicine. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, when he was the Under-Secretary, agreed that alternative and complementary medicine could be made available on the NHS, providing that a doctor took clinical responsibility. That has had a significant impact on increasing the level of service available and the amount of money that has been spent by the health service on alternative medicine.

Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, in a recent speech in the other place, mentioned an organisation called Foresight, which has had great success targeting the health of couples to improve the probability of conception. It had spectacular results, but it was instructed to carry out a double-blind trial. Given the evidence of an 89 per cent. success rate, that seems unduly harsh.

Chinese medicine is growing in popularity, and has been successful in treating eczema. Tough restrictions and conditions have been imposed on practitioners who seek funding, despite the fact that there are 500,000 professionals practising in 1,500 hospitals throughout China. Surely that is evidence enough of the success of the treatment.

My message for the Secretary of State and the Minister is that demand for alternative and complementary medicine in all its many different hues has never before been so great, and it will increase. I suggest that it is not in the interests of the Department of Health to spend so little—£1 million out of £37 billion—on those important medical treatments.

9.13 pm

**Mr. Edward O'Hara** (Knowsley, South): With all due respect to the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), I must express my frustration after listening to such a lengthy excursion into alternative medicine. It has left me with very little time to discuss the ills of the national health service. They are what concern my constituents, for whom alternative medicine is not exactly an everyday option. In the few minutes I have at my disposal, I want to refer to the real experience of real people on Merseyside and in Knowsley, South, and to the accountability, or lack of it, of the NHS to my constituents.

Despite all the fine words about the magnificent resources being globally allocated to the NHS, inadequate resources have been allocated to Merseyside, given its demographic and medical needs. I shall base my remarks on one battle in the health service in our area—over the closure of the accident and emergency department of Broadgreen hospital.

By a quirk of a line on a map, the hospital is not in my constituency, but it could have been: it is on the other side of the road. It serves my constituency and is located on the junction of Liverpool's inner ring road and the M62, which leads to east Lancashire and joins the M57 and the M6, the main north-west route. One would have thought that an ideal location for an accident and emergency

department, so I was deeply concerned about the loss of such a well-placed facility and the consequent impact on my constituents.

I was assured that magnificent new resources would be provided at the Royal Liverpool hospital, the trust that eventually merged with Broadgreen, and at Whiston hospital at the other end of my constituency. I did not want the closure to be effected until the new resources were available and on stream. I was assured that they would be, but as it happens, we lost the battle.

In the course of the battle to retain the Broadgreen A and E department, the public of Merseyside and my constituents lost all confidence in the people who were running the trusts. Even as a public representative, I found it difficult to get information and to make my voice heard. The closure was agreed by unaccountable NHS trust appointees. We suspected that the rationalisation would be accelerated—I had no illusions about that.

From my local government experience, at the delivery end and on the receiving end of rationalisations, I have learnt all the tricks; and when there were suggestions that the closure might have to be accelerated because staff could not be appointed to fill essential posts, I certainly had my suspicions. I asked why the staff were not appointed earlier and advertised for in good time.

Next, the closure took place, and I was assured of all the magnificent facilities that would be available at the Royal and Whiston hospitals. Instead, I found that patients were waiting as long as 12 hours for beds. There were no spaces for emergency cases. Ill and even terminally ill people were having to wait for hours in casualty. The surgical assessment unit had to be kept open all night so that people could lie there on beds. Emergency admissions had to be put in beds in the reopened but doomed Broadgreen hospital.

This information was given me in early November by a mole in the hospital trust, whose identity must be protected—a sad reflection on the system. The mole told me:

"The weather so far this autumn has been kind. I shudder to think what will happen if the weather turns cruel in the winter."

So it turned out. Before Christmas, all the things that people were worried about in Merseyside happened.

Ten days before Christmas, there was an accident just around the corner from my house. A lady suffered multiple injuries and had to be transferred from Whiston hospital while connected up to drips and all sorts of life support systems. She was taken to Oldham, 40 miles away. Her condition was stable when she left, but deteriorated during the 40-mph journey through snow along the motorway. Ten days later, she died. I shall protect her identity, out of respect for her grieving family.

On Christmas eve, a heart attack patient presented herself at Whiston hospital and had to be transferred to Wythenshawe—another journey out of the area. I remind hon. Members that, if critically ill patients are transferred out of the area, the whole family is in crisis. My constituents in Knowsley, South should not have to travel 40 miles during their own crisis to visit sick friends and family.

The crisis in the NHS came to a head before Christmas, and I saw a system that had finally broken down. Emergency services on Merseyside could not cope. Beds were needed on Merseyside, but they could be provided only out of the area. Ambulances that were needed for emergencies on Merseyside had to travel large distances out of the area and were not available for emergencies on Merseyside.

I am describing the failure of a system and the lack of accountability to my constituents of the people who run it. The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) referred to returning the NHS to ordinary people. Is that what he means? Not ordinary people like Margaret Pritchard, my constituent, who provides me with information and keeps an eye on what is happening. She has been told that her requests for simple information about what is going on and what difficulties are being experienced in the hospitals on Merseyside will no longer be answered by the chairman's office. Delivery of the national health service to the people of Knowsley, South? Not on your life.

9.21 pm

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton): I am delighted to see that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has returned from the school run. Perhaps she will hear something from me in the remaining two or three minutes about just how the national health service is "falling apart limb from limb" in Burton-upon-Trent.

The Queen has just opened the brand spanking new Burton district NHS hospital, costing £34 million. It is one of the best equipped in the country. It has 463 beds, which is 294 more than the old hospital had. It is modern, spacious and cheerful, and has integrated acute services. This is not a system that is falling apart limb from limb.

The hospital won the charter mark for excellence—the only acute hospital to do so in 1994—from the Prime Minister. It led the country in day surgery cases and has now increased the number of such cases by 10 per cent. We have slashed waiting lists, and nobody now has to wait for as long as nine months. The hospital leads the country in information technology. It has the first fully operational computerised information system, which is being spread to general practitioners, who can get their information from the same computer.

Ten per cent. more treatments take place there. Some 8,000 more of my constituents and those in neighbouring constituencies are able to access the new Burton hospital. This is not a system that is falling apart limb from limb.

There has been a magnificent reduction in waiting lists—down from 4,686 in December 1992 to 2,800 last December, which is a 40 per cent. reduction. I can go on, but, alas, I do not have the time. We have had two new nurse specialists from the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund, who are doing magnificent work in helping cancer patients, in the finest traditions of those nurses. Last year, the Burton Hospitals NHS trust screened a higher proportion of women than anywhere else in the west midlands region.

The Burton trust has not been the only great NHS achievement in my part of the world. There is also the Premier Health NHS trust, which opened a £700,000 psychiatric unit only last year on the district hospital premises. There are 13 fundholder practices in nine funds, representing 85,000 patients and costing about £14.5 million.

Before all that was set up, I heard plenty of dread prophecies about what would happen, but I hear no complaints now about the concept of fundholding, either

*[Sir Ivan Lawrence]*

from GPs or from patients. They now receive better direct patient care, more quickly, efficiently and effectively and to a higher standard. My doctors and patients will be most interested to learn that Labour, if it ever got into power, would abolish fundholding practices and all the successes that went with them.

In my part of the world, the Staffordshire ambulance service is now better equipped, better organised and better performing—the fifth best in Britain. What on earth is the Labour party talking about when it speaks of the wreckage of Conservative policies, with the national health service falling apart limb from limb? It is preposterous that, in a debate such as this, so much time should be spent attacking what is clearly succeeding throughout Britain.

I know that, from place to place and from time to time, one can find things going wrong, but I am fed up with having to try to explain to people that what the Labour party says about the overall picture simply does not apply to my region. There are magnificent achievements there, and it is offensive to those who dedicate so much of their time—doctors, nurses and staff workers in the hospital—continually to have their achievements run down and rubbished by the Labour party.

I am pleased that I have managed—I thank everyone concerned—to say a few words which will perhaps correct the false impression. I hope that the hon. Member for Peckham, when she has finished delivering her children to their schools, will take a little drive around the country so that she can see what is really happening.

9.26 pm

**Mr. Henry McLeish** (Fife, Central): There have been some excellent contributions in the debate. I want to single out two and, to show my impartiality, there will be one from each side of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) demolished the Government's excuses for the crisis over Christmas in terms of bed numbers. It is useful to have an authoritative view on health care in the House and I congratulate my hon. Friend.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on her contribution. She is Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, which has produced an excellent report on continuing care, and we await with interest its evaluation of the Government's response.

That said, the Government have a real problem. I recall the famous John Maples memorandum. *[Interruption.]* I hear the Secretary of State going on from a sedentary position, but I think that he will enjoy the next two or three comments. That memorandum suggested that the Tories should bury the NHS in any debate in any part of the country. Having listened to Conservative Members today, in particular the Secretary of State, I believe that that was probably the soundest piece of advice that they have been given in many years.

The Tories have a threefold crisis when it comes to their concept of a one-nation health service. We are now seeing the cumulative effect of the so-called reforms during the past three or four years and the Government's barely concealed incompetence. That rich mixture is fuelled by the obsession with privatisation.

The problem for the Government is that when the public perception of what is going on matches up with the reality facing patients, they have a crisis of credibility. As the Secretary of State undertakes his so-called charm offensive around the country, he would do well to face up to the fact that his problem is one of credibility, not charm.

The other part of the problem facing the Government is the inescapable conclusion about the future of the NHS. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), in an excellent contribution to the debate, highlighted the fact that the Government were moving slowly but surely towards a privatised health service and, at best, a residual NHS. There has been fragmentation, contractualisation and commercialisation. If, for any reason, the Government won the next election, which is unlikely, the British public should be aware that those would be the building blocks for a privatised health service.

The other point that concerns us is the apparent tale of two health services. According to Conservative Members who have spoken up, there are no problems, and Opposition contributions have merely been encompassed by shroud-waving criticism. But if the Government think that everything in the garden is lovely, the public, patients, specialists within the health services, doctors, consultants, nurses and Labour are all marching together.

**Mr. Whitney:** If the hon. Gentleman had really listened to what was said by Conservative Members, he would know that no one suggested that everything in the garden was lovely. Everyone recognises the existence of a huge challenge, not only in Britain, but in every civilised and industrialised country in the world. Several of us enumerated the reasons for that. The hon. Gentleman and the Labour party ignore the challenge, because they have no solutions to offer; they try to pretend that there is no problem. There is a problem, however, and the Conservative party is contributing to the achievement of a magnificent solution following the mess that Labour left in 1979.

**Mr. McLeish:** I am pleased to find that we discussing semantics. Conservative Members call it a challenge; we call it a crisis.

In fact, I listened to all the speeches with great interest, noting the praise for the Chairman of the Health Select Committee. The fact remains, however, that Labour Members were accused of shroud waving and ambulance chasing. Conservative Members have been impertinent enough to suggest that we should not raise the cases that we have raised in the Chamber. That brings us back to the Maples memorandum: "If there is a problem, just bury it." We will not bury important NHS issues; we will raise them at every possible opportunity.

The Government tell us that they care for the national health service, but that is not the case if linage and word counts are anything to go by. At last year's Tory party conference, the party chairman, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), devoted three lines of a 22-page speech to the national health service. The Deputy Prime Minister did not mention it once in a 19-page speech. Five lines of the Prime Minister's 31-page speech dealt with the subject. In those 72 pages of speeches, eight lines were devoted to the NHS.

Conservatives' attitude to the NHS is akin to Lady Thatcher's attitude to the Prime Minister: grudging, insincere and deeply damaging, with the suggestion that the object of criticism is not sufficiently right wing.

**Mr. Hayes:** Will the hon. Gentleman tell us how many lines of his speech the leader of his party devoted to the health service?

**Mr. McLeish:** What defines the difference between ourselves and the Conservative party is the fact that the leader of the Labour party is committed to a one-nation health service. The Conservatives are not committed to a one-nation anything.

We have been accused of shroud waving. We have heard of grim tales, and of people being scared by soundbites. The health service, however, touches everyone in the country; it is a precious asset. Meanwhile, we see headlines such as:

"Children are dying and we can't offer a bed"

in the *Evening Standard*,

"Hole in the heart of the NHS"

in the *Sunday Express*—referring to children in intensive care—and

"Crisis for Britain's sick children"

in *The Independent*.

Are we making those stories up? It seems to us that the Government simply will not pay attention to the crisis that has engulfed the national health service. We could present a litany tonight, including ward closures, bed closures, staff morale, lack of trainees, accident and emergency problems, failure to meet "The Health of the Nation" indicators and poverty as a cause of malnutrition. There is also the way in which the Government have driven dentistry out of the NHS. Those are the issues that dominate the agenda of most ordinary people, and the Government ignore them at their peril. This is the NHS in 1996, Tory-style.

We should examine the case that we are making against the Government. The first issue, which arose recently, is poverty triggering malnutrition. It is happening not in 1896 but in 1996. An article in *The Observer* was headlined:

"Poverty triggers UK diet crisis".

True to form, the Government commissioned a report, but saw the results and decided to shelve it. I challenge the Minister to comment on that damning report. More important, will he place a copy of it in the House of Commons Library?

The second issue is preventive health care. We thought that there was a consensus about the future of such care. Why is it then that the NHS is being pushed out of dentistry, which is vital as a preventive health measure, especially for children? A recent survey conducted by the British Dental Association shows that even 44 per cent. of Conservative Members believe that, in 10 years' time, the NHS will be outwith dentistry. That is a condemnation and a sad indictment of a so-called one-nation health service.

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. McLeish:** I am not giving way because I need to make some progress.

A one-nation health service can accommodate the cash to provide for dentistry.

The third issue is resources. We hear the Government say that funding always increases by more than inflation, but the Government must face real questions about waste. They are always lecturing people on their fiscal prudence, but they are happy to see £100 million in England tied up in GP fundholding balances held by health authorities. As some of my hon. Friends have said, that money should be spent immediately on the vital things that are missing from the NHS.

True to form, the Government have ensured that, in the most recent year for which figures are available, nearly £500 million has been spent on non-NHS providers. That is a leakage from the NHS. At the same time as children are touring the Pennines looking for a bed in a hospital, £500 million is being spent on non-NHS provision. That is a challenge to the Government. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are harping on from sedentary positions, but the harsh reality is that our NHS needs national investment, not the approach that is being taken by the Government.

I know that the Secretary of State for Health will not like this, but his so-called purge of bureaucrats comes too late. The Government have closed the door after the horse has bolted, which is typical. How laughable that, at the Conservative party conference, he should suggest that we tackle bureaucracy. The key issue for us on waste is that a large part of the finance is being spent on efficiency measures. We want an efficient NHS, but we cannot be bothered with more and more people policing an internal market where hospitals are competing with hospitals for patients' beds. That is ridiculous.

Over the next two or three months, we shall develop the issue of wasting taxpayers' money, but I want to return to the role of the Secretary of State for Health. Over Christmas, he decided to relax the drinks limit. That is nothing special in itself, but even the Conservative Medical Society, whose patron is the Prime Minister, said in its submission on the review:

"At a recent meeting of the Conservative Medical Society Executive there was unanimous opposition to any raising of the so called sensible limits for alcohol consumption.

Any increase in recommended 'safe' limits is likely to encourage some or many individuals to consume nearer the levels to cause problems."

It said that about 1 million people in Britain have alcohol-related problems. The question for the Secretary of State is this: if medical opinion was not moving him, and if the Conservative Medical Society was so opposed to the relaxation of the limits, why did he change the limits over Christmas and whose pockets were being lined by that development?

I also want the Secretary of State to respond to questions on bureaucracy. There is no point in shedding crocodile tears now, when during the past five years we have seen an increase of nearly 20,000 managers, while 50,000 front-line nurses have simply left the wards. It is important for the Secretary of State to come clean and explain that the Government have made historic mistakes. There has been burgeoning bureaucracy while, at the same time, they have sacrificed what patients and the public want—front-line care at the sharp end.

It is also crucial that we examine an experiment that is taking place in Scotland, in which the Secretary of State for Health does not seem to be interested. The experiment, in Stonehaven, is about clinical services and every other

*[Mr. McLeish]*

service being simply passed over to the private sector. In an interesting article in *The Sunday Times* about the Secretary of State for Health, unfortunately headed:

"Misfit with a mission against meddling",

the Secretary of State said:

"What I'm not in favour of is privatising clinical care".

We need to find out tonight—*[Interruption.]* I should be happy to send a copy of *The Sunday Times* interview to the Secretary of State. We did not bother with the other sources because one is damning enough.

The Secretary of State is quite happy for a poll tax-type experiment to take place again in northern Scotland, but is he willing to tell the House that he will not allow clinical services to go into the private sector in England? Double standards are being operated by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Health. The right hon. Gentleman should clear up that confusion as quickly as possible.

Labour Members want our Secretary of State for Health to be active on some of the issues that concern us. There has been much discussion recently about pregnant women being manacled by the Prison Service, but I did not hear the Secretary of State make much of an outburst about it. I should also like to reveal to the House that a *Daily Mirror* article of 12 January reveals that women prisoners who are being treated for cancer and pneumonia are also shackled. I expect the Secretary of State to give a lead and tell the Home Secretary that such barbaric behaviour is unacceptable. The Secretary of State for Health has been conspicuous by his absence on that issue.

We have raised with the Secretary of State the issue of intensive care beds for children. The tragedy about a hand-wringing, couldn't-care-less Government is that they say, "We don't know the answers to the questions you asked." On 16 January, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) asked the Secretary of State

"what is the present occupancy rate of intensive care paediatric beds?"—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. *549*.]

The Minister said that, because the information on bed occupancy was not available, the Department had asked the Sheffield Children's hospital to find out the bed occupancy rate from the 17 units. Is not that a damning indictment? People are concerned about serious issues, and this Secretary of State is not aware of the figures. The Department of Health instead asked the hospital to find the information that the health service executive should have had immediately available. Again, that speaks volumes for what is going on.

If there is one single issue on which morale reels in the health service, it is staffing. If one reads submissions from the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association or GPs' committees, on every occasion, one finds a situation in which—*[Interruption.]* The Minister for Health can sit there and rant, saying "More, more," but I can tell him what the nation would like to see: more nurses, more trainee nurses and far fewer bureaucrats.

When are the Government going to stop pretending that the real world does not exist? When will Government Front-Bench Members acknowledge that, during the past five years—I shall repeat the figures for the Secretary of State; he got very excited when they were read to him earlier—50,000 front-line staff have disappeared from the wards? We have 19,000 fewer nurses in training, which is a scandal for investment in the new millennium. At the same time, the Government keep feeding through more and more money for an extra 20,000 managers.

How can the Secretary of State wonder why morale is low, when nurses give more than the hours they work suggest in terms of commitment, dedication and skill? How do they feel when they see a Government who deliberately ignore their needs and patients' needs and push the growth of a burgeoning bureaucracy on every possible occasion?

If the Government were serious about the national health service, they would stop acting on the basis of hearing no evil, seeing no evil and speaking no evil, and start to get to grips with the problems that surround them. *[Interruption.]* The Government Whips are suggesting that I sit down. They do not like hearing the truth about what is happening to the NHS throughout the country. It is crucial to tell the Government that, if they believe in a one-nation health service—in view of their recent behaviour, that is a laughable concept—they must stop shuffling structures and start to think about patients and the professionals who do an excellent job on our behalf.

Unfortunately, some time will elapse before we take over the national health service. Until then, the Government should try to make an effort. We want some urgency and understanding, and we want them to realise that, ultimately, the national health service is our most precious public resource. In 1952, Aneurin Bevan said:

"What emerges in the final count is the massive contribution that the national health service makes to the equipment of a civilised society. It has now become part of the texture of our national life. No political party would survive that tried to destroy it."

We do not want the Tory party to survive, but the health service will certainly be safe in our hands.

9.45 pm

**The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone):** The only interesting discovery to emerge from the contribution of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) is that he reads party conference speeches after they have been delivered and analyses them. The only problem was that he had not read the Leader of the Opposition's party conference speech and could not even say how much he had addressed the subject of health, so it was not a compelling contribution.

I am grateful to my right hon. and hon. Friends who have spoken in and remained throughout the debate. Opposition Members pushed off following the solidarity photo opportunity, which was probably orchestrated by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who pulls the puppets' strings from time to time. According to the Order Paper, this was an Opposition day, but on the Floor of the House it was an Opposition away day. If anyone in the House showed an interest in the health service, it was my right hon. and hon. Friends, who made excellent contributions to the debate.

As usual, the Labour party has alleged crisis. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the pressures on the system, which I acknowledge. The hon. Member for Fife, Central suggested that Conservative Members had tried to say that there were no problems in the health service. We do not say that. We acknowledge the fact that pressures exist and that steps have been put in hand to

deal with them. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those health service staff who do so well in difficult times to deliver service to the public. It can do them no good to hear Labour Members denigrate time and again the service that they deliver, basing their arguments on partial facts rather than the full story of what is happening. If anyone should be upset about the tale delivered by the Labour party, it is not the Conservative party but those who serve within the health service.

There is no doubt about the challenge that faces us, and a number of hon. Members dealt with it. I shall respond to the detail of the debate briefly because of the lack of time available to me.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) always makes an important contribution. He was on all fours with us about the difficulties of meeting the challenges of modern medicine and he referred to a number of matters on which we could agree. He mentioned emergency admissions and scoffed when I suggested that there was some doubt about why they were rising. Our research on whether premature discharges have caused the increase in emergency admissions comes from Scotland and shows that they are not necessarily a pressure.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) made yet another powerful Back-Bench contribution on behalf of his constituency, and he illustrated clearly the two sides of the coin. Opposition Members tried to say that the service was in crisis, but my right hon. Friend pointed quite properly to what was happening in Good Hope hospital in his constituency. He reminded the House about proper management arrangements, the need for which was rooted in the failure of the service in 1980s. The matter was addressed by my right hon. Friend, and the health service needs proper management.

**Mr. McLeish:** What about nursing?

**Mr. Malone:** I shall be pleased to refer to nursing in a minute. Proper management is right for the health service, and cutting away bureaucracy and cutting management—the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—are also right. The two are quite compatible. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) talked about the structure of the health service, and about defining the boundaries of clinical effectiveness. I agreed with him on that, but he went on to say we that we should have local government participation.

I read with some interest a famous Liberal Democrat document, "Towards 1996", which said:

"Obviously this document will have a very limited circulation."

I am not sure whether every one of my hon. Friends now has a copy of this document, but probably most do. The document referred to the work done by somebody called the Liberal Democrat party's political warfare officer—whoever that might be. The document dealt with health in some detail, and listed the Liberal Democrats' strengths and weaknesses on the issue. It managed to find one strength and four weaknesses, one of which was the policy enunciated by the hon. Gentleman, who talked of having councillors in control of health authorities. The document said:

"Lib-Dem policy of putting councillors in control of LHAs is a barmy idea."

The hon. Gentleman would do well to listen to his advisers on that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), the Chairman of the Health Select Committee, made a powerful and thoughtful speech in which she set out an important future agenda for the Committee, with which we will work with great interest. The Government are keen to respond to the work of the Select Committee—as my hon. Friend pointed out—and we have just submitted an important memorandum on the subject of long-term care. I know that the Committee will consider that with great interest.

The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) came out with the real tactic of the Opposition, which was to have a saga of cases to which Ministers might have been able to respond had they been given some notice. I say that because I made an offer to another hon. Member—he is not in his place—at our previous debate on the matter to investigate every single case that he raised. I must say that he was deficient in the facts when we looked at the cases. I make the same offer to the hon. Member for Bootle—I shall look at each of the cases that he raised and respond to him in detail.

The Government suggest that people go to the point of first resort, which is the trust. But if there is dissatisfaction, Ministers are happy to look at the case and take up matters on behalf of hon. Members. The hon. Member for Bootle mentioned specifically a reduction in beds, and the loss of a 59-bed unit at Walton hospital. There is to be a new bed block in an associated hospital, but the hon. Gentleman may be disappointed to hear—as it rather destroys his point—that it will contain not 59 but 72 beds.

The imbalance in the debate was that, although we heard tales such as that told by the hon. Member for Bootle, Opposition Members positively refused to talk about what was happening. The hon. Gentleman referred to Fazakerley hospital, but I was surprised that the hon. Gentleman—as an hon. Member who represents his constituents' interests—failed to mention the investment of £1 million in accident and emergency services in 1994-95. Although he illustrated his point with three cases, he failed to point out that 95 per cent. of patients are now admitted within one hour of the decision to admit. It would be helpful if he looked at the facts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) paid tribute to what the NHS is achieving, but she raised concerns about mixed wards. We share those concerns, and we need to make progress towards eliminating such wards. She also suggested that NHS staff ought to have care when referring to patients by their Christian name, as that might be insulting. All I can say is that any staff member who referred to my hon. Friend as "Jill" should she ever be in hospital will probably get a thick ear. It is certainly not something that I would try.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) acknowledged that there had been improvements in the service. He dealt specifically with nursing, to which I promised the hon. Member for Fife, Central I would return. I find fault with the Labour party because it always refuses to tell the full case. If one looks at the figures and notes that learners and Project 2000 students are now treated in a different way, and includes general medical services practice nurses, whom the

*[Mr. Malone]*

Labour party always seems on purpose to exclude, one sees that there has been a 1.6 per cent. increase in qualified and unqualified nursing and midwifery staff between 1989 and 1994. The full picture shows a different story.

**Mr. McLeish:** There are not enough.

**Mr. Malone:** The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position that that is not enough, but that is not the point. His hon. Friends have said that nursing numbers have decreased, but that is simply not true.

**Mr. McLeish:** Will the Minister confirm that if one takes Project 2000 nurses and adds them to the learners who are still within the NHS, there are, based on the Minister's figures, 19,000 fewer nurses in training now than in the past?

**Mr. Malone:** The numbers of nurses in training at any given time, as of doctors and any other medical staff, are those sufficient to man the service. The hon. Gentleman forgets that when his party handed the health service to the Government, people were leaving it in droves. The NHS was not retaining its staff. More nurses are now being retained than in the past, and that explains why the figure is different.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) challenged the Labour party to say what management levels are right. We did not hear anything about that from the Labour party. Judging from what the Opposition have said, however, one would expect them to say that no management was appropriate. That, of course, is absolute nonsense.

The hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) spoke about the plans for her hospital. The plans to which she referred were based on the recommendations of a working party composed of health care professionals and consultants. They have been discussed with the community health council and the staff. I am sad to say that the chief executive of the hospital has been trying, I understand unsuccessfully, to discuss the plans with the hon. Lady. Perhaps I will write to him tomorrow to tell him of the concerns that the hon. Lady has expressed in the House, and perhaps a meeting can now take place to illustrate what is going on.

Various other speakers contributed to the debate, and I would like to refer specifically to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), who said that he was fed up with statistics. Too many statistics mask a story. What tell a false story are partial statistics, which the Labour party cites. It is all very well for the Opposition to say that they do not like statistics, but the truth of the matter is that the facts do not suit them. That is the problem with the health service—more people are being treated more effectively and there are more satisfied customers than ever before. The hon. Gentleman asked for more resources. I ask him to put that question to his hon. Friends on the Front Bench. The Government have been committed to putting more resources into the health service year on year, but it is his party that is silent on that.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) paid tribute to what has happened to the health service in his constituency. He is quite right to point out that it is a great achievement that day surgery is at record levels at his local trust hospital. That improvement is one reason why we have been able to make such progress.

I apologise to other hon. Members to whom I have not been able to respond directly, but my time is limited.

This has been an interesting debate in which the Labour party has not dealt with the current issues in the health service. We heard nothing from the Opposition about the primary care-led NHS and where it is going. They said nothing about how that service will shape the health service for the 21st century. Not a word did we hear.

We heard a mealy-mouthed answer to the question of fundholding. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) will have to answer to a number of fundholding practices in her constituency, including Dr. Virji and partners, who offer clinical psychology, minor surgery and other services; Dr. Brownsdon and partners, one mile north of Herne Hill, who offer excellent services; and Doctor Hossain and partners, who provide outreach teaching clinics for dermatology and in-surgery clinics for antenatal treatment, asthma and hypertension. Those are the benefits that her party is, at bottom, committed to sweeping away. She is fudging the issue and refuses to tell the story.

Yesterday, we heard from the Leader of the Opposition that he was not buckling under pressure. The whole country could see that he was twisting. His party has been twisting on the health service today. Policy by staccato soundbite will not do. From what we have heard today, the hon. Member for Peckham is more credible when she acts on education than when she speaks on health.

*Question put,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 262, Noes 285.

**Division No. 35]** **[9.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Davis, Cynog

Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. David Clelland and Mrs. Jane Kennedy.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre Forest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welw[illegible] Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*

Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Richard Ottaway and**
**Mr. Timothy Wood.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question,* That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House believes that the NHS is a great British success story which delivers health care of international quality, which is and will remain available free at the point of use on the basis of medical need and provides excellent value for money for taxpayers; congratulates all NHS staff for their hard work and dedication, particularly during the exceptional period of increased demand for NHS services over recent weeks; welcomes the increasing number of qualified nurses and midwives over the last seventeen years and looks forward to the NHS continuing to flourish under the policies of a Government which has backed its commitment to the service with year-on-year increases in real resources.

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

### MARINE POLLUTION

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution) (Law of the Sea Convention) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.

### INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft International Sea-Bed Authority (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.

That the draft International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## Saudi Arabia

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

10.15 pm

**Mr. George Galloway** (Glasgow, Hillhead): I hope that the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), will accept that I mean him no disrespect when I say that he should not be here this evening. Given the great interest among the British people and internationally about the subject of Britain's relations with Saudi Arabia, and given the intense controversy surrounding the Government's plan to deport the leader of the Saudi opposition, the Foreign Secretary himself should have come to the Chamber tonight to defend the Government's position. His absence is an act of cowardice, which is all the more shameful in view of the important role that he played—as we shall see in a moment—in the plot that was hatched many months ago to rid the Saudi tyrants of this turbulent Muslim priest.

As the organiser of the "Masari must stay" campaign, I want to deal with the professor's deportation, but only inasmuch as his case crystallises the corrupt and infectious nature of our relationship with that medieval, absolutist royal dictatorship. It is my contention that our unhealthy obsession with, and increasing dependence upon, the single-family rulers of Saudi Arabia is demeaning to us as a country, is diminishing to us as a democracy and is potentially disastrous for us as a trading and manufacturing economy.

We have reached a nadir in the Government's brazen and almost certainly unlawful decision to deport a peaceful law-abiding refugee and probably send him to his death in Dominica. However, the illness of which I speak is of far longer standing. It reaches to the commanding heights of the military industrial complex, into the inner sanctum of the Cabinet and even into the family home of a former Prime Minister of this country, Baroness Thatcher.

The infamous Vickers memorandum, which was revealed by *The Guardian* on 6 January, establishes the nexus as clearly as the most fantastic conspiracy theorist could have dreamt. In the memorandum, two captains of industry—Dick Evans, chief executive of British Aerospace, and Sir Colin Chandler, chief executive of Vickers, who was knighted by Her Majesty the Queen—reveal the complex web that has been woven.

That web encompasses the British arms industry, the Government and Foreign Office grandees such as Andrew Green—who was revealed by *The Independent* newspaper to have been at one and the same time the head of the middle east desk at the Foreign Office, ambassador designate to Saudi Arabia and a director of Vickers, a private arms company. It involves the British security services and a brutal foreign autocracy. It is the last absolute monarchy in the world, surviving 350 years after the death of the last such monarch in this country, who was executed not a quarter of a mile from here under the authority of the House.

The purpose of the web was to conspire to sell more and more guns to that dictatorship not for jobs, but for private profit, and to conspire with its customer to silence or to "stifle personally"—in the chilling words of the memorandum—any opposition to the conspiracy, however peaceful, representative or democratic. No other construction is possible than that the memorandum was referring to, at best, the kidnapping or more likely the assassination of the Saudi opposition leader.

Last August, in an interview given at his request to the Saudi-controlled newspaper *Al-Hayat*, the Foreign Secretary carefully laid the ground for the conspiracy. Breaking all protocol in his desperation to appease the Saudi potentates, the Foreign Secretary singled out Professor al-Masari—then an applicant for political asylum—for savage personal attack. He said that the professor represented nothing, but by what process the Foreign Secretary discovered that is unclear, as there are no elections of any kind in Saudi Arabia and no such thing as opinion polls. In any case, the Foreign Secretary has never been known for his special insight into, or interest in, the Arab world.

The Foreign Secretary contradicted his point by raising and repeatedly returning to the al-Masari case, showing an unhealthy obsession with it. In that interview, the British position began to change. Previously, the stated position was:

"We can only take action against deeds, not words."

Thereafter, the position was, "Never mind the law. Never mind our international obligations. This man's faxes and e-mail are dangerous to the continued survival of the rich milch cow that is Saudi Arabia under the dictatorship. He must, one way or another, be stifled personally."

The wave of revulsion that followed the al-Masari deportation order signed on 3 January was considerable. It can be charted in newspaper editorials across the political spectrum, correspondence columns and the torrent of parliamentary questions and motions, and in the huge number of people of all political colours who are united in the campaign against Professor al-Masari's deportation.

I visited Saudi Arabia in 1989 as part of a group of parliamentarians—all specialists in the middle east—under the able leadership of Lord Pym. That visit took place in the wake of a squall in British-Saudi relations, after the publication of a private memorandum by Sir James Craig—the recently retired British ambassador to the kingdom. Although years had passed, the regime was still smarting from the British television documentary, "Death of a Princess".

At every meeting at the highest levels, our delegation was regaled with complaints by the Saudis about the licence, as they saw it, of the British press. With great skill and incomparable charm, Lord Pym painstakingly described the nature of press freedom in Britain, humorously explaining that politicians were frequently on the receiving end of that freedom but that there was nothing we could do about it.

Late one night, I spoke to Lord Pym about the pressure to which the Saudis were subjecting him. Taking a long sip of water, as was his wont, Lord Pym said something that I have never forgotten: "You see, my boy, we are here to soft-soap really—but we can never, never apologise." What a distance we have travelled since then, under the corrosive influence of the Saudi embrace.

**Mr. Charles Hendry** (High Peak): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the Register of Members' Interests, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) declares a remunerated directorship of Hawk Communications International Ltd.—

*[Mr. Charles Hendry]*

"a communications company . . . to assist democratic development in the Middle East".

I am seeking to establish whether the hon. Gentleman has an interest to declare in relation to Saudi Arabia.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** It is not for the Chair to find out such things. If the hon. Member concerned feels that he has an interest to declare, he should declare it.

**Mr. Galloway:** If I had an interest to declare, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would have declared it. All the interests in Saudi Arabia sit on Conservative Benches—as is clear from the catcalling even from the Treasury Bench. I have no interest to declare except in democratic reform in Arabia and in the overthrow of the absolutist monarchy in that country. I resent the implication of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

In Lord Pym's words, "We are here to soft-soap really—but we can never, never apologise." What a distance we have travelled since then, under the corrosive influence of the Saudi embrace. Let us walk down the road that we have travelled and see what landmarks paved the way to that sorry pass. The most corrupting turn was when we opened the door to the Aladdin's cave of the Al Yamamah arms deal and gorged ourselves in a trough of larceny and backhanders. We have to face the fact as a country that that contract was landed by British Aerospace as a result of corruption on an unprecedented scale.

Enormous bribes—*[Interruption.]* Interestingly, someone on the Treasury Bench has just said "Hear, hear."

**Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): I said, "Hear, hear."

**Mr. Galloway:** Enormous bribes and commissions of up to 30 per cent. of the multi-billion pound deal were paid. They were shared between the Defence Minister, Prince Sultan and his family, and the sons of King Fahd, notably Prince Mohammed, about whom I will say more later. If we are talking about declarations of interest, a whole gang of middlemen was involved in London in that affair and made millions of pounds in pay-offs.

Those middlemen included Wafic Said, who became a business partner of the right hon. Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken) and a close friend of, and generous benefactor to, the Conservative party. They included Mark Thatcher, the son of the then Prime Minister, who gave 10 Downing street as his address at the time, but who was later given his own house and other lavish benefits by Wafic Said and who has become mysteriously and inordinately rich.

Among those who shared the millions of pounds sucked from those commissions was the former Cabinet Minister and former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for South Thanet. Some of those secret commissions on the Al Yamamah deal have been handled by British Aerospace through a British business man, Douglas Leese, who has close connections with an offshore bank, the Bank of NT Butterfield in Bermuda.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, a report by Sir John Bourn of the National Audit Office, which reveals some of those commissions, has been suppressed by the Select Committee on Public Accounts for more than three years. Public opinion is increasingly asking why.

Another part of the deal was concluded in 1988, when the regime agreed to buy minesweepers from Vosper Thorneycroft. Vosper used as its agent a Saudi named Fahd al-Athel, who, like the right hon. Member for South Thanet, worked for Prince Mohammed. Vosper made huge payments to al-Athel's company, which were laundered with the knowledge of Vosper through a front company in Saudi Arabia and were divided 20 per cent. to al-Athel, 40 per cent. to Prince Mohammed and 40 per cent. to unnamed others, some of them known to be prominent figures in British life.

In a third part of the Al Yamamah deal, Colonel Thomas Dooley, an executive of Sikorsky, testified in a United States court that, while trying to sell Black Hawk helicopters to the Saudi regime, there took place what he described in his testimony as a "competition for bribes". He said that Prince Bandar told him what bribes must be paid for the deal, through which middleman they must be paid, and how he would distribute the money to other members of the royal family.

In a fourth part of the Al Yamamah deal, the right hon. Member for South Thanet was hired personally by a British arms company—Astra—which hoped to land a contract to fit guns to those helicopters. The right hon. Member has acknowledged that he was paid to introduce his business partner, the aforementioned Fahd al-Athel, to Astra, which was also paying him, as a commission agent.

The bribes and commissions linked to those deals extended to every subcontract. Last year, Thorn EMI admitted that it had paid bribes totalling 26 per cent., which were illegal even by Saudi law by a factor of five, on the sale of smart fuses for the bombs carried by the Saudi Tornados. Half of those bribes paid off the Saudi princes and the other half went—via a small-scale arms dealer, Michael Gay, who, interestingly enough, is based near the British Aerospace headquarters outside Preston—to those mysterious bank accounts in the Bank of NT Butterfield in Bermuda. There, like other things that venture into the Bermuda triangle, they promptly disappeared.

The British Government insist that they are expelling al-Masari because of their new-found concern for British industrial jobs. In fact, it is British Conservative politicians, their relatives and business associates, and the revolving-door arms barons-cum Whitehall mandarins who are milking the Saudi cash cow. As the newly elected president of the engineering union, Davey Hall, a man who has represented Vickers workers in the north-east for so many years, has pointed out, a future based on pandering to unstable and unrepresentative middle eastern dictators can never guarantee a secure future for British defence exporters.

In fact, Vickers is a case in point. An order for the very same Challenger tanks for which Sir Colin Chandler is prepared to sacrifice human rights, to sell them to bloated Saudi princes, was one of the first contracts to be cancelled after the overthrow of the Shah of Iran—a decision that came about precisely because of the craven support, until the last hours, of successive British Governments for the despot in Iran. It is by investment in high-tech performance that British manufacturing will sell around the world, not by giving baksheesh to Saudi princes whose days are, in any case, numbered.

The contagion of corruption is not confined to business or to Government. The television film "Death of a Princess" is now under lock and key, and all requests for

footage from it are routinely denied. Its producer has taken an inexplicable vow of silence, and will make no comment about the film to anyone.

Nothing, however, could be more humiliating for the world's pre-eminent broadcasting organisation, the BBC, than to have had its editorial integrity prostituted by its reckless commercial involvement with the Saudi royal family. In the wake of the deportation order against al-Masari, all reports of the case on the BBC's Arabic World Service Television were censored by the corporation's partner, the Saudi-owned Orbit Communications, based in Rome. The BBC has still been unable to restore its once incomparable reputation throughout the middle east, despite intensive negotiations with Orbit, and the Secretary of State for National Heritage has still not explained the circumstances of this censorship to the House.

Who could have predicted that the country which made "Death of a Princess" would itself fall victim to the Saudi virus which has strangled the fragile flower of press freedom throughout the middle east by corruption and larceny?

It is the Government's case that Britain's strategic and economic interests are bound up with the propping up of what, by anyone's standards, is a rotten and crumbling dictatorship. It is our contention that only by befriending the people of Arabia and extending help to those working for freedom, human rights and democracy in Arabia can we guarantee our long-term future. At the moment, we are guaranteeing the enduring enmity of those people by propping up the people who oppress them. That is why the British people have risen against this decision—and why the British courts will overturn it.

10.32 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley):** The hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) has given us the opportunity to debate Britain's relations with Saudi Arabia, and I welcome that—although it will come as no surprise to him to learn that I do not agree with most, if any, of his remarks. The hon. Gentleman says that it is a disgrace that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is not here. That is absolute rubbish. Can he give me a precedent of a Cabinet Minister taking an Adjournment debate, particularly since I am the Minister responsible for our relations with Saudi Arabia?

**Mr. Galloway** *rose—*

**Mr. Hanley:** The hon. Gentleman did not allow any interventions—

**Mr. Galloway:** Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister asked me a question.

**Mr. Hanley:** No, the hon. Member may not answer.

**Mr. Galloway:** Douglas Hurd answered my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on the subject of Lockerbie just a few months ago.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I deprecate this kind of behaviour. It is very important that the courtesies be observed. Mr. Hanley.

**Mr. Hanley:** If there is a—

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Foreign Secretary did answer me on Lockerbie, as a matter of fact.

**Mr. Hanley:** I find very few precedents for the fact that not one Labour Front Bencher is present for the debate on a matter as important as this. Indeed, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) did not come in until some 15 minutes after the hon. Member for Hillhead had started his speech. I believe that the presence of so many Ministers on the Government Bench shows how importantly we take our relations with Saudi Arabia.

The United Kingdom has a long-standing and close relationship with Saudi Arabia, based on mutual respect and shared interests. Not only is Saudi Arabia a country of great strategic, economic and commercial importance to us, but there are many ties of history and friendship between Britain and that kingdom, including well-developed cultural, educational and sporting exchanges.

Britain's links with that country date back to the founding of the modern state of Saudi Arabia in the 1920s and 1930s. Britain never acted as protector of the kingdom, as it did with some of the smaller Gulf states. Instead, the relationship has always been one between two independent sovereign states. Britain recognised the important strategic role that Saudi Arabia was likely to play in the post-war world when Winston Churchill met King Abdul Aziz, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, on the Suez canal in February 1945. Since then, successive British Governments, with our allies in America and Europe, have sought to ensure that Saudi Arabia remains a force for stability in the region.

Our bilateral trading relations are extensive. In 1994, visible exports to the kingdom amounted to more than £1.5 billion—a trading surplus of around £800 million. The figures for 1995 are likely to be even better. There is a major invisible account with numerous British financial institutions and companies investing in Saudi Arabia to the tune of £1 billion or more annually, and Saudi Arabians are investing in the City of London. With the exceptions of Hong Kong and Singapore, Saudi Arabia is our largest export market outside the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. There are more than 100 Saudi-British joint ventures currently under negotiation, ranging from construction to pharmaceuticals.

Saudi Arabia is also our biggest defence sales market in the world. I welcome the presence of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in the Chamber. The sale of military equipment, and the provision of military advice and support is, without doubt, a vital strand in our relationship. Nowhere is that better illustrated than in the Al Yamamah project, which accounts for tens of thousands of jobs in the defence and defence-related sector and contributes to the overall health of our aerospace industry. That may not be important to the hon. Member for Hillhead, but it is important to many thousands of industrial workers throughout the United Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia is not just a trading partner, but a country whose foreign policy has shared similar objectives to our own. Whether in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, the Organisation of Islamic States or other organisations or groupings of which it is a member, Saudi Arabia has played a crucial role in the promotion of

*[Mr. Hanley]*

moderate and sensible policies. During the cold war, Saudi Arabia, while at all times remaining staunchly independent, was a vehement opponent of communism and the spread of Soviet influence throughout the region.

Saudi Arabia has been in the forefront of efforts to establish credible regional security blocs. In 1981, it helped to create the Gulf Co-operation Council which, although not perfect, has none the less proved to be a workable model for developing regional co-operation. There is a growing relationship between the GCC and the European Union and the next in a series of ministerial level meetings will take place in April.

We share with Saudi Arabia a particular concern for the continued stability of the Gulf, to which we make a substantial contribution on the ground and at the United Nations. We stood shoulder to shoulder with Saudi Arabia in the Gulf war in 1991, with the largest deployment of British armed forces since the second world war, and we are ready to do the same again if necessary. As the leading member of the GCC and our major Gulf ally, Saudi Arabia played a vital role in the coalition against Iraq, helping to defeat the expansionist ambitions of Saddam Hussein—I think that we know the hon. Gentleman's views on that subject—and has since been steadfast in support of all UN resolutions designed to force Iraq to adhere to internationally acceptable standards of behaviour.

**Mr. Tim Devlin** (Stockton, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Hanley:** I hope that my hon. Friend will understand if I do not give way as I have a lot to say and very little time.

Saudi Arabia remains an important bulwark against any further Iraqi attempts to threaten or invade its neighbours. The Saudis share our suspicions of Iranian policies in the region and they share our support for the middle east peace process. Saudi Arabia has been a bastion of stability and moderation in a region not always known for those qualities.

Our warm friendship with Saudi Arabia is reflected in a number of ways, which perhaps I can illustrate. There are close relations between the two royal families. Hundreds of thousands of Saudi Arabians visit Britain every year on holiday. Many have homes here and look upon Britain as their second home. They are important contributors to the British economy. So, too, are the nearly 30,000 Britons who work in Saudi Arabia. Many official visits have taken place between the two countries.

Saudi Arabia has enjoyed an impressive rate of economic growth and stability. It is important for the economic well-being not only of Britain, but of the whole industrialised world, to ensure ready access to middle eastern oil at an economic price. Saudi Arabia, the leading member of OPEC, has by far the largest proven crude oil reserves in the world. Saudi Arabia is therefore a key element in that equation. Her policy of sustaining a moderate and stable oil price has benefited Britain enormously.

As our Prime Minister recently emphasised, the continued stability and security of Saudi Arabia are vital to the health of the global economy, to the prosperity of British industry and to the preservation of so many jobs in this country.

The hon. Gentleman, as he has made clear on many occasions inside and outside the House, is a fervent supporter of the beliefs of Dr. al-Masari. Dr. al-Masari has launched a vituperative campaign from London aimed at the overthrow of the Saudi Arabian regime. He has at times appeared to condone violence. He has abused our hospitality.

The hon. Gentleman sees Dr. al-Masari as a western-style liberal. That is clearly not the case, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. Dr. al-Masari's organisation—the Committee for the Defence of Sharia Law—indicates that he would insist on an even stricter application of Islamic law than that followed by the Saudi Government, who themselves adhere to a strict interpretation of Islam. In recent newspaper interviews, Dr. al-Masari has clearly stated his support for an Islamic republic in which only Islamic political parties committed to ruling the country strictly by Koranic law would be able to stand for election.

**Mr. Galloway:** How many parties, Islamic or otherwise, are allowed to exist in Saudi Arabia now? And how many elections, of any kind, for anything, are allowed now?

**Mr. Hanley:** I am not in any way trying to say that Dr. al-Masari's views are different from many in Saudi Arabia. What I am trying to say is that Dr. al-Masari is not the liberal saint that the hon. Gentleman likes to suggest.

Not only would Dr. al-Masari ban any party other than those which are strictly bound by Koranic law, but his prescription is for a Saudi Government on the Iranian model. He has also been quoted as following strict anti-blasphemy laws, as wanting women to stay at home and claiming that women sin if they do not submit to sex with their husbands at any time and in any manner, and as favouring stricter applications of the punishments of execution by beheading for criminals and amputations for theft. That does not make him a western-style liberal in my book.

**Mr. Galloway:** Rubbish.

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to articles in the press setting out Dr. al-Masari's views.

The United Kingdom takes seriously its obligation to protect those who seek asylum, but asylum seekers cannot pick and choose which countries suit them best. Against that background, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has directed that Dr al-Masari be removed to a country which is willing to receive him and which is a party to the 1951 refugee convention and the 1967 protocol. We believe that that decision, against which Dr. al-Masari has appealed, was made in accordance with our law and our international rights and obligations.

The immigration rules provide that an asylum application may be refused without substantive consideration if there is clear evidence of admissibility to a safe third country. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary was satisfied, following receipt of a letter from the Prime Minister of Dominica, that not only would Dr. al-Masari be admitted there but he would be granted refugee status should he wish to apply.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary believes that Dominica is a safe third country for the purposes of the refugee convention. Had he thought otherwise, the decision to remove Dr. al-Masari there would not have been taken. Dominica has an excellent human rights record, with freedom of speech and worship enshrined in the constitution.

Dr. al-Masari's wish for protection under the convention does not entitle him to choose Britain. It is relevant in this context that he also had no ties with this country before entering illegally, and we have all seen how he has taken advantage of our communications network in order to campaign against the Saudi Government—a campaign which the hon. Member for Hillhead, by his own mouth this evening, supports.

We have made no secret of the fact that the action taken in Dr. al-Masari's case took account of the United Kingdom's strategic and economic interest in the stability of Saudi Arabia. On being satisfied that Dr. al-Masari was not at risk of persecution in Dominica, or of removal from there to a country in which he might fear persecution, it was entirely consistent with the 1951 refugee convention to give wide consideration to the United Kingdom's overall interests.

We believe that a regular dialogue on human rights is the most appropriate and effective way to address this issue. As for human rights, we and our European partners regularly discuss human rights with the Saudis. In September, for instance, the European Union made a démarche to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh expressing concern at the increasing number of executions taking place in Saudi Arabia. In early December, at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the European Union pointed out, in a reference to Saudi Arabia, the existence of serious obstacles to the enjoyment of human rights and freedom of religion and expression—

*The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 25 January 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be considered again on Thursday 1 February.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Action for Community Employment

1. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received concerning the funding of action for community employment. [9626]

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram):** Many representations have been received from the voluntary sector and others concerning the reduction in next year's ACE budget. Unemployment, while still a problem, is no longer the major problem that it was when ACE was introduced and the need to fund temporary jobs has diminished with the improving economic situation. During the 12 months to September 1995, almost 11,000 new jobs have been created in Northern Ireland.

**Dr. Godman:** The Northern Ireland Office has a policy of targeting social need, but the decision to cut ACE so savagely flies in the face of that principle. How does the Minister justify that decision? More importantly, will he now reverse it? That would be welcomed in both communities and by all political parties. There must be money somewhere in the Northern Ireland Office budget which would allow him to take such a principled step.

**Mr. Ancram:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I am sure that he would agree that it is necessary to reflect changing circumstances when deciding how to allocate resources to maximum benefit. There have been many substantial changes in economic circumstances since the early 1980s when the programme was introduced. That was at a time of very high and rising unemployment, which has now fallen to its lowest level in 14 years. Long-term unemployment has fallen by more than 5,000 and there are 7,500 job vacancies, which is a record level. That suggests that it is right that resources should now be allocated to promote the growth which exists within the Northern Ireland economy and which can provide real long-term and lasting jobs.

**Mr. Beggs:** I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on his question and draw the attention of the House to early-day motion 273, which I am pleased to say had the support of all the Northern Ireland political parties and many other parties in the House. The suddenness of the proposed cuts will have a devastating effect on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society, who often live in areas where there is high unemployment and social deprivation. We are concerned that some of the charities that are dependent on ACE workers may be forced to close. Again, the disabled in particular could be further disadvantaged. I appeal to the Minister to undertake to review the damage that is being done. The fact that those who have given commitments are demoralised—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I regret to have to call the hon. Gentleman to order, but he is making a statement. I have not yet heard him put a question to the Minister.

**Mr. Beggs:** May I ask and appeal to the Minister to review the funding to ACE with a view to increasing resources?

**Mr. Ancram:** I cannot give that undertaking—nor, I suspect would the hon. Gentleman expect me to. However, it has been made clear to ACE providers that they are best placed to decide how to manage the reduction and they have flexibility to ensure that key posts of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman referred are not left unfilled. Real jobs are what all of us involved in Northern Ireland should be looking for, particularly in growth areas such as tourism. Substantial additional resources have been allocated to the growing tourist industry, especially for training. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the emphasis being put on training people within the growth areas in the Northern Ireland economy to take on real and long-lasting jobs. That must be our joint objective.

**Mr. John Marshall:** May I thank my hon. Friend for his first answer and welcome the improvement in the economic situation, which is partly the result of the peace process and partly due to the fact that this country has not signed the social chapter and is not committed to a national minimum wage which would destroy jobs in Northern Ireland as it would elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

**Mr. Ancram:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, which will be accepted by all those who work in the Northern Ireland economy. His point is valid. Peace and the lack of a social chapter have indeed helped to promote economic prospects in Northern Ireland. We are trying to make sure that those prospects are even more enhanced by ensuring that resources are spent in the right areas.

**Mr. McGrady:** From the replies so far, the Minister appears not to understand the problem being created by the 25 per cent. immediate cut in the budget of the Training and Employment Agency. That 25 per cent. has been translated into cuts of 30 per cent. in the south-east and 15 per cent. elsewhere. When that decision was made, was the Minister aware that it would impact on the elderly, the aged and the sick, and on training in areas where there is no employment, such as the training given by ACE? That will have serious social consequences. If the Minister is not prepared to review that decision, will he provide further finance through the Department of Health and Social Services to replace those services?

**Mr. Ancram:** If the hon. Gentleman will write to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, who is responsible for health and social services, I am sure that my hon. Friend will respond. Indeed, my hon. Friend will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has just said. The reduction is not an abandonment of the programme. It was made because it was felt that at this point in the economic circumstances of Northern Ireland resources could be better applied in ways that would create real and lasting jobs. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and other Northern Ireland Members would criticise the Government if we did not seek to promote the growth that now exists in Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Illsley:** I accept that unemployment has fallen, but in Northern Ireland it is still more than 11 per cent. The key figure is that 55 per cent. have been out of work for more than a year. With the fragility—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I must instruct the House that this is Question Time and not the time to make statements. We must have questions to Ministers. We have been going for nearly 10 minutes and we have not yet finished question No. 1. I want questions to Ministers and brief answers to them.

**Mr. Illsley:** In view of the fragility of the Northern Ireland economy, as evidenced by the problems at Shorts, does the Minister consider that the decision to cut ACE funding is at least premature? Should he not redirect—or restore—that finance to the long-term unemployed?

**Mr. Ancram:** I shall be as brief as I can, Madam Speaker. That is exactly what the Government seek to do in promoting growth in the Northern Ireland economy. I re-emphasise that unfilled job vacancies are running at record levels—a situation on which I would hope that the hon. Gentleman would congratulate the Government.

### Arms and Explosives

2. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in respect of the decommissioning of illegally held arms and explosives in Northern Ireland. [9627]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew):** No illegal arms or explosives have yet been decommissioned by any paramilitary organisation. That is deplorable. The international body said that total and verifiable disarmament of all paramilitary organisations must continue to be a principal objective. It recommended the acceptance of that as a principle. We accepted it at once with all the other recommendations in the report. All others should now do the same.

**Dr. Spink:** Is it not a fact that decommissioning remains an option? If some arms were decommissioned even now, we could progress to all-party talks, which might still be the best way forward. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Mitchell report showed that the only obstacle to decommissioning is the mind set of Sinn Fein and the IRA?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** It is, indeed, an option. It is more than an option—it is a duty. I believe that if that option were taken and that duty fulfilled we could proceed to all-party negotiations, which is the objective of everyone, in a very short time indeed. I hope very much, in the light of the report, that that course will now be taken.

**Mr. Maginnis:** As Sinn Fein-IRA appear unable to rehabilitate themselves to the normality of democratic politics and summarily reject accommodations offered by the Government, the Ulster Unionists and now the Mitchell Commission and, in defiance of 83 per cent. of society in Northern Ireland—which includes 75 per cent. of Social Democratic and Labour party supporters—refuse to decommission a single gun, is it not depressing to find Tanaiste Dick Spring and the leader of the SDLP whingeing and whining about the Government's latest offer to establish a mandated forum which might advance progress towards peace?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** It is important that Sinn Fein and other parties associated with the paramilitary organisations should be pressed to say whether they accept the principles recommended by the report—especially the second of those principles, which is total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. On the proposal for an election, it is worth reminding the House that in the communiqué at the end of November setting up the political and disarmament tracks the two Governments expressly envisaged that in preparatory and political talks the question of what part an elected body might play would be specifically mentioned. So it is not some new idea summoned out of the ether in the past minute or two. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, it represents a way by which the necessary confidence can be achieved and I hope that it will receive careful consideration.

**Rev. William McCrea:** Does the Secretary of State agree with the principle that there can be no guns on the

table, under the table or outside the door if lasting peace is to be established in Northern Ireland? Has he carefully studied the recent poll, which showed that 83 per cent. of people in Northern Ireland demand the removal of all terrorist weapons from the equation? What steps will he take to press the Dublin Government to act on the known arms dumps in the Irish Republic, which were created prior to the IRA ceasefire?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am confident that the Irish Government are as anxious to discover illegal arms dumps as the British Government are—and that is very anxious indeed. I have studied the report and agree that it is extremely important that public opinion is shown to be in line with what the hon. Gentleman has just said, and in line with support for an elective process to play a part in our current problems. That should give reassurance.

**Mr. Mallon:** Will the Secretary of State confirm that both the Irish and British Governments jointly appointed the Mitchell Commission to give an objective assessment on how the decommissioning issue would be dealt with? His Government have now rejected the Mitchell report's central recommendation in paragraph 34 and have unilaterally and shamelessly moved away and reneged on the agreement with the Irish Government to pursue the matter through all-party talks in the twin-track approach. How will decommissioning be tackled now that the Secretary of State has sacrificed potential consensus for expediency within this House?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am afraid that I am not with the hon. Gentleman on any of that. The Government have not rejected the Mitchell report but have welcomed it. We immediately adopted all the recommendations of principle that it put forward. We welcome especially the report's identification of confidence as the central requirement. All-party negotiations could begin in fulfilment of the Government's aim by the end of February, provided that a start is made on decommissioning. If that does not happen—and we are told that it will not—it is the duty of Governments to see whether confidence can be engendered in some other way. I want that issue urgently debated in the twin-track process. That is what is suggested.

**Mr. Day:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that although everyone in the House hopes for the day when all parties in Northern Ireland will seek the path of peace and sign up to the six points of principle laid out in the recent report, such declarations count for nothing in practice until the people holding arms give them up? Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to call for all parties to give up arms now—not just to make declarations, but actually to hand the arms over?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I very much agree with what my hon. Friend says. Putting it in a cliché, actions speak louder than words. That was put in slightly different language by the Mitchell report, when it said that if those principles, which include the total disarmament of all paramilitary arms, were adopted and honoured, there would be a tremendous accretion of confidence and progress. I very much agree with that.

**Ms Mowlam:** Continuing our bipartisan approach, may I joint the Secretary of State in welcoming the report of Senator Mitchell and his colleagues? Yesterday, discussing the report, Members on both sides of the House emphasised the need for trust and confidence. Today there is a worrying air of distrust and a lack of confidence among some Members of the House and among some communities in Northern Ireland. To help to allay some of those fears, can the Secretary of State confirm to the House today that he will consider all options proposed to take the process forward, including making a start on decommissioning, and that movement towards an elective process, in line with paragraph 56 of the Mitchell report, will go ahead only with the widespread agreement of the parties in Northern Ireland?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** We have always made it clear that there can be no imposition if any solution that is proposed is to stick. I make that clear again.

The hon. Lady is right that in that paragraph the report states:

"Elections held in accordance with democratic principles express and reflect the popular will."

There are other signs of that in the poll that has been mentioned. The report continues:

"If it were broadly acceptable, with an appropriate mandate, and within the"—

three-party—

"structure, an elective process could contribute to the building of confidence."

We endorse that. I hope very much that that, on reflection, will be seen to be a way around the impasse represented by the refusal of paramilitaries even to start giving up their arms.

### Health and Social Service Funding

3. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from health and social services boards and health and social services trusts on the financial proposals for next year and the impact on services. [9628]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss):** Boards, trusts and agencies were asked for their views. These have now been received and I am considering them carefully. I shall also be meeting board and trust chairmen in the next two weeks. I hope to make an announcement as soon as possible after that time.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** I thank the Minister for that response. Does he accept that a 3 per cent. up-front saving would have an impact on health provision in the Province, especially coming after years of taking the fat out of the system? Does the Minister acknowledge that it may lead to increases in waiting lists, especially as elective surgery may be targeted?

**Mr. Moss:** The 3 per cent. efficiency saving that we are asking the boards to consider this year is similar to the percentage amount that they have been saving in previous years, and I have no reason at this stage to doubt that they can do so again. However, until I have read their submissions I cannot determine whether any cuts in services will occur.

**Mr. Ian Bruce:** Is Northern Ireland getting its fair share of health resources from the central Exchequer to

look after health services? Has my hon. Friend had a chance to compare the amount of money from the central Exchequer given to health services in Northern Ireland with the amount given in the south, and to discover whether there is a flow of people from the south trying to take advantage of any difference?

**Mr. Moss:** I have no comment to make on comparisons with the Republic of Ireland. I believe that in the past decade people in Northern Ireland have enjoyed a greater than average per capita spend on health. I am delighted to report to the House that, despite a reasonably tight public expenditure round, the total resources to be spent on health in the coming year will increase in real terms compared with last year.

**Dr. Hendron:** The Secretary of State and the Minister will be aware of the McKenna report on the rationalisation of services between the Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospitals trust and the Belfast City hospital trust, and they will know that the report contains a proposal to close the Royal Maternity hospital. Is the Minister aware that there is great anger among my constituents—both Catholic and Protestant people of west and north Belfast—that such a proposal is being made, bearing in mind that the Royal Maternity hospital contains a neo-natal unit which serves not only Belfast, but the whole north of Ireland?

**Mr. Moss:** I am well aware of the contentious nature of the proposals in Dr. McKenna's report, but that is the third tranche of proposals. Most of the proposals in the other two reports have been agreed internally by consultants. The whole report is out to consultation and no decisions have been taken. It is important for the hon. Gentleman to refer to the truth of the matter, which is that two maternity units are to amalgamate—we are not closing one.

**Mr. Dowd:** Is the Minister aware that the current position in acute care in Northern Ireland is already intolerable and that he has succeeded in uniting all shades of political opinion against the Government's stewardship? Does he agree with the recent statement of the chairman of the British Medical Association's Northern Ireland council that the Government have

"withdrawn beds to such an extent that we've reached a critical point"?

Does that not demonstrate beyond doubt that the crisis created by the bed shortages is every bit as serious in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the national health service?

**Mr. Moss:** I do not agree with the statement by the BMA spokesperson and I do not believe that there is a crisis in acute bed provision in Northern Ireland. If there are shortages in individual hospitals, I shall ask for an immediate report on them.

### Direct Action Against Drugs

4. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional measures are being taken in response to the recent murders attributed to the Direct Action Against Drugs organisation. [9629]

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler):** While operational policing is a matter for the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, I can state that in mid-December last year a team of detectives, headed by a chief superintendent, was formed to investigate murders which have been claimed by a group calling itself Direct Action Against Drugs; there have been seven murders procured by the provisional IRA under that flag of convenience. The RUC team has all the resources that it requires.

**Mr. Greenway:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the light of what he has just said—and of the Mitchell Commission's recommendations announced yesterday that punishment killings should cease immediately—it behoves IRA-Sinn Fein not just to condemn the recent killings, but to take direct action to prevent further murders?

**Sir John Wheeler:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Mitchell report noted that the key to progress is confidence. My hon. Friend is right when he questions how people can have confidence when the provisional IRA is beating and murdering people and Sinn Fein refuses to condemn that. An important measure for establishing confidence will be the speed and conviction with which the parties demonstrate and honour—and I stress honour—their commitment to the six Mitchell principles, one of which is the disposal of weapons and semtex.

### Peace Process

5. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his preparations for the first round of all-party talks on Northern Ireland. [9630]

11. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress towards substantive political negotiations involving all parties in Northern Ireland. [9636]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The Government have now had bilateral meetings with all the relevant parties to discuss their ideas on the way forward, although the meeting with the Democratic Unionist party was not part of the twin-track process. Meetings involving both the British and Irish Governments have also taken place separately with the Alliance party, the Social Democratic and Labour party and Sinn Fein. Further meetings are planned with the continuing aim of reaching agreement on a basis for launching all-party negotiations by the end of February.

**Mr. Wareing:** Does the Secretary of State agree that no obstacles should be placed in the way of all-party talks to perpetuate the peace in Northern Ireland? As Mr. Dick Spring made it clear this morning that the holding of elections was not broadly acceptable, is it not true to say that the holding of such elections, with an Assembly, at an early stage before all-party talks, would be unacceptable and would threaten the peace? When was Mr. Bruton informed of the Prime Minister's proposal which was made in the House yesterday?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** What we are seeking, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explained yesterday, may well be described as elections to all-party talks. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, of course, that no one

should put obstacles in the way of progress towards peace. It is precisely in order to circumvent the obstacle represented by the fact that the paramilitaries are not willing even to begin to decommission their illegal arms that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced yesterday that we think it very desirable that there should be urgent consideration of the question of an election. That represents the way forward.

In answer to the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had a conversation, which lasted some 35 minutes, with Mr. Bruton late on Sunday night. It was made clear to Mr. Bruton that we saw the elections as an opportunity to get the parties around the table. We did not see any other way of doing that in the light of the report.

**Mrs. Prentice:** The Secretary of State will, of course, be aware that there is a marked lack of trust and confidence among some parts of the community in Northern Ireland about such elections and what they will establish. Can he tell the House what measures he could take which might build trust and confidence among those communities so that they might wish to participate in such elections?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The most important objective is to allay the nationalists' traditional and classic misgivings that the elections are intended as a way back to a Stormont regime.

May I correct what I just said to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing)? The conversation did not take place on Sunday, but on Monday night.

There is a traditional feeling that elections are sought as a way back to a Stormont regime. As I understand it, everyone who has brought forward that proposal has made it clear that that is regarded as quite impossible and is not intended at all. It would be quite impossible. Once that fact is hoisted in and accepted, I believe that the notion of elections will become much more acceptable. I hope that that will be the case.

**Mr. Hunter:** With regard to decommissioning and the elective process in parallel, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that it is envisaged that the Northern Ireland parties would agree to the remit of an elected body, and also that that elected body would not have legislative or administrative powers? Surely such considerations would greatly reassure those who fear the return of Stormont.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That is an important point. The situation now is substantially different from the two occasions in the 1970s and 1980s when elections took place without altogether successful results. What is now being envisaged is not a body with legislative or administrative powers, but something quite separate and in the context of inclusive all-party negotiations. That is very different indeed.

I am terribly sorry—I said that the conversation between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Mr. Bruton was on Monday, but I am reminded by the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), that it was on Tuesday night. It was on the evening before the statement—there is no advance on that.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is incumbent on all those who have any misgivings about the elections to do everything possible, in public and in private, to urge those who hold the weapons to give them up?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I believe that my hon. Friend is right about that. If independent and impartial corroboration and support for that is needed, it is to be found in the Mitchell report.

**Mr. Hume:** Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether the Government are still committed to their agreement with the Irish Government that the target date for all-party talks is the end of February? In order to achieve that, will the Secretary of State implement the only major proposal of the Mitchell report, which is that all parties be invited to such talks provided that they accept and commit themselves to the six principles contained in the Mitchell report?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** It remains the firm aim of Governments that all-party negotiations or all-party talks should begin by the end of February. I reaffirm that fact, but I cannot command it; I cannot require and compel people to come who will not come. As I have said to the House on many occasions, if I were to try to do that and to summon talks in the sure and certain knowledge that people would not be there, I would destroy the very process upon which all progress depends.

I happen to know—it has been made perfectly clear to me—that Unionists would not attend the talks according to the terms advanced by Mitchell. Therefore, we want to secure the confidence that will ensure that people attend the talks, and I believe that that confidence will be found in the alternative route of elections.

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** Most people in Northern Ireland welcome the measured approach of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats to the Government's proposal for an elected body. However, does the Secretary of State understand that there was considerable disappointment in Northern Ireland last night at the negative response emanating from certain quarters in Dublin? Will he arrange an urgent meeting with the Dublin Government to make it clear to them that the peace convention—as I prefer to call it—is not an internal settlement, but will address many issues? All parties involved will address many issues, including cross-border relations and enhancing relations between Belfast and Dublin.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The reassurance of which the right hon. Gentleman speaks is to be found in the way that he describes. I think that there is a strong case for all interested parties and Governments to talk together "intensively"—to use the word employed in the communiqué. I believe that that is no less true after the publication of the Mitchell report than before it.

**Mr. Worthington:** If there is general agreement about an elective process, as the Prime Minister proposed yesterday, will the Secretary of State give an assurance that the purpose of that electoral process is to lead directly to all-party talks in which the interests of all minority parties are safeguarded fully? Will the Secretary of State describe how he believes that that safeguarding will be achieved?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** That is right. It is very important that any settlement that is achieved should attract

widespread support. It can be arrived at only by way of a process in which all democratically mandated parties—including those representing quite small minority groups—have a part to play. I agree with the hon. Gentleman: that is the only viable way forward and we now wish to see it proceed.

### Company Relocations

6. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what account he takes, in encouraging companies to locate in Northern Ireland, of the extent to which such location affects companies in other parts of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [9631]

**Mr. Ancram:** The rules applied in Northern Ireland for assessing the displacement effect of selective financial assistance support are exactly the same as those applied in all other parts of the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Kennedy:** As the Minister is aware—through the information that I have provided to his office and, by way of courtesy, also made available to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), in whose constituency the Benelux Manufacturing (NI) Ltd. production plant is located—a company in my constituency, Zonal Audio Plastics, is concerned about a contravention of the assurances that Benelux gave to the Industrial Development Board when the plant received support to locate in Northern Ireland. Instead of concentrating on exporting to the north American market, Benelux has severely undercut mainland competitors—not least the company in Invergordon, which employs between 40 and 60 people—in the United Kingdom and the European markets. Will the Minister comment further on that existing genuine business dilemma?

**Mr. Ancram:** The Industrial Development Board, when appraising the project, analysed the existing markets in the United States and in Europe for CD jewel boxes, the forecast for growth in those markets, and the impact that the project would have on existing United Kingdom manufacturers. In deciding to assist the project, the IDB ensured that it properly addressed the relevant criteria for the provision of selective financial assistance.

**Sir James Molyneaux:** Does the Minister agree that companies in all parts of the United Kingdom could benefit greatly from the promotion of the enterprise investment scheme, which has the potential to bring together companies who have money to invest and companies—particularly small companies—which are desperately in need of funding? In that regard and in the light of the problems affecting the Fokker aircraft company, will the Minister do all that he can to ensure that sympathetic consideration is given to Ministry of Defence tenders from Shorts of Belfast?

**Mr. Ancram:** I agree with the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, and I am grateful to him for reminding the House and United Kingdom businesses of it. In relation to the second part of his question, we share his concerns about the situation that Shorts faces. I know that my colleagues in the MOD are sympathetic to Shorts' concerns, and I will ensure that what the right hon. Gentleman has to say is passed on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

**Mr. Spring:** First, I offer my warmest congratulations to my right hon. Friend. Does he agree that one of the spin-offs of the location of so many companies in Northern Ireland and of inward investment is that manufacturing output is rising at twice the level of the United Kingdom overall, that exports have risen by more than 25 per cent. in the past three years, and that, as a consequence, unemployment is now down to the lowest level for more than fourteen and a half years?

**Mr. Ancram:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his initial remarks and for the points that he raised. It is important to appreciate and to welcome the fact that, since the ceasefires last year, 6,000 jobs have been promoted by the IDB, of which more than 4,000 were generated by inward investment. In the financial year 1994-95, Northern Ireland attracted three times its per capita share of new inward investment jobs into the United Kingdom.

### International Fund for Ireland

7. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of whether sums expended by the international fund for Ireland are targeted at those in greatest need. [9632]

**Sir John Wheeler:** Her Majesty's Government are kept fully appraised of the work of the fund through the advisory committee of senior officials, who, in turn, advise the fund's independent board. On the facts as advised to me, I am satisfied that the fund targets those in greatest need through its focus on disadvantaged areas, where some 70 per cent. of its resources are spent.

**Mr. Ross:** Is the Minister aware that whenever an application is made to the Housing Executive for a grant to repair a house, the applicant is means tested, but that no such means test applies when an individual, no matter how wealthy—and some of them are—applies for a grant to erect a dwelling or dwellings on derelict sites? Surely that is a total waste of public funds, since many of those sites could be sold profitably on the open market. Will the Minister arrange for serious consideration to be given to those matters?

**Sir John Wheeler:** The international fund is independent. As I understand it, it has helped to establish some 23,000 jobs in Northern Ireland and provides funding to a variety of organisations, including, the hon. Gentleman will be glad to note, some £330,000 to the Limavady small business agency in his constituency. I take note of what he says and I will ensure that the chairman of the fund is informed of his concern.

### Drug Trafficking

8. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many (a) arrests and (b) convictions have been made on charges of alleged drug trafficking offences in Northern Ireland for each of the last three years. [9633]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The Royal Ulster Constabulary drugs squad collates figures showing the total number of

persons arrested for all types of drugs offences. It is not possible to identify separately how many were arrested for drugs trafficking offences. There were a total of 610 arrests in 1992; 976 in 1993; and 1,196 in 1994. The number of convictions for drugs trafficking offences were 29 in 1992; 110 in 1993; and 116 in 1994.

**Mr. McAvoy:** Does the Minister accept that the increase in those on-going figures shows the developing nature of the real problem of drug abuse in Northern Ireland? Many voluntary groups tackle drug abuse in Northern Ireland, such as the Northlands project in Londonderry/Derry, and Dunlewey, Contact Youth and Panda in Belfast. Those organisations receive some funding from the Government, but, in view of the need to tackle the problem on an overall basis, will he seriously consider increasing Government funding of those organisations?

**Sir John Wheeler:** I am glad to tell the hon. Gentleman that I shortly expect to make a visit to the Northlands project so that I can see for myself the quality and extent of the work being done. I shall be visiting other projects too. In recognition of the growth of the drugs problem in Northern Ireland, funding has been increased to assist in education on the drug habit and its prevention. In addition, the RUC establishment has been greatly increased to prevent such offences.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 January. [9656]

**The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major):** This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Mr. Sheerman:** Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the director general of the Confederation of British Industry, who said today:

"It is blindingly obvious that we must develop a framework"—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. There should be no quoting during questions.

**Mr. Sheerman:** The director general said that we must develop a framework for involving employees at every level—dare I say it, a stakeholder economy. If it is blindingly obvious to the director general of the CBI, why is it not blindingly obvious to the Prime Minister that the reason why his Government are so deeply unpopular is that they have failed to give the British people a proper stake in their own country?

**The Prime Minister:** If I may say so to the hon. Gentleman, he should be cautious about quoting the CBI at me. The CBI opposes the social chapter, the minimum wage and most of the policies advocated by the Opposition. When we and the director general of the CBI talk about stakeholders, we do not mean what the hon. Gentleman means. We know who Labour's stakeholders are. We know who owns 50 per cent. of the votes at the Labour party conference. We know who pays 50 per cent. of the money that the Labour party gets. We know what has been said by senior trade unionists. They have made it clear. While they continue to fund the party they will have a say. It is simple—no say, no pay. They are Labour's stakeholders.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the continuing campaign of violence by the IRA and Sinn Fein has betrayed the peace process? Will he urge them now to accept the Mitchell report's recommendation and cease their heinous actions immediately? Furthermore, does he agree that if peace is to continue long term in Northern Ireland, the IRA and Sinn Fein have two clear options open to them? They can either begin immediately to decommission weapons or they can agree to take part in the democratic process, as outlined by my right hon. Friend yesterday.

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, of course, my hon. Friend is right in all she says. The point made by the Mitchell Commission about the decommissioning of weapons was that Sinn Fein-IRA would not decommission, not that they could not decommission. We still look forward to hearing from Sinn Fein-IRA whether they accept the other elements of the Mitchell report—whether they accept the six principles and the fact that they must condemn and stop for good punishment beatings and punishment killings. We still await a comprehensive response from them on those matters. I should like to start all-party talks as speedily as possible, but I cannot be clearer to the House than this—the impediment to all-party talks is and has been the unwillingness of Sinn Fein-IRA to begin the decommissioning of their arms. If they would begin the decommissioning of their arms, there would be no justification for any party not to attend and join in all-party talks leading to negotiations.

**Mr. Blair:** Does the Prime Minister agree that the test results for 11-year-olds in English and maths are appalling? May I put to him the following proposals for improvement? I propose an end to the delay in base-line assessment for five-year-olds, a reduction in class sizes for five-to-seven-year-olds, a register of national head teachers, the use of associate teachers in classrooms and a reinstatement of the reading recovery programme for primary school children which was so wrongly scrapped. Will the Prime Minister at least consider those proposals?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me say first that we have looked very carefully at the test results. Those of 11-year-olds are disappointing; those of other age groups are better. The point that the right hon. Gentleman and the House need to bear in mind—I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has apparently changed his policy on this—is that, as he will recall, the Labour party opposed the introduction of the tests, and he personally voted against it. We introduced the tests precisely to throw up the shortcomings that we believed were probably in the education system. The test results are very useful: they tell us where the shortcomings are so that we may deal with them, and we shall consider a range of measures with which to deal with them.

I do not intend to respond immediately to the ideas that the right hon. Gentleman has produced, but we established the tests so that we could identify shortcomings and then put them right. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman now acknowledges—better late than never—that we were right to introduce those tests.

**Mr. Blair:** Was that not a complacent reply? Will the Prime Minister confirm that the problem does not relate merely to 11-year-olds? The GCSE results a few weeks ago also showed a decline. May I put it to the Prime Minister that, although the Secretary of State for Education and Employment may boast about the results for 14-year-olds today, those results still show an appalling level of failure in key curriculum subjects?

May I remind Conservative Members that these are children who were born under a Conservative Government, sent to school under a Conservative Government and educated under a Conservative Government? The failure is not theirs, but the Conservative Government's.

**The Prime Minister:** If it is the Conservative Government who have failed, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could explain why some of his right hon. Friends remove their children from Labour education authorities and have them educated under Conservative education authorities. While we are on the subject of the 16 years, perhaps he would also register the fact that in 1979 fewer than a quarter of pupils obtained five GCSEs; today the figure is 43 per cent. In 1979, 14 per cent. obtained two A-levels; now the figure is twice as high. In 1979, one in eight young people went to university; now, one in three do so.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to class sizes. I will tell him about class sizes. The Office of Standards in Education has itself recognised that the quality of teaching is the important issue. The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but parents agree. I shall give him an illustration. For example, for children up to the age of 16, the average class size in secondary schools in Islington is lower than at the London Oratory. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Blair:** There it is. The Government do not want to answer questions about the test results, and now we see the reason why they want to focus attention on one 11-year-old child—*[Interruption.]* The reason why they want to focus attention on one 11-year-old child is to conceal the damage that they have done to millions of our children.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman will really have to learn to keep cool under pressure. If he casts his mind back, he may remember the episode of Jennifer's ear before the last election, and if he wants to talk about records and standards in education, he may remember that his deputy leader said that school performance tables are "political propaganda". Test results are "virtually worthless", said the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). Tests encourage "a climate of failure" said the hon. Member for Dewsbury. They say that grant-maintained schools are wrong, but they are perfectly happy to use them. The fact of the matter is that Labour Members enjoy choice themselves, but they wish to deny it to other people.

**Sir Hector Monro:** Is my right hon. Friend aware, which I am sure he is, that today is the anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns who lived the latter part of his short and remarkable life in Dumfries? *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The House must come to order. I cannot hear the right hon. Gentleman, nor can the Prime Minister.

**Sir Hector Monro:** Is my right hon. Friend further aware that, this year, Scotland and countries further afield will be commemorating the 200th anniversary of the great poet's death? Will he send to Scotland, to the Burns Federation and to his drouthy cronies in the House a message of good will on his important bicentenary?

**The Prime Minister** *rose—[Interruption.]* The deputy leader of the Opposition is heckling again. I must explain to the House that, despite occasional differences between us, the Leader of the Opposition and I have one thing in common: neither of us invites the deputy leader to meetings.

As to the remarkable anniversary referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), he is wise to mention it. I am a great admirer of Rabbie Burns and I should like to explain why by quoting what he said. His view on the constitution, for example—to be wrecked by the Labour party, if it came to power—was clear:

"As to Reform Principles, I look upon the British Constitution . . . to be the most glorious Constitution on earth, or that perhaps the wit of man can frame."

That was Rabbie Burns's view. The Scottish National party might remember that and so might the Leader of the Opposition and his party.

Q2. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 January. [9657]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Jamieson:** During national empty homes week, in a fortnight's time, what advice will the Prime Minister be giving to the Ministry of Defence about the 552 empty married quarters in his own Huntingdon constituency?

**The Prime Minister:** At the moment, I should tell the hon. Gentleman two things. First, we shall be looking at the ways in which we can dispose of empty Ministry of Defence properties—we are determined to do that. Secondly, if the Labour-controlled authorities in London filled up their empty accommodation, they could wipe out homelessness in London at a stroke. In Southwark, Islington, Hackney and right across London, Labour-controlled authorities have an appalling record of keeping homes empty and then complaining about homelessness—as the hon. Gentleman has done. That is another illustration of Labour's hypocrisy. They make claims about something—they have the power in their hands to put it right, but don't.

**Mr. Sheerman:** On the ropes again, John.

**The Prime Minister:** I now have a definition of hope over optimism.

Q3. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 January. [9658]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Hendry:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that GP fundholding has brought enormous benefits to doctors and patients alike, especially in my constituency, in which they cover some 90 per cent. of the population? Is not it typical of the say one thing, do another Labour party that, while many of them take advantage of GP fundholding for themselves and their families, at a moment's notice, they would abolish it? Is not that typical of the hypocrisy of the modern Labour party?

**The Prime Minister:** I think that there is now overwhelming evidence that fundholders are able to get a better deal for their patients from hospitals. It makes sense to build on what has been achieved and induce more and more GPs to join the system—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry to hear cries of objection from the Opposition Benches. Those are not my words but the words of the vice-president of the Fabian Society and former adviser to Barbara Castle.

## Business of the House

3.31 pm

**Mrs. Ann Taylor** (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House provide details of future business?

**The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton):** The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 29 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Housing Bill.

TUESDAY 30 JANUARY—Opposition Day (3rd Allotted Day). Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on the record of the privatised water companies, followed by a debate entitled "The Cuts in Overseas Aid". Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

Motion on the Police Grant Report (England and Wales).

WEDNESDAY 31 JANUARY—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motions on the English revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Debate on the Royal Navy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 2 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Debate on policing of London on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

*[Wednesday 31 January:*

*The following reports are relevant:*

*The Local Government Finance Report (England) (1996-97); the National Parks Supplementary Grant Report (England) 1996-97); the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1996-97); Special Grant Report (No. 16).]*

I am afraid that I am not able to be as forthcoming as I should like to be this week about the following three days—6, 7 and 8 February—but I hope to provide an Opposition day, and it may be necessary to take Government business on Thursday 8 February.

On Friday 9 February, the business will be Private Members' Bills.

**Mrs. Taylor:** I thank the Leader of the House for that information, and also for responding to our request for a separate debate on the police grant report on Tuesday. In the past, the Leader of the House has also made favourable noises about the desirability of a debate in this Session on further changes to our parliamentary procedures. When I last raised the matter, the right hon. Gentleman was not unsympathetic. I wonder whether he has any further thoughts on what he might do to find time for a wide-ranging debate, which might lead to further improvements in the workings of the House following the changes that we have already made with the Jopling report.

I asked for that especially so that we might consider one aspect of the changes required, to which I have referred during the previous two business question sessions. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that in each of those two sessions I asked about plans to provide time for a debate on the EC directives that the Scrutiny Committee unanimously recommended should be debated on the Floor of the House. I refer in particular to economic and monetary union, convergence and social protection. Having had two weeks to consider, can he now tell us when the issues might be debated? Can he also tell us the timetable for the publication of the Government's White Paper and any subsequent debate that should take place in the House?

We heard this week—though not through any announcement in the House—that the Government are retreating from their plans to introduce identity cards. The position has moved from the Prime Minister believing that they should be compulsory, to the Home Secretary saying that they should be voluntary, to nothing at all. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that is the Government's position? Will he further confirm that Ministers have suggested that other forms of identity cards, such as those proposed for driving licences and Department of Social Security purposes, do not require legislation? If that is the case, and if the Government are proposing to introduce such measures without legislation, would not it be wise—indeed, proper—to provide a mechanism to gain parliamentary approval before any such measures are taken?

In view of today's National Audit Office report that more than 16 per cent. of benefit awards contain errors, will the right hon. Gentleman find time for a debate on the staggering levels of waste that have been revealed? Such a debate would allow us to examine the full extent of the incompetence of the Benefits Agency and to raise the problems that such errors create for our constituents.

**Mr. Newton:** I shall take the hon. Lady's points in the order in which they were raised. I am grateful for her remarks about the police grant report. I always try to respond to representations, even though I cannot always do so. I am glad to have been able to do so on that matter.

I remain sympathetic to the idea of a debate on parliamentary procedures and I shall continue to keep the matter on what I have recently been calling my list.

I have made further inquiries about the points that the hon. Lady has raised a couple of times relating to European legislation. I am advised that the Committee reports that it is said will contain the recommendation to which the hon. Lady referred are not yet available. As soon as they are, I shall consider her request in the usual way.

On the hon. Lady's point about the White Paper, I assume that she was referring to the White Paper on the intergovernmental conference. I am not yet able to give further guidance on the timing for that.

No decision has been taken on whether an identity card should be introduced and, if so, what sort of card it should be. Specifically, none of the options in the Green Paper has been ruled either in or out. The time to consider what sort of debate might be appropriate is when we reach a decision on what might or might not be done.

I understand why the hon. Lady felt it right to raise a point about the National Audit Office report. However, the Auditor General commended

"the energetic and effective steps to address fraud and error"

that were being taken.

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North): May we have an early debate next week on choice in education so that we can, in particular, consider education for 11-year-olds and examine why the Leader of the Opposition is so

obsessed with the education of a single 11-year-old and so unconcerned about the education of all the other 11-year-olds throughout the country?

**Mr. Newton:** I certainly cannot begin to explain that—and more to the point, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Leader of the Opposition cannot begin to explain that.

**Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Having regard to the concerns throughout the UK about the privatisation of British Rail and also to the puzzling reluctance of Her Majesty's official Opposition to use one of their Supply days to debate the subject, may we have an early debate—preferably in the week beginning 5 February—to discuss that very important subject?

**Mr. Newton:** I take that as a plea addressed to Labour Front-Bench Members. No doubt there will be time for a Liberal Supply day, and the hon. Gentleman can perhaps consider that as a subject for the debate. I have no plans, however, for such a debate in Government time.

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): In view of the proposals from European Commissioner Bangemann for a European-wide defence procurement agency and a system of tariffs for the import of defence equipment from outside the EU, may we have a debate on trade and industry policy on one of the free days that remains in the week after next, so that the potential damage to national security caused if such proposals were carried through can be debated?

**Mr. Newton:** I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the debate that I have announced for next Thursday on the Royal Navy. He may find some way of taking part in that debate and raising the points to which he referred.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): May I ask the Leader of the House a question of which I have given his office notice? Could we have a statement next week on the validity or otherwise of a report emanating from Japan and published in *Le Monde*, that iodine 131, caesium 137 and strontium 90 elements have leaked in Mururoa? If the report is true, does not that undermine the assurance that was given by France that it was impossible for leaks to occur in material encased in rock? Does not that raise a question about the dangers arising from fissures in subterranean rocks? Will the Government consider the introduction of an international commission, as has been asked for in leading articles in *Asahi Shimbun* and other serious papers in Japan?

**Mr. Newton:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman who, with his usual courtesy, has given me notice of his question. I am advised that the French have assured us that the recent reports do not relate to the current test programme, and they have confirmed that the so-called revelations relate to information that has been public for some time. It remains the British Government's position that we have no reason to doubt the assurances that President Chirac has given that the tests do not put at risk the environment or public health. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the President has invited independent experts to visit the region to verify that for themselves.

**Sir Peter Emery** (Honiton): In addition to one of the points made by the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), may I remind my right hon. Friend and the House that the Procedure Committee has started an in-depth inquiry into secondary legislation, statutory instruments and indirect legislation coming from Europe? While a debate might well assist the Committee in carrying that work through, any views that any hon. Member wishes to express on the matter of secondary and indirect legislation would be willingly received by the Procedure Committee.

**Mr. Newton:** I take that as an advertisement to the House by my right hon. Friend, the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, and I am happy to endorse it. I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) to my right hon. Friend's comments, as I know that my hon. Friend has a strong interest in those matters.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): The Leader of the House has tried his level best during the past few months to give the House advance information, and he has given us the dates for the Easter recess and various other dates. But somehow in the past six or nine months, he has not been able to provide us with the date of publication of the Scott report or the date for a debate on the report in the House. I am beginning to realise that he has not done that because the heads of four Cabinet Ministers are on the block. It is high time that the public out there were given a chance to see what is happening and how much fiddling has been taking place. Are the Government screwing Scott's arms up his back? Why has the report not been published, to let us get to know the truth?

**Mr. Newton:** There are two reasons. One is that I have not hitherto been asked—*[Interruption.]*—so far as I can recall. The other is that it is not for me to set the date, as the publication of the report is a matter for Sir Richard Scott.

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Mid-Kent): Given the surprising information vouchsafed to us yesterday that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) learnt more from being underground than in grammar school, could we have a debate that would allow us to discuss whether underground tests are thoroughly satisfactory?

**Mr. Newton:** I have no answer to that, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Gerald Bermingham** (St. Helens, South): As the Leader of the House was unable to answer the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), perhaps he can make some inquiries, because Lord Howe seems to know the date—he was certainly attacking it in the press today, anyway. While we wait for Scott, could not the right hon. Gentleman reconsider the Ordtech appeal, which I raised with him a little while ago, and the principles involved in that case, in which innocent men stood the risk of going to prison while documents were hidden from them? Should not that be a matter for an early debate before Scott?

**Mr. Newton:** I certainly do not have any plans for an early debate before Scott. It would seem right that matters of that sort should await the publication of the report, on whatever date that turns out to be.

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): I know that my right hon. Friend is very concerned that there should

*[Mr. Tony Marlow]*

be good relationships throughout the House. I wonder whether he might feel that we should have an early debate on the subject, particularly given the bad blood that has recently developed between the Leader and the deputy Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and the whole Labour party. Is he aware of an article in *The Independent* yesterday headed, "Tony, Gordon and no Joy", which sets out the growing chasm, I fear, between the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor? There is an incipient tragedy of Cain and Abel proportions and perhaps my right hon. Friend can pour some oil on troubled waters in that debate.

**Mr. Newton:** Having seen the interesting article to which my hon. Friend refers, I would observe merely that, judging from the faces behind him during the last two sessions of Prime Minister's questions, there is a chasm between the Leader of the Opposition and almost everyone behind him.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South-East): Bearing in mind the fact that it is just over 12 months since a serious air crash at Baginton airport in Coventry, will the Leader of the House tell us when the Government are prepared to produce proposals to deal with small airports outside London? Will he also direct his attention to the fact that the Government produced a report on the crash—when will we have a debate in the House on that?

**Mr. Newton:** I recall the hon. Gentleman raising related matters with me some time ago. I am sorry that I did not get back to him earlier. I dropped him a note this afternoon saying that I continue to bear his thoughts in mind, but pointing out—I hope that this will not be offensive to you, Madam Speaker—that that sounds like a good subject for a Wednesday morning debate, if the hon. Gentleman applies for one.

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): May I endorse the call by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) for a debate on choice in education, perhaps with the theme, "Don't do as I do, do as I tell you"? That will give me the opportunity to mention Michael Hindley, the Labour Member of the European Parliament who lives in a neighbouring constituency to mine, who sends his child more than 10 miles to a grant-maintained selective school in my constituency. That would allow us to point out to the public that the stench of hypocrisy runs far deeper than the Opposition Benches in Westminster—to the European Parliament.

**Mr. Newton:** It is certainly becoming clear that, across a range of matters, Opposition policy is to say one thing, but do another.

**Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours** (Workington): I met executives of Campbell Soups of Camden, New Jersey in my office this morning and they were as intransigent as ever, despite the fact that 340 Members of Parliament—the majority of the House—have asked them to keep their factory open. Can we debate those matters in Government time and will the Leader of the House further strengthen my campaign, calling on the wider public to boycott Fray Bentos products and Campbell Soups products, so that the company learns the feeling of the British people?

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Gentleman knows that the policy, within the law, of commercial companies is a matter for those companies, not for the Government. I would not expect to provide Government time for such a debate. I have already suggested the possibility of a Wednesday morning debate to him. Having seen the hon. Gentleman in operation in various forums, I am glad that I was not one of the directors of the company at the meeting with him.

**Mr. Richard Tracey** (Surbiton): While my right hon. Friend is considering the request for a debate on education, will he consider broadening the debate to include the subject of grammar schools, so that the many Labour Members who went to grammar school can explain to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) why they are against grammar schools so fiercely and so that she can explain to them why she has privately chosen one for her son? It may be because the school is in a well-run Conservative local education authority.

**Mr. Newton:** I am always glad to consider opportunities for the inexplicable to be explained, but I think that the debate would reveal that it remains inexplicable.

**Mr. Dafydd Wigley** (Caernarfon): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 335 on home workers, which is supported by hon. Members of all parties?

[*That this House recognises that many homeworkers are failing to secure protection in law to which they are at present entitled, but on which they frequently miss out because of loopholes in legislation; further recognises that the Treasury is losing hundreds of millions of pounds of national insurance contributions arising from the same loopholes; and calls on Government to allow progress on the Employment (Homeworkers) Bill.*]

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there are 1 million home workers, the rights of many of whom, which should have been established by legislation, are not being observed because of loopholes in the law that also deny the Treasury many millions of pounds? Will he ensure that the Government take a positive attitude to the Employment (Homeworkers) Bill, which is currently before the House?

**Mr. Newton:** As the hon. Gentleman said, the Employment (Homeworkers) Bill is before the House. I am sure that my hon. Friends will indicate the Government's approach to the Bill if it is debated. I also understand that home workers have the same employment rights as other workers.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 295, which concerns replacement medals for war veterans?

[*That this House urges the Ministry of Defence to accept the petition of Mr. Jack Conn, dated 19th December 1995, to allow him and other pensioners, who were awarded medals in recognition of service in the armed forces of Her Majesty the Queen or her predecessors and who have had these either stolen or lost through misadventure, to have them replaced, recognising the debt we owe them 50 years after the end of the Second World War.*]

Could my right hon. Friend prevail upon my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to have a debate on the matter? The 50th anniversaries of VE and VJ day took place last year and many veterans were unable to parade with their medals.

**Mr. Newton:** There have been many requests for replacement medals in recent years and a great deal of effort is being made to meet them. I am sure that we all want them to be met wherever possible, because we owe those people a great debt of gratitude. I shall bring to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary the way in which my hon. Friend raised the matter this afternoon.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will remember that last week he trailed the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Time did not allow it to be dealt with today. May I therefore press the Leader of the House for a statement next week from the Secretary of State on greater use of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, which would create greater democracy and allow greater use of parliamentary time?

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that oral questions that are not reached are answered in writing. He may have noticed that, just before the end of Northern Ireland questions, I was looking at the file of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which contained the answer to that question. I have an interest in the matter that was generated, in part but not wholly, by the hon. Gentleman's previous questions to me. I think that I can assure him that he will welcome the positive spirit of the answer that will be given.

**Mr. Roy Thomason** (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend find time to debate the millennium exhibition, so that the overwhelming advantages of Birmingham's national exhibition centre over Greenwich as a venue can be clearly put on record and the importance of the west midlands at the heart of this country can be stated?

**Mr. Newton:** I can safely assure my hon. Friend that even though it is not in the normal sense a Government body, the Millennium Commission is well aware of the cases being made from a number of directions.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland on his Department's breaches of central Government conventions on publicity and advertising? Does the Leader of the House acknowledge that we now know that last Wednesday there were at least two breaches of the conventions in two separate press statements advertising a single speech? Is not it time that the Secretary of State for Scotland came and made a statement to apologise to the House and to the people of Scotland, instead of making unfortunate civil servants apologise to him?

**Mr. Newton:** I have nothing to add to what I said last week. It is clear that an error was made and that the Secretary of State for Scotland had every intention of observing the guidelines and did not intend to breach them. I see no reason why he should make a statement to repeat what has already been said in other ways.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): Will my right hon. Friend seek to arrange at an early date a general debate on crime and vandalism, and the problems that they create for the citizens of this country? Both sides of the House can then explore the exciting initiatives that the Government have taken, not least the provision of funds for closed circuit television, and also I, as the representative for Macclesfield, can support the application being made by the borough and police of Macclesfield for assistance under that scheme to install closed circuit television in Macclesfield town centre.

**Mr. Newton:** I must confess that my hon. Friend has caught me out as I have before me a brief on the Poynton bypass.

**Mr. Winterton:** Read it out.

**Mr. Newton:** Although I recognise that Macclesfield is some way from London, in a general sense some of the points that my hon. Friend seeks to make might be relevant to the debate on policing in London, which I have announced for Monday week.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): The Leader of the House seems strangely reluctant to arrange debates about the European Union. One European item has already been discussed, but six items, some of which date back to 1994, are waiting to go into European Standing Committee A and 11 are waiting to go into European Standing Committee B. Should not the scrutiny of European matters be speeded up by holding more discussions on the Floor of the House?

**Mr. Newton:** I do not think that I have shown any such reluctance. I have tried to answer questions put to me as straightforwardly as I can. I shall look into the hon. Gentleman's specific point about outstanding European matters.

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): May I ask my right hon. Friend for an urgent debate on early-day motion 3?

[*That this House calls on the Government to acknowledge that over 3,000 people with haemophilia have been infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV) as a result of NHS treatment with contaminated blood products; recognises that over 50 people with haemophilia are now understood to have died from liver disease contracted as a result; and considers giving similar financial assistance to those infected with HCV, who currently receive no additional help, as for those infected in the same way with HIV who have been compensated by the Government.*]

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Haemophilia Society has produced a publication that shows that haemophiliacs with hepatitis C are suffering great hardship? Is it not illogical that haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C who have then died should have received no compensation, while those infected with HIV received compensation? The cause was the same; the consequences have been the same; the reaction has been different. Is not that unfair?

**Mr. Newton:** I know my hon. Friend well and I understand his reasons for raising the matter once again.

*[Mr. Newton]*

However, I am afraid that I cannot add to what I have said to him at least once before or to what has also been said to him by my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Health Department.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): When will we debate the Government's undemocratic and inexplicable opposition to the call to declare St. David's day a bank holiday in Wales? Is the Leader of the House aware that last year Wales and England had fewer bank holidays than any other country in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in Europe? As all the Welsh county councils, which represent every voter in Wales, have signalled their support for that call, how dare the Government, who managed to secure only 4 per cent. of councillors in the last measure of opinion in Wales, continue their opposition to making Dydd Gŵyl Dewi a bank holiday?

**Mr. Newton:** I was not aware that England and Wales were so deprived in that respect. It may be part of the reason why our economy is doing the best in Europe.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): My right hon. Friend will remember that on Monday we voted for an imaginative Conservative measure that provides exciting opportunities for grant-maintained schools to finance their capital projects. May we have a debate next week during which we may express great sympathy for some headmasters of grant-maintained schools, such as St. Olave's school in Orpington, about why in one week parents may gain admission for their children to their school and, in the following week, the same parents may vote against a measure to allow them to develop that school effectively?

**Mr. Newton:** As I have said several times this afternoon, I very much hope that it will be possible to find an opportunity for the answers to those questions to be given, but I remain very unhopeful that any answers will be forthcoming.

**Mr. John McAllion** (Dundee, East): Does the Leader of the House recall the Prime Minister telling the Tory party conference that, while he lived and breathed, the NHS would never be privatised? Will he therefore arrange for the Prime Minister to attend the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Stirling on Monday 29 January, so that he can attempt to explain away the fact that this week, three private consortia were short-listed for the contract to provide NHS hospital services at Stonehaven, near Aberdeen? As well as making allegations about hypocrisy, the Tory party should be prepared to answer those self-same allegations.

**Mr. Newton:** I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's argument in any way fits in with the suggestion that the national health service is being privatised. The health service remains a publicly funded service, as it has been. The issue of the way in which those services are provided is, as in the case of many other services, a separate one.

# Orders of the Day

## Finance Bill

**(Clauses Nos. 36, 105, 112 and 139 and Schedule No. 15)**

*Considered in Committee [Progress, 23 January].*

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

### Clause 139

MIS-SOLD PERSONAL PENSIONS ETC.

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

4 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight):** The purpose of the clause is to exempt from income tax and capital gains tax compensation paid in respect of certain mis-sold personal pensions, buy-out contracts and retirement annuity contracts. The exemption applies where, between 29 April 1988 and 30 June 1994 inclusive, an individual was wrongly advised to transfer from, opt out of or not to join an occupational pension scheme and instead to take out a personal pension scheme, buy-out contract or retirement annuity contract. It may be helpful if I briefly define the terms to which I have referred.

"Transfer" means the payment of a sum of money from an employer's pension scheme into a personal pension plan or a buy-out contract. "Opt-out" means someone who is a member of an employer's pension scheme and who leaves that scheme while still employed by the company, and takes out a personal pension instead. "Non-joiner" means someone who, on starting a job, decides not to join their employer's scheme even though he or she is able to do so, and takes out a personal pension scheme instead.

The problem has been identified. It became clear to regulators and to the Government that some sales of personal pensions had taken place on the basis of advice that was bad, and not given in accordance with the regulatory rules then in force.

**Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours** (Workington): Early in her speech, the hon. Lady used the word "mis-sold", and she used that word rather quietly. Will she explain to us how it was that so many people managed to buy a product that was obviously not one that they should have purchased? How was it that they were mis-sold that product?

**Mrs. Knight:** The clause is entitled "Mis-sold personal pensions etc." Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to read it, because it goes into some detail—

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** What about the background?

**Mrs. Knight:** It goes into some detail of the aspects that we propose to help in such cases.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** That is not what I asked.

**Mrs. Knight:** In reply to the substance of the hon. Gentleman's question, the background to the

investigation that is taking place at the moment is well documented. He will have read it in many of the reports by the various regulators who are inquiring into the matter, and I shall say more about it later. If the hon. Gentleman would care to wait a few moments and allow me to proceed, I believe that he will find that the questions he asks will be answered.

The hon. Gentleman will recall—we all recall—that my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), made a statement to the House on 25 October 1994. He announced that anyone with a personal pension who was found to face financial hardship as a result of mis-selling would be entitled to redress. The aim is to put people in a financial position equivalent to that in which they would have been if the mis-selling had not taken place. But to do that, a considerable amount of work needs to be done to identify those who have suffered loss as a result of the mis-selling and to assess how much compensation is due.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** The hon. Lady keeps using the word "mis-selling". I understand that, in so far as she is giving a taxpayer a subsidy towards redressing the difficulties that have arisen, we are in fact talking about taxpayers' money being used to deal with a problem that was generated by mis-selling. In this debate, we are surely entitled to know why it happened. Why did people find themselves in a position where they bought products that were obviously inappropriate in the circumstances? May we be given a little background information, because we are spending taxpayers' money today, are we not?

**Mrs. Knight:** People were given wrong advice—in most instances as a consequence of the mis-selling; people may well find that their financial position is not as beneficial as it would have been if, for example, they had stayed within the occupational pension scheme.

The proposals are designed to identify those people and, where possible, to reinstate them into the occupational pension scheme. For some individuals, such redress—entry into either the occupational pension scheme or the personal pension scheme that they took out—is not available, because they have retired. Under those circumstances, a cash payment will be made—the Government do not consider it correct to tax in those circumstances.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** Is it fair to say that there was a deficiency in the regulatory approach adopted by the Government for regulating the industry, which is why the problem occurred? Is it fair to say that we are paying today because of a lack of Government regulation in a sector where clearly there should have been regulation? Is that what the hon. Lady is saying?

**Mrs. Knight:** No. I am saying that some people did not pay proper attention to the regulation that was in place. Personal pensions have been sold correctly to a considerable number of people. However, it is those pensions that have not been sold correctly to some other people that we are addressing. In certain circumstances, where compensation is paid in the way that I have just explained to the hon. Gentleman, people may be liable for tax, but the Government do not consider it right to tax people in these circumstances. I hope that that is something with which the hon. Gentleman and other Labour Members will agree.

**Mr. Alistair Darling** (Edinburgh, Central): I wonder whether what the hon. Lady has just said is correct. It is common ground throughout the industry and among all the regulators that the regulations in force when the mis-selling took place were deficient. Her assertion that certain salesmen ignored regulations that were adequate is not right, unless the Government are changing their view. There used to be common ground between the hon. Lady's predecessor and myself that the regulations were deficient at the time, which is why they were subsequently changed.

**Mrs. Knight:** The hon. Gentleman knows full well that we have tightened up the regulations, and rightly so. He also knows full well that a considerable number of pensions have been sold, and the circumstances in which they were sold were good, and the consequences for the individuals who bought them have been good.

We are today talking about a small minority. A considerable number of people were sold pensions that were fine and a considerable number of people have made prudent provision, and will receive its benefit under the regulations that were in place at the time. One must, if necessary, tighten up the existing regulations, and we have done so. But one must also put the problem in perspective, which is what my predecessor did in his statement to the House on 25 October. The clause takes the issue forward from that statement.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Is not the truth of the matter that the Minister is saying that the Government made a mistake, the regulations were deficient, the Government did not know, and now, today, they are putting that right? People did not make a mistake on their own account—the regulations were there and people made their investments.

Now the taxpayer is going to bail them out, and that could be called a subsidy. The Government are involved in a subsidy because of a deficiency in their regulations. I want to know how many people are involved, and how much in total the taxpayers out there in the hon. Lady's constituency and mine will have to find to foot the bill for that mistake by the Government.

**Mrs. Knight:** The Committee will not be surprised to learn that I do not agree with the construction that the hon. Gentleman has put on the issue. However, I am sure that he will agree—I look forward to hearing his confirmation—that those people who are affected, who have retired and who therefore cannot be helped by the restitution to an occupational pension or a top-up to a personal pension—should be compensated, and should not have to pay tax on that compensation. I am sure that people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency who find themselves in that position will welcome the fact that the Government have decided not to tax their compensation.

I am not able now to give the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) the total numbers involved, nor am I prepared to speculate. We will all have the numbers when the review is complete.

It is clear from the review so far that the majority of cases are people who either transferred out of or opted out of pensions, and that redress for those people will be achieved by restoring them to the occupational pension or by topping up their existing personal pensions. That is a different issue,

*[Mrs. Knight]*

but the majority will come into that category. However, a few will have retired, so cash compensation will be the only help available to them.

If I might proceed, that would be of real help to the Committee.

**Mr. Darling:** May I help the hon. Lady out again? The figure that she is grasping for is 400,000.

**Mrs. Knight** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Darling:** It is. The Personal Investment Authority, which has taken the lead in investigating the matter, believes that 400,000 pensions were wrongly sold. On that basis, surely the Government must have some estimate as to the cost of the measure.

**Mrs. Knight:** The hon. Gentleman should be careful about bandying numbers around. Until the review is complete, there is no way in which accurate numbers can be given. That is the reason why I do not propose to do so. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will have read press reports in which the numbers were much lower, but I cannot confirm, deny or comment on them. It would be better for the Committee to deal with the problem before us, rather than to speculate on numbers which may not be even reasonably accurate, because, until the review is complete, we will not know.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours** *rose—*

**Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe) *rose—*

**Mrs. Knight:** I will give way.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. To which hon. Member is the hon. Lady giving way?

**Mr. Betts:** I think that the hon. Lady has given way to me.

**The Chairman:** Order. I would be grateful if the hon. Lady would indicate to which of the two hon. Members she has given way.

**Mrs. Knight:** I apologise, Mr. Morris. I gave way to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts).

**Mr. Betts:** The Minister said that she cannot speculate about the figures. Given that the Government are talking—rightly—about compensation and tax relief on that compensation, presumably they have made contingency plans in their estimates for future expenditure and future reduction of income. Surely the Minister can explain to the House precisely how much those contingency plans will cost, as they must be based on the numbers of people involved.

**Mrs. Knight:** The problem relates to industry mis-selling to individuals; therefore, financial redress and the payment of compensation to individuals are matters for the industry. The Government propose not to charge tax on compensation when it is paid in cash to individuals. We expect the number of people involved to be relatively small, but until the review has been finished, we cannot speculate on numbers.

It does not make sense to pull numbers out of a hat or to try to make estimates when we do not have the facts available. That is why the Government are waiting for the review to be completed. We are urging the regulators involved to complete the review as quickly as possible. As the hon. Member for Attercliffe will know, we had hoped that the review would be completed by now, but the principal delays have been caused by legal cases. That is unfortunate, but we must live with it. Those cases have now concluded, and the review is continuing apace.

4.15 pm

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** Will the Minister confirm that we could be talking about many millions of pounds of taxpayers' money which must be used to bail out those people who are in difficulty as a result of Government negligence in the past?

**Mrs. Knight:** It is not negligence, and I ask the hon. Gentleman not to use that term. The Government have not been negligent, but there has been mis-selling by the industry; that is where the responsibility lies.

The levels of compensation and the total bill will be revealed in due course, once the specifics are known. The vast majority of compensation payments will be borne by the industry. The Government will be involved in only a very small area, in the sense that tax may become an issue in a small number of cases. The clause ensures that the tax problem will not be borne by the individual concerned, but that it will be resolved by ensuring that there is no tax payable at that time. I repeat that it is one small circumstance; it is not the case with the majority of the money that will be involved in paying compensation in various forms.

I must make some progress, although I suspect that many of the points that I intended to make have been covered in the discussion. The Securities and Investments Board and self-regulatory organisation programmes—which have been worked up in order to set in train the process of determining who has and who has not been mis-sold a pension—are under way. The SIB released a detailed statement on 16 January, in which it revealed the stage that the review has reached. Those who have mis-sold personal pensions are beginning to put the matter right.

However, we should not kid ourselves: it is a mammoth exercise. Many of the large life companies have written tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of letters to their clients. Once returned, the questionnaires that they have sent must be analysed. We are now beginning to see the first fruits of the process, as payments are starting to be made. Conducting the review is a big task, but it is worth while.

It is worth it because people have the right to expect the investment advice they take to be in their best interests. When it is not and they lose, they expect that things will be put right. Personal pensions are a very good thing. They offer people flexibility in planning for the future, and it is in the interests of everyone—individuals and the industry—that confidence is restored.

Many firms have been actively engaged in taking the review forward, but the pattern is not uniform. A few of the firms concerned have not applied themselves to the task with the vigour that might be expected. Legal actions have also been brought, which have slowed the review, and, as a consequence, progress has not been as fast as we had hoped. However, those who have put obstacles in the way have only delayed the review. It is now on course, and I assure the House that it will be taken forward with vigour and will be carried through to a positive conclusion.

Let no one underestimate the task at hand, but let no one get it out of proportion. All those involved in the industry are particularly keen to identify those who have been the victims of mis-selling, and to resolve the matter satisfactorily.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** I am a little worried about some of the debts that a Labour Government—elected probably in April or May next year—will inherit. Will the Minister clarify something for me? Is it possible that a Labour Government might inherit a liability which our taxpayers will have to pay—a liability incurred as a result of negligence by the Conservative Government?

**Mrs. Knight:** The hon. Gentleman should not bank on there being a Labour Government next year. The biggest liability that he will inherit is the social chapter, which is proposed by his colleagues, and its consequences on unemployment in this country. On the mis-selling of pensions, the problem will be there next year, and indeed the year after, but it is a problem that is being solved well.

I now return to the clause itself, which is particularly designed to resolve the issue that we have discussed—instances in which compensation may result in tax. The Government are anxious to do all they can to speed up the compensation process. It is not just the clause that will help people. As I announced on 21 November, on advice from the Government Actuary, the Government have reduced the charges for reinstating the pension entitlement of current public service employees.

**Mr. Betts:** The Minister said that the Government were doing all they can to speed up the process. Perhaps she can name one or two concrete measures that the Government are taking, because many constituents feel that nothing much is happening. They were sold the wrong pensions and are not being compensated—certainly not at any discernible speed.

**Mrs. Knight:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening. I have just named two measures: first, the change that will make it much easier for members of Government pension schemes to get back into pension schemes, as a consequence of the assessment from the Government Actuary; and, secondly, the clause, because it addresses the potential tax issue. These measures have received an immense welcome from the industry as being useful and good to facilitate the pension mis-selling problem.

We also endorse the SIB recommendation that redress should, if possible, take the form of reinstatement in the original occupational pension scheme. Under existing legislation, compensation for the type of mis-selling covered by the SIB review could, depending on the form in which it is paid, be liable to income tax or capital gains tax. The clause covers both eventualities.

The payment of compensation for mis-selling is still in its early stages, and we believe that it is in the interests of all concerned for there to be certainty on the tax treatment of the compensation payments. That is why we have introduced the clause. I commend it to the Committee.

**Mr. Darling:** I have been a Member of the House only since 1987, but I have always understood that it is one of the great traditions in Committee that the Minister says why a clause should stand part of the Bill. I found it quite astonishing that the Minister said that she had no idea how the problem arose or how many people might be involved, yet that it might be a mammoth task. She said that no one should underestimate the task involved, but went on to say that no one should overestimate it either. She could not tell us how many people would possibly be affected. She had no idea how much it will cost. She had very little to say in terms of what the Government are doing to try to resolve the problem.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) rightly suspected, the Government are not doing very much, and one reason for that is that it was they who created the climate that encouraged some unscrupulous people ruthlessly to exploit the vulnerability of many people who had recently been made redundant or were in occupational schemes, who were wrongly persuaded to come out of those schemes and to go into private pensions that were wholly inappropriate for them.

The Minister is coy, either because she genuinely has no idea why the clause has come about and she has simply been good enough to read us a Treasury brief in order to justify the clause; or possibly because she knows full well that the Government have to accept a major responsibility for creating the sort of environment in which it was possible for so many people to be sold policies in a wholly inappropriate manner.

Perhaps I should move that the clause stand part of the Bill, because I agree with its principle. We want to see people reinstated or compensated, as the case may be. Clearly it would be wrong if innocent people then found themselves subject to income tax because of the compensation or the reinstatement that they had been given by those who had wronged them. Therefore, I welcome the clause and believe that it should stand part of the Bill. But in view of the Minister's remarks, it is necessary to push her a little further.

The Opposition have raised the matter many times in the House. It remains one of the scandals of the late 1980s that up to 500,000 people were wrongly sold policies between 1988 and the early 1990s. It is easy to say that that was all the work of one or two unscrupulous or greedy salesmen, but it was not just those individuals.

Senior management knew full well, for example, that many former miners living in constituencies such as Bolsover were not only disillusioned with their employer but were persuaded that the Coal Board pension fund and the National Coal Board were one and the same thing. It was suggested to them that they might like to get out of their pension fund and go into a private pension.

The fundamental point about occupational pensions is that two people contribute to them. As a general rule, two people contributing to a pension fund is rather better than one, which is the case in a private pension. Private pensions are appropriate for many people—I had a private

*[Mr. Darling]*

pension myself in my former employment—but they are wholly inappropriate for a large number of people, and they were inappropriate for about 500,000 people who were wrongly persuaded to transfer their funds into a private pension in the late 1980s.

**Mr. Skinner:** My hon. Friend referred to the fact that many miners were involved at that time in what I would call the scams of pension schemes. It was around the period when the present Prime Minister was a junior Treasury Minister. On occasions such as this, when the Government created the climate for such spivs, someone should carry the can.

That is probably one reason why the Economic Secretary is being coy about the background to the clause. She will never give us the figures. The Government gave us a figure of £21 billion for the public sector borrowing requirement, but within 12 months it had gone up to £29 billion. The Government, who created the climate in which such spivs operated, should carry the can for the resulting mess.

**Mr. Darling:** My hon. Friend will wait in vain. The last time we debated the matter, the Secretary of State for Social Security was present. He too knew something about it, as he was a junior Minister in the Department of Social Security when the problem first arose. Curiously, he did not want to discuss the subject. He preferred to concentrate on other matters.

All Opposition Members remember the advertisement showing a man breaking out of a straitjacket and going to get a private pension. What was so insidious about that was that it encouraged people to believe that the very act of going private was enriching, both spiritually and materially. That was not right, and many people lost money as a result.

As I understand it—the Chief Secretary may be able to obtain assistance from nearby—about 9 million pensions were sold during the period in question, about 500,000 of which may be suspect. The clause refers to the qualifying period as being between 29 April 1988 and 30 June 1994. It would be helpful if the Chief Secretary could let us know why those dates have been selected, how she can be confident that it will catch all those affected, and that there will not be people who might have been mis-sold pensions before the end of April 1988?

It is less likely that the same problem will have arisen after 1994, because—the Minister did not seem to know this—it is common ground that the regulations in force that governed the sale of pensions in the late 1980s were quite different from the regime now in force. They have been tightened up. I am surprised that the hon. Lady did not know that.

The Minister's predecessor knew his stuff. He was well briefed, and could answer such questions. We had differences of opinion about how the situation arose and what could be done to improve it, but the rules and regulations have been changed. I think that the likelihood of problems of mis-selling arising after 1994 is rather less than it was before April 1988.

People should be encouraged to use the financial services industry. More and more people will want to make provision for themselves over and above the provision that they can expect from the state. If they are to do that, however, they will need a regulatory system in which they can have complete confidence. We have proposed measures to make the system simpler and more effective, but the Minister should realise that the root cause of the problem—the reason why the clause must stand part of the Bill—is the climate created by the Government.

4.30 pm

The self-regulatory system is now wholly discredited, and regarded as one of the main reasons for the unscrupulous behaviour that we are discussing. All the problems were produced by the Government's policy. In this as in so many other contexts, they have always been more bothered about the few who stood to gain from the selling than about the many victims who suffered at their hands. No wonder the Minister is so coy about the nature of the problem.

The need for decent advice has never been greater. We should acknowledge the importance of the work done by both the Securities and Investments Board, under Sir Andrew Large, and the Personal Investment Authority, the lead regulator. When I asked the Minister about the numbers involved and the progress being made, she said that it was all wild speculation. She must be aware—such matters are hardly secret—that I often speak to both Sir Andrew Large and Colette Bowe of the PIA, and I take the trouble to try to find out about the current position.

The Minister, however, does not seem to know that. I should have thought that, between them, those at the Treasury could rustle up a meeting or make a telephone call to find out the position. The Minister may have seen the SIB review, which has been circulated to me and, I assume, to those at the Treasury. It has thrown some light on the difficulties.

Most of the life companies—the producers—have got on with the review, and are making quite fast progress. They expect to know what the problem is by the end of the year, and have probably started to compensate some people. Those who were sold policies by the independent financial adviser sector, however, may not be in the same position.

There are two distinct difficulties. First, some independent financial advisers simply do not have the resources to carry out the sort of investigation that is now required of them. Clearly, if a small enterprise is involved, someone who is examining files relating to the past six or seven years cannot be earning, and therefore will not be generating fees and commission to pay staff. I understand that problem, but there is another.

Some of the independent financial advisers' professional indemnity insurers have tried to block the review. There are legal reasons why they might have wanted to test the matter, but their actions were wholly undesirable for the industry's reputation. The Minister mentioned delays in the courts, and they can be blamed to some extent, but much of the problem has been caused by the wilful obstruction of the review.

Another reason for the slow progress is the fact that the self-regulators cannot compel the professional indemnity insurers to get on with the review. They must rely on contracts, and if there are no contracts in the self-regulation system, they are left helpless.

That problem could be remedied. If we are not to see similar clauses in future Finance Bills, the Minister must accept that she has primary responsibility for the matter, and that the present system of self-regulation does not work. As most people outside the industry realise, it has been a complete failure. It is high time that the Government faced up to that. If they do not want a repetition of the present problem, they must accept that self-regulation is ineffective, and—what is worse—is denting the confidence of members of the public whom we want to use the industry. The industry employs 2.5 million people, and many towns and cities depend on it for employment. Self-regulation is not helping the industry, and it is not helping the public.

The Securities and Investments Board review identifies another problem. Paragraph 10 makes the point that there is

"an element of self-selection amongst investors who respond."

There is every reason to believe that, either because of delay or because of lack of knowledge among those who may have been mis-sold pensions, they will not submit their claims before they are legally time-barred. What will the Government do about that? What steps will they take?

It would be most unfortunate if, at the end of this year, when the time bar will start to bite, people have been excluded over and above those who are excluded by the clause because it affects only policies sold after the end of April 1988. Some people, however, may find that they are time-barred, and the clause cannot help them at all.

The Minister must tell us what she will do about that. She was keen to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe that the Government were doing lots of helpful things, and that he had no cause to worry. That is one thing that the Government will have to deal with. Clearly, to amend the general law relating to prescriptions would be to take a sledgehammer to the problem—that is not appropriate—but I am just wondering whether the Government could do something in this case.

Perhaps by the time my hon. Friends have finished speaking in the debate, the Minister will have enlisted some help and be able to assist us on that important point.

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Government spent about £10 billion on advertising to encourage people to withdraw from the state earnings-related pension scheme and to go into personal pension schemes? Some tiny proportion of that money might be usefully spent in the form of newspaper advertisements, first, to apologise for the negligence caused—if the Government are capable of saying sorry—and, secondly, to draw the attention of everyone concerned to the need to apply now to ensure that their claims in terms of tax relief and other applications are not made too late, and do not fall out of compliance with the final date.

**Mr. Darling:** My hon. Friend is on to an interesting point. He is right to say that about £10 billion was spent on advertising. It is interesting that the advertising not only encouraged people to go into private pensions, but, surprisingly, invited those seeing or reading it to believe that it all had something to do with the Conservative party. Curiously, it does not want to have any more advertisements.

My hon. Friend makes an important point, although I might differ from him in one respect. He suggests that the Government should place advertisements saying that they are sorry. I can see a compelling reason for the Conservative party placing advertisements saying that it was sorry about that. It could take a double-page spread and add a few other things besides, but, as the Government never tire of telling us—and I agree—the Government do not have any money of their own: it is taxpayers' money.

The difficulty here is not only that the taxpayer paid for the advertisements to encourage people to get into the difficulty, but that they have to pick up the pieces at the other end. The people who buy policies are having to pick up the pieces because of the compensation and all the other costs. There has been cost after cost after cost—all imposed because the Government tried to sell their dogma, and, as I said, acted in the interests of the few, as a result of which many people have suffered.

The Government have rightly tabled this clause to deal with the people who opted out of occupational pensions, but we have not begun to consider in great detail another category of people: those who were wrongly persuaded to opt out of SERPS. No one knows—I am prepared to concede on this point that I do not know either—how many people might have opted out of SERPS. I fear that many people may wrongly have been persuaded to opt out of it.

My question is simple: what will the Government do about that? Will there be a similar clause in next year's Finance Bill to deal with that problem? Perhaps, as the Minister will be dealing with that point, she will also tell us what the Government are doing about it and what inquiries they have put in hand. I know that the regulators have taken the view that they have to solve the problems in relation to occupational pensions first, and then turn to the SERPS problem.

What we have here is a cleaning-up exercise. We are cleaning up after a mess that was caused, to a large extent, by the actions of the Conservative Government in the late 1980s, and in respect of which they will not accept responsibility. Yes, there were others who were culpable. Many of them have left the industry. Others have been fined and punished. We will support the clause because we want to ensure that the people who lost money through no fault of their own are restored to the position they were in before this disaster struck them—so far as that is possible. That is only right.

The Government should do two things. First, they should accept responsibility for what they have done—something this Government have been very poor at doing. Secondly, they should take action to ensure that such a disaster does not happen again, which means—I state it once again—that they have will have to do something to simplify the regulatory system and to make it more effective. The Government will also have to investigate other spheres—such as SERPS—in which, I fear, there may be another problem that will force us to return to this matter next year.

**Mr. Betts:** As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) just said, Labour Members welcome the clause, although we do not welcome its background or the reasons that have made it necessary. It is incredible that we have a major national

*[Mr. Betts]*

scandal that is not merely a general problem but a problem for all those individuals who have suffered a great deal. They initially suffered a potential loss of their pensions, but, even now that they recognise that there may be some light at the end of a long tunnel and that the problem may eventually be sorted out with a bit of further relief provided by the clause, they have still undergone the agony of uncertainty, and the matter has still not been finalised. That lack of progress concerns Labour Members, and it is a pity that the Minister did not show the same concern when she spoke to the clause.

It is incredible that the Government blame the private sector and unscrupulous private individuals for creating the problem, while, at the same time, taking no responsibility at all for their legislation, which allowed private individuals to behave in such a manner. That is the reality. Why will the Minister not admit that and say, "The Government got it wrong. Yes, we were responsible for bad legislation and we apologise for the heartache and problems that we have created"? The legislation was wrong and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central has pointed out, the regulatory regime was totally inadequate because it was self-regulatory.

Self-regulation was of course a product of the deregulation mania of the 1980s and the Government's attempt to create the spectre of the nanny state—from which they were saving people. Whenever problems about the recession are mentioned, Conservative Members happily get to their feet and say, "It was not our fault, not as individuals. It was all the fault of Lord Lawson, in his role as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He created the boom, and he was responsible for the recession." Why do not they do the same thing with this issue? They could speak to this clause and say, "We have reached the position where we have to introduce this clause, but the problems are from way back in the 1980s. Lord Lawson, who was then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was to blame for the scenario and for all the problems that have occurred, but we have since moved on."

Conservative Members cannot do that, however, because so many Government Members are completely and utterly tied up in this mess. When those measures were introduced, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), advocated the proposals and launched the advertising campaign, about which we have already heard, to persuade people to take up personal pensions. We all know that his assistant and junior social security Minister at that time was the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister had the hands-on responsibility for creating this disaster, and it took him a long time to do it. In 1990, when the Prime Minister was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he told the House during the Budget statement:

"This extension of choice is a considerable tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). Over 3.5 million people have now taken out personal pensions. As well as benefiting the individuals concerned, in the long term this will reduce public spending".—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1017.]

That statement is a sick joke. That was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister, telling the House in 1990 that personal pensions were a great bonus for all those people who had taken them out. He had not a shadow of a doubt that it may have gone wrong. He spoke about a reduction in public spending, when we now know from this clause that there will be a cost, not only from the initial advertising campaign but to rectify the problems that the campaign created. It is time for the Government to admit that they and the private sector are responsible for those problems.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury will not come clean and spell out the precise scale of the problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central has said that the PIA has estimated that 400,000 pensions have been wrongly sold in some manner. At the beginning of the investigation the Securities and Investments Board discovered that there was substantial compliance with the main conduct of business rules in only 9 per cent. of the files examined, based on the initial pensions transfer pilot studies. That does not mean that 91 per cent. were completely mis-sold, but that 91 per cent. were not conducted in a totally proper way. That is an enormous scandal because that was how things worked within the self-regulatory climate that the Government proposed.

4.45 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury said that the Government still cannot discover, after all this time, how many people are involved, how many pensions were sold or how much it will cost in total in compensation. If the Government do not know, how do journalists manage to obtain figures? The *Financial Times*, on 17 January, was able to obtain such figures. Pension companies give journalists estimates of the compensation levels that they expect to pay out. Journalists can apparently pick up a telephone and obtain figures from Allied Dunbar of £100 million; Lloyds Abbey Life, £80 million; and Barclays Life, nearly £50 million. They can get figures from a substantial number of the pension companies. Some of the pension funds would not respond to the questions, but presumably they would have responded had the Government bothered to find out for themselves the scale of the problem. Instead, they sit back and say that they do not know and are not interested in discovering what has happened.

On 20 January, *Weekend Money*, a supplement of *The Times*, contained estimates and figures from Pearl Insurance, which admitted that it thought there would be about 40,000 opt-out cases. It said that it had sent out 300,000 letters. Companies have that information and are making their estimates. Why cannot the Government collect that information and come to an overview of the problem? The Minister has denied being able to do that.

In the end, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central said, it is down to ensuring that the scandal does not happen again. Surely that would be simple to do. When we are examining a regulation, we must think of its purpose. First, regulation is meant to stop problems occurring and to ensure that things are done properly. On that first test, the self-regulation of the selling of personal pensions that the Government had in place has been an absolute failure. It is time for the Government to accept that and put in place statutory regulations.

The Government do not want to do that and choose to ignore the problem. In this case, however, they must admit that this is not a theoretical argument but a clear case with evidence that self-regulation has been an absolute failure. Secondly, presumably, recognising that

whatever system of regulation one has in place things will go wrong and some people will not abide by the regulations, the purpose of regulations and a regulatory system is to be able to identify when the things go wrong. In this case, it was not the SIB or the self-regulatory organisations that discovered the problem. The SRAs were oblivious to the problem even though in 91 per cent. of cases people were not being advised properly and in 400,000 cases pensions were mis-sold. That is a scandal. So the second function of regulations failed. The Government have to accept the need for change.

The third reason for regulations is to ensure that, having identified a problem, there is a speedy resolution. No one would accept that the current regulatory system provides for a speedy resolution. Certain pension companies have said that they could not send out the letters and questionnaires quickly enough because they did not get advice from the SIB quickly enough.

I do not really want to go over the details of a financial scandal for which the Government were responsible. I am making a serious request that the Government accept that the regulatory regime failed on three counts: first, it did not stop the problem happening; secondly, it did not identify it when it had happened—indeed, it seemed oblivious to the problem; and, thirdly, it did not correct the problem speedily. Is not it time that the Government accepted that they got it wrong and joined us to find a proper statutory system of regulation that will stop such scandals occurring again?

**Mr. MacShane:** I have listened to the debate with some interest. I am waiting for the word "sorry" to pass the Minister's lips. After all, she is proposing to put aside an immense amount of new money—money that would otherwise be in the public coffers—to rectify the mistakes of her predecessors. We do not blame the hon. Lady because she was not in the House when the scheme was introduced. She has to come here with a giant dustpan and brush. In Paris and Orlando, the younger and more dynamic members of the Disneyworld team, wearing bright blue uniforms, walk behind the elephants with giant dustpans and brushes, trying to clear up the mess. The Minister is clearing up the droppings from the elephantine figure of Lord Lawson, so perhaps she feels she does not have to say "sorry".

The scandal has affected many of our constituents. The Government say that no figures are available, but last year *Hansard* reported a figure of 500,000 and the Personal Investment Authority has cited a figure of 400,000. A large amount of public money is involved and it is irresponsible of the Government not to tell the House the precise sum.

Pension companies have accepted responsibility for the mistakes. Norwich Union, Legal and General and Barclays have fired people and shaken up their systems. We may all feel that it is a little late for that, but at least they have accepted a direct responsibility and have dismissed their incompetent staff. I invite the Minister to accept some retrospective responsibility. It would not hurt her career if the word "sorry" passed her lips.

This is one of the great scandals of the last decade. As long ago as 1991—before the Minister came to the House, so it is not her direct responsibility—the SIB published a report showing that one third of all personal pensions taken out were terminated within two years. Either an awful lot of pensions were sold to 58 or 63-year-olds or it was one of the biggest financial scandals of the century. The SIB reported losses to individuals running at £250 million a year, mainly from up-front commission charges and the front-loading of monthly premiums. The money disappeared into the pockets of people whom the pension companies later had to dismiss. That is a Maxwell every year, inflicted by this Conservative Government on those who were conned into taking out personal pensions. It is all part of the wider question of how the Government relate to citizens on the question of pensions.

I welcome the forceful speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). He correctly identified the need for regulation. To place an adjective before "regulation"—for example, self, state, independent, autonomous or agency—would be a misnomer. We are talking about people's investments to provide for their old age, so the principle of caveat emptor is not good enough. We need a flexible and friendly system; it must not be onerous or devised exclusively by civil servants. We need to move away from caveat emptor and allow people to have a direct stake in their pension schemes, in the knowledge that that stake will be safe from corruption.

I feel affection and respect for the Minister. She was the minder for my opponent in the by-election that I won—and she minded him to losing his deposit with considerable charm. However, I would rather take advice from Cilla Black on a blind date than from the hon. Lady on any aspect of pension provision. I chide my children every day to teach them the magic puissance and power of the word "sorry". I use a French word because my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) ranted at me yesterday in Latin.

I hope that the Minister learns to allow the magic word "sorry" to pass her lips. Many of her hon. Friends have condemned the feckless, profligate, spiv regime of the former editor of *The Spectator*, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer during a sad period for this country. It has done no harm to their careers. The Minister should feel able to rise and say "sorry" to those who were misled. She must not praise but bury the era of Lord Lawson. The House would welcome that and those who were misled into taking out personal pensions would feel that they had a friend in the Treasury.

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane)—better known as the hon. Member for Geneva—is, as always, extremely entertaining. This is an important matter and I am glad that hon. Members are treating it seriously.

I am aware that it is part of Labour party policy to impose wholesale change on the financial regulatory system, but it is not something with which I agree or with which most of the industry agrees. It is important that we deal with the issues of today. If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) talks to the industry with an open mind, rather than having already made up his mind on his policy, he will also hear that the industry does not want wholesale change of the financial regulatory system. The industry is looking for stability.

**Mr. Darling:** The Minister is right that the industry does not want wholesale change—nobody is suggesting that—but it does want significant changes in the various

*[Mr. Darling]*

areas that I have identified. If she stays in her job for much longer and takes the trouble to speak to people, the Minister will find a growing consensus as to what form that change might take, and Labour is articulating that.

**Mrs. Knight:** I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I have found that there is considerable concern within the financial services industry at the hon. Gentleman's proposals, which are considered to be a wholesale change.

A number of important points have been made in the debate, and I propose to reply to them. On the numbers involved, there are about 9 million personal pensions overall. Some 2 million of these relate to transfers and opt-outs, of which possibly 400,000 are in the criteria of "those to be looked at". There will be no knowing how many of those 400,000 have been mis-sold until the review is complete. I say yet again to Opposition Members that we do not know the specific figures—all we know is that people are covered by certain criteria. That does not mean that they have been mis-sold a pension.

5 pm

The date that pertains to the clause and to the review as a start point is 29 April 1988, which is when the Financial Services Act was introduced. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made a point regarding mine workers. I can tell him that the mine workers' pension scheme is allowing victims of mis-selling to be reinstated, and miners will be put back to the financial position they would have been in had mis-selling not occurred. A number of former members of the scheme have already been reinstated. I hope that the hon. Gentleman finds at least some comfort in that fact.

The situation regarding the IFAs—the independent financial advisers—is more complicated than we have perhaps seen with life offices. The reason for that, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) outlined, is that there have been court cases relating to questions on professional indemnity insurance. Where the PIA wanted one thing and the professional indemnity insurers wanted another, the IFAs felt that they were unable to proceed with the review. That matter has now been resolved, and I welcome the agreement between the PIA and the professional indemnity insurers to enable progress to be made, as the review of personal pension transfers and opt-outs involving IFAs can now be taken forward.

The agreement clears the way for IFAs to complete a review of their casebooks and to provide redress where it is due. There is concern about the ability of small IFAs to carry out the review as it is required. Large product providers have paid for the development of computer software to enable IFAs to carry out the detailed calculations required in the review. This will be of considerable benefit to IFAs and has the added benefit of helping to ensure that the calculations are correct and compliant.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) mentioned an advertising campaign. Wide coverage has been given to the Securities and Investments Board's progress reports, and similar wide coverage has been given to the matter since it started. A large amount of coverage has been given to the reviews, the progress report and the issue as a whole in the past few days. In addition, the SIB has made widely available detailed fact-sheets on the review, the PIA has set up a dedicated pensions unit and a helpline and a large number of questionnaires have been sent out. Therefore, we do not think that an advertising campaign going any further than the publicity that is currently taking place is required.

Questions have been asked about SERPS. As promised at the time of the October 1994 statement, the SIB has been working with the Department of Social Security and consultants to establish whether there has been a significant degree of mis-selling of personal pensions to people who otherwise would have remained in SERPS. Again, this is a complex task that requires a detailed analysis of a specially determined sample of a DSS database. It has taken longer than initially expected, but I am glad to say that the SIB should be in a position to make a statement within the next couple of months.

I must ask the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central to wait for the SIB's statement to see the full results, but I can say with some confidence that the scale of the problem—if there is one—is a great deal less serious than in the area of transfers and opt-out cases. We will consider with the SIB what needs to be done once the findings of the review are known.

The point was raised about the cost of the tax exemption proposed by the clause. The "Financial Statement and Budget Report" published on Budget day suggested that this measure will have a "negligible effect" on revenue. The Committee will be aware that the continuing uncertainty about the price or the approximate number of cases of mis-selling mean that we are not able to provide precise figures. At a time when compensation payments are only just beginning to be made, it is not possible to give a more accurate estimate of numbers than that which I have given.

I conclude by referring to an article in the *Evening Standard*, which stated that there are two morals to be learned from mis-selling. The first was that if a person was sold a personal pension and had the slightest suspicion that mis-selling had occurred, he should start kicking up a fuss. The second moral was that anyone mis-sold a pension should not let that put them off purchasing a personal pension. These are points with which I, and I am sure most hon. Members, entirely agree. I hope that the Committee will agree with and commend the clause.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 139 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Clause 112**

RETURNS AND SELF ASSESSMENT

**Mr. Mike O'Brien** (North Warwickshire): I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 76, line 37, at end add—

'(9) In subsection (2) of section 199 of the Finance Act 1994, for "1996-97" there shall be substituted "1997-98".

(10) In subsection (3) of section 199 of the Finance Act 1994, for "1996" there shall be substituted "1997".'.

**The Chairman:** With this we may discuss the following amendments: No. 10, in page 76, line 37, at end add—

'(9) After subsection (2) of section 178 of the Finance Act 1994, there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(3) For the year of assessment 1996-97, for the words '31st January' in his section there shall be substituted the words '30th April'; and

(4) For the year of assessment 1996-97, for the words '31st October' in this section there shall be substituted the words '31st January'.".'.

No. 11, in page 76, line 37, at end add—

'(9) After section 194(1) of the Finance Act 1994, there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2) For the year of assessment 1996-97, for the words '5 per cent.' in this section there shall be substituted the words '2.5 per cent.'.".'.

**Mr. O'Brien:** Self-assessment has been described by the leading tax advisers Ernst and Young as

"the biggest change there has ever been to the tax system of this country since the introduction of Income Tax in 1803".

The firm adds that, by comparison, the introduction of PAYE in 1945 was

"simply tinkering around the edges".

Let us be clear about it—Labour supports the concept of self-assessment. We want it to succeed, but we believe that it is being rushed in at an alarming pace. The Government appear to be more interested in cutting 3,000 Inland Revenue jobs to make short-term savings than in getting it right. The result will be a confused botch-up of an introduction that will cause unnecessary burdens on business and 9 million self-employed people and will undermine confidence in the whole concept of self-assessment. It is all so unnecessary, and it need not happen. If the amendment is accepted, we can phase in self-assessment in a balanced and measured way and help business to create confidence in the whole idea.

There is much in the Government's attitude that reminds me of the introduction of the Child Support Agency. A good idea in principle is rushed through because it might provide an added cost saving bonus, but goes horribly wrong in implementation. I predict that self-assessment will be a policy debacle for the Tories on the scale of the CSA. Today, we are merely serving warning that the buff envelopes containing the self-assessment forms that thud through the letter boxes of Conservative Members' constituents will have just same the effect as the CSA assessment forms that have arrived to the anger of fathers and voters in the constituencies of Conservative Members in recent years. Self-employed business people will come along to complain to Tory Members. It will happen just before the general election and it will lose the Tories votes. It will create anger and contempt at their policies. All we aim to do through the amendment—in a spirit of charity—is to save them from themselves.

**Mr. Nigel Forman** (Carshalton and Wallington): The nub of the hon. Gentleman's policy on the matter and, indeed, that of his hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who spoke on the subject on Second Reading, seems to be phasing in. That implies either that everyone moves towards self-assessment more slowly, or that some groups are moved towards it by law more quickly than others. Which is it and can he explain more?

**Mr. O'Brien:** We want to ensure that the procedures are in place to enable the successful introduction of self-assessment. We want to ensure that the computer and electronic lodgement systems and the machinery of how the system will work are properly organised. There are some question marks over that. There is also the question of training Inland Revenue staff.

All those problems must be resolved and we are concerned that the system will be rushed in and that Conservative Members will pay the price. After all, Labour Members of Parliament will have an excuse. We can say that we voted for the amendment to enable the system to be introduced properly. Today, Tory Members are offered their opportunity of an alibi to protect them against the bungling of their Treasury Ministers. They should vote for the amendment. Self-assessment will still happen, but it can be done properly. That is our offer to the House and that is why we are telling Conservative Members to vote for the amendment and delay self-assessment, or at least to support the other amendments so that we can deal with some of the more difficult issues that self-assessment raises.

**Mr. Forman:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the date on which people must start to fill in the forms on the new basis has already been delayed by one year? What is the argument for delaying it further?

**Mr. O'Brien:** I am about to set that out in more detail and if the hon. Gentleman—an old colleague from the Select Committee on Treasury and Civil Service—pays attention, he will learn that there are many reasons why the delay should be accepted. I invite him to conduct a survey among some of the companies in his constituency, as I did in mine recently. I asked them what they knew about self-assessment and whether they were happy with it.

Some were very happy, particularly the bigger companies with accountants who had been following the matter closely, but others were less sure. A leading company in Bayton road, Bedworth said that it felt, "badly informed" and did not yet understand what it might do, saying:

"There is a lack of clarity. Until more information is available we do not feel prepared".

That company sought a more simple, straightforward explanation of the system.

A major manufacturer in Bedworth said, through its accounts clerk, that the introduction seemed rushed and sudden, which is not an uncommon response judging by the survey conducted by my office.

A wages clerk working for a business in Hartshill, who had an information pack, said:

"There was an awful lot of literature."

She had had no time to look at it yet in detail but felt that it looked "very complicated". She also felt that there was "insufficient advice".

**Mr. Tim Smith** (Beaconsfield): I wonder what leads the hon. Gentleman to suppose that, if we delayed self-assessment for another year, people in business who are very busy trying to run their businesses would attend to the matter in the next 12 months. Inevitably, there will be people who, however much information the Revenue puts out—it has put out some good, simple information,

*[Mr. Tim Smith]*

including audio tapes on the subject—will not attend to it until the time comes. So, we would just be putting the problem back a year.

**Mr. O'Brien:** We would also be giving those businesses more time to understand what is happening. That extra time is extremely important. As I said, this is a major change to our tax system. I do not think that Conservative Members have comprehended the enormity of what is proposed. We should do it, but we should do it properly. Conservative Members are not yet sure how they will carry it out. They will create a series of difficulties for themselves, which need not be created, and will undermine the project in the process—a project that we all want to succeed in the longer term.

I also spoke to a small manufacturing and hire company in Coleshill, which said that it knew nothing about self-assessment but hoped that its accountant did. Another Coleshill business said that it knew it was coming, but knew little else about it and complained of "insufficient information". A day had been arranged for companies to be advised on self-assessment, but there was too much to do to take the day off to attend.

A self-employed man who runs a business called Sign Language said:

"I do not have any opinion on SA because I have never heard of it."

The managing director of a large manufacturing firm, who had a finance background, did not think that self-assessment would present any serious problems for him, but was concerned that some of the information that he had received needed to be much better and that a tape on the subject failed to say anything of substance.

5.15 pm

Those are the typical responses of small and medium-sized businesses on the subject. Conservative Members should talk to people in their areas and find out the response. Recently, I spoke to a meeting of small business men and women in Coventry, who expressed "trepidation" at the proposed changes.

It is not surprising that there is some concern among small businesses. They are right to be concerned. Hurried attempts at Government cost-cutting now are likely to cost small businesses and the self-employed dearly. Many will have to employ accountants to understand the forms and the complexities of the legislation.

Let us look at the Bill and the schedules to it. Just look at schedules 18 to 25, which I have here. They contain detailed and complex clauses and information, which will have to be understood and digested. They go on and on—54 pages of rules in close type.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon): The hon. Gentleman is making a detailed and cogent point on the problems of both businesses and individuals. Given the fundamental scale of the change and the substantial reductions in staff, how does he think the Treasury and the Inland Revenue will cope? Has he done any surveys of internal morale and mood within the latter organisation and of its ability to handle all the queries?

**Mr. O'Brien:** That is a good point. It would appear from the Inland Revenue staff association that there are problems of morale. There will be staff reductions—3,000 are to go as a result. It is my view that morale will be undermined because of those reductions at the very time that considerably greater demands will be placed on staff—while self-assessment is phased in. The staff simply will not be there to cope with the demand. So, the hon. Gentleman has a good point and it is not one that the Government have yet understood. They are so desperate to find money for tax cuts to win them the election that they do not understand the difficulties that they are creating for themselves.

How can one expect a self-employed person to be sure that he is obeying the law? Let us remember all the penalties that the new legislation will create. Following enactment of the Bill, self-assessment provisions will be found in the Taxes Management Act 1970, as amended by the Finance Act 1994, the Finance Act 1995, and now the Finance Bill in 1996. Those include amendments to amendments.

If I were self-employed and wanted to understand the law, I would need to read the 1970 Act, as amended by the 1994 Act, the 1995 Act and this Bill and I would have to understand which amendment applied to which amendment.

I shall give an example. If one wants to understand the complexities of self-assessment, one should look at clause 112, which is the first clause on the subject and amends section 8 of the 1970 Act, which was originally amended in the 1994 Act—that amendment was flawed, so section 8 was amended again in the 1995 Act. Does it really inspire confidence that the clause must be amended again in the Bill? This is the Government's second attempt to correct the clause.

I have glanced through the new section, as amended by the 1994 and 1995 Acts and the Bill. I must inform the Minister that the version that he is presenting to the House in clause 112, which amends section 8A(1) of the 1970 Act—on trustee's return—contains an obvious and stupid grammatical error. Line 4 refers to

"the amount payable by him",

when it should read, "payable by them" or

"payable by any one of them".

That is a small grammatical error. I make no more of it than that except to say that we are dealing with an amendment of an amendment of an amendment. That suggests a rushed, even slipshod approach. It is messy and it worries me that the Minister is cooking up a dog's dinner for business and the self-employed.

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): On Government grammar, my hon. Friend may recall that in Prime Minister's Question Time earlier this afternoon, the Prime Minister said, in answer to a question about the CBI—

**The Chairman:** Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying hard but he is not in order.

**Mr. O'Brien:** The Bill is a bit complex, even for a lawyer like me. There needs to be a Consolidation Act to deal with the whole subject of legislation for self-assessment. There needs to be easy access to the legislation for those who will have to deal with it. A year's delay would enable the Treasury to bring forward a Consolidation Act that would bring all the legislation into clear sequence.

The Government are pushing self-assessment through even though they know that tax legislation across the board is getting much more complex each year. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) knows that because he has advocated simplification. Let us allow time for it. We are talking about a significant cultural change for the taxpayer. The Government acknowledge that. We need to ensure that that change can occur and that sufficient time is given for it to occur.

**Mr. Gerald Bermingham** (St. Helens, South): I have listened carefully to what nas been said. I shall declare an interest later. Does it occur to my hon. Friend, as well as to Conservative Members, that the more complicated that we make the legislation and the more difficult it will be to make self-assessments, the more people will be disinclined to self-employment? Jobs will be lost and wealth creation will suffer.

**Mr. O'Brien:** I hope that my hon. Friend is wrong but if things happen the way that we fear they will, what he fears may come to pass. That would be regrettable.

The Federation of Small Businesses is deeply concerned about self-assessment, as well it might be, and is asking for it to be postponed. I have also received a pertinent letter from the British Retail Consortium. It states:

"Dear Mr. O'Brien . . . As you will know, Self Assessment is programmed to come into effect in April this year, subject to passing of the relevant provisions in the Finance Bill. In view of your interest in this subject, we wish to apprise you of the following:—

(i) the feedback from our members, as a substantial body of employers who employ 2.1 million people, is that the Inland Revenue are not geared up to administering the new regime;

(ii) considerable problems, such as uncertainties of interpretation, will arise from administering this radical new regime;

(iii) the Revenue have not e.g. provided adequate relevant material for employers to brief employees;

(iv) employees will be bound to look at their employers for help with self-assessment and it is unfair for employers to be put in the position of unofficial and unpaid tax advisers;

(v) retailers, therefore, are urging the Inland Revenue to give urgent and fresh consideration to finding means to alleviate problems from self-assessment, whether by delaying implementation until 1997/98 or by some other means."

And so say all of us.

Tory Members should listen to the employers, heed the warnings and step back from the brink of political self-destruction. The self-employed and those who run small businesses have had a rough time of it already. Let me make new Labour's plea not to impose new burdens upon their shoulders. They have made the courageous decision to start an enterprise and create wealth for themselves and for Britain. They may have a bank or investors on their heels, hounding them for results. They have had to face a recession, late payments or, even worse, non-payment. The words "cash flow problems" are ones with which they are no doubt familiar.

I was self-employed for several years before I came to the House. People who have run their own businesses know what a chore it is to maintain accounts. Do not place upon such people the burden of the rushed and confused introduction of self-assessment. They are ill-informed about such a tax regime. Many of them are unprepared for it and it may impose penalties of which they are ignorant.

The legislation must be simplified to make self-assessment work. Simplification reduces complexity, cuts compliance costs and makes self-assessment possible, but it takes time. Our amendment would give the Government that time.

**Mr. Tim Smith:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the proposition in the letter that he read out that no obligation should be placed on employers to provide information to their employees to help them with self-assessment? He said, "And so say all of us," at the end of his quotation.

**Mr. O'Brien:** We want to make sure that whatever system is decided upon works. We want the time to consider such issues. When I said, "And so say all of us", I was particularly referring to the final part of the letter. Employers are telling Conservative Members that they are going to have difficulties with the system. Give them the time to sort those difficulties out. That is all that we are asking and what Conservative Members are denying them.

To make self-assessment succeed—and I have said that we want it to—we need to create confidence in the system. We do not want headlines in *The Sun* about how the newspaper has uncovered someone who has said on a self-assessment form that he was liable for only a small amount of tax but who has not declared all sorts of things, only for it to turn out later that he had not understood the forms. That would bring the whole system into disrepute and undermine confidence. It is right that the Government should introduce the process cautiously.

We are right to be concerned about the risk factor. Only about one third of returns will be considered for inquiry, of which around two thirds will have some inquiry made about them. Only a small percentage will be given a full investigation. It is essential that the selection process is got right from the beginning. Rushing through the process will make it more likely that some fraud will get through. Once some people get the message that fraud can escape detection, confidence in the system will be undermined.

It is also necessary to be able to distinguish mistakes by taxpayers from fraud. That requires care, experienced staff and the setting of precedents about what will be regarded as fraud. In the big bang approach to self-assessment advocated by the Government, problems will be exacerbated and there will be greater potential for the self-assessment system to fail.

The Federation of Small Businesses says that 1.5 million self-employed people do not have an accountant. With this complex legislation, they may need to employ an accountant or tax adviser. The Government claim that that will not happen. As always, there are those who disagree.

In June, both the Chartered Institute of Taxation and the Institute of Chartered Accountants urged taxpayers to get help and advice from an accountant. Many accountancy firms, such as Cooper Lancaster Brewers, are hoping to cash in on the fears of the self-employed by offering special packages to deal with self-assessment. Some US firms, such as Hon. and R. Block, are keen to establish themselves on British high streets. They think that there will be greater demand for accountancy and advice after the introduction of self-assessment.

The annual fees paid to an accountant can often be offset against tax as part of a business's running costs. It may be that it will not be only the self-employed who line

*[Mr. O'Brien]*

the pockets of accountants and advisers; money that the Revenue would otherwise have received will go to them. I am certain that the Government do not intend that self-assessment should provide a boom for accountants. I want to be sure that it does not.

Labour is not only concerned about the cost of compliance but at the growth of unqualified tax advisers. The Inland Revenue Staff Federation and Tax Aid have pointed out the need for regulation of such advisers. If self-assessment causes some people to go to unqualified tax advisers like Harry down the road to do their returns, they could incur penalties for delays or inaccuracies caused by Harry not being properly qualified. Those legitimate issues should not preclude self-assessment but urge caution in its implementation.

Penalties are an important concern.

**Mr. Bermingham:** Will not my hon. Friend's argument also apply to the elderly widow or pensioner with a few shares in the business that her husband once worked for and who does not know where she has put the dividend slip and cannot justify tax deducted for the dividend? She will have to scrabble round her house. Is she going to be penalised for a mistake over a few pounds? It appears so from the legislation.

**Mr. O'Brien:** That is worrying and makes the point that we need to ensure that self-assessment is phased in cautiously and carefully. Phased in it must be, but in the right way.

If taxpayers fail to file their forms by 1 January, they will incur a fine of £100 and a 5 per cent. surcharge on any tax after that which is due. Small businesses and the self-employed, overworked and perhaps understaffed may miss deadlines because they do not realise what the law is.

The Federation of Small Businesses has proposed that, even if the Minister will not delay the project by a year, the penalties should at least be adjusted and people should be given a warning note after 1 January 1998 saying that they may be fined the following year. If the Minister does not accept that there should be a one-year delay, he should reduce the impact of the interest for late payment for a period of time. Our other amendment is important because it deals with that issue and proposes that the 5 per cent. interest penalty be halved for one year.

5.30 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack):** So that I may follow the hon. Gentleman's argument, will he tell me at which point in the tax payment cycle the penalty to which he refers is payable?

**Mr. O'Brien:** The penalty is payable just after the money is due. Interest starts to arise at that point.

**Mr. Jack:** Are we discussing payments on account or the final payment of a tax year's total requirement to be paid to the Revenue?

**Mr. O'Brien:** The latter.

**Mr. Andrew Smith** (Oxford, East): Did not the Minister know that?

**Mr. O'Brien:** He did not appear to know. So long as he is now clear on the facts, we can proceed.

Ernst and Young also say, first, that it is not clear what can be filed under the electronic lodgement system and, secondly, that the Inland Revenue will randomly select 5,000 to 10,000 cases a year to vet for accuracy. That will be a time-consuming distraction and an expensive exercise for those who are chosen. It is purely to validate the Inland Revenue's selection procedures. Ernst and Young want Parliament and the Government to consider who should pay for that if nothing material emerges from the inquiry into those who are randomly selected to be hassled. Those issues should be considered and we simply seek the time to do so.

**Mr. Tim Smith:** May we conclude that the hon. Gentleman advocates that compensation should be paid to small businesses that are investigated as a result of a random sample?

**Mr. O'Brien:** The hon. Gentleman heard exactly what I said: that this House should understand the problems of businesses and the self-employed. I want the House not to commit itself now to spending money but to consider whether we should compensate those people. We should discuss it but we have not yet had an opportunity to do so, which is why we need the time proposed in our amendment.

We are also concerned about the absence of independent information on and evaluation of the new system. Taxation links between Parliament and the Government are part of the contract between the citizen and the state. The proposed new system of self-assessment will fundamentally alter the relationship between taxpayers and the state. However, the Government seem to have created no independent audit or source of information on the progress of implementing self-assessment, so neither taxpayers nor their representatives know how implementation is progressing. They do not know how the costs are worked out, how Inland Revenue staff are being prepared, what the form will be like, whether the new computer systems will be implemented successfully, or whether the project must meet certain performance targets if it is to operate successfully. Reports of difficulties are widespread. The only formal information available comes from the Inland Revenue, which is implementing the project, and its political masters, the Government.

Will the Minister say exactly what is happening with the electronic data systems? Are the reports that staff are being transferred from filing to self-assessment true? We need to know exactly what is happening because those are legitimate issues.

Forms are scheduled to arrive in spring 1997. If the whole self-assessment system fails, real problems could arise, putting considerable strain on the relationship between taxpayers and the Inland Revenue, and therefore between citizen and state. If the Minister will not accept one year's delay on the system's initiation, we propose to delay the filing arrangements in new section 8 of the Taxes Management Act 1970 by three months, from 31 January 1998 to 30 April 1998. The significant problems in operating the system merit further consideration. We simply ask for time to consider them.

You, Mr. Morris, may think that you have heard a thorough indictment of the Government's self-assessment policy, but you ain't heard nothing yet. At the same time

as introducing self-assessment, the Government are imposing another expensive burden on business. I know that you will find it difficult to believe, Mr. Morris, having heard all that windy rhetoric on deregulation, but what about the £850 million burden on business—the little extra Government windfall exposed on page 112 of the 1996-97 Red Book? In the same year as introducing self-assessment, the Government have decided to change taxation of the self-employed from a previous-year to a current-year basis.

Such a change alone would have had a massive impact; the two changes together will have an enormous impact. For one year, the self-employed will face a £850 million tax bombshell. It is a massive move with an enormous impact, which will come at a time when the self-employed will feel that they are being taxed twice, albeit they are not.

**Mr. Jack** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. O'Brien:** The assessment comes from the House of Commons Library so I am sure that the Minister will accept it. First, taxable profits will be assessed on a current rather than previous-year basis, so personal allowances will be set against the current rather than the previous year's profits, giving a normal uprating of allowances. If there is any doubt about that, hon. Members should look at page 112 of the Red Book and the Minister's explanation to *The Independent*, where he effectively confirmed that that would happen.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): A constituent who runs a small ladies' dressmaking business, which has worked with other small businesses in my constituency, told me that she had thought that self-assessment was a good idea if one was good at arithmetic and knew what one was doing. She had thought that it might save her money by making her less dependent on her accountant, who costs her £200 a year. But the more she looked into the matter, the more she saw that she would depend more on her accountant because of the complexity of the change and the extra rules being introduced.

**Mr. O'Brien:** Like my hon. Friend's constituent, many people will be afraid of what is happening, and their fear will be fully justified. We have studied the legislation and seen its complexities and how it will operate. My hon. Friend's intervention confirms our argument. We should give the process an extra year in which people may begin to understand what it is about, and give the Government an opportunity to begin to come to terms with the process, ensure that staff are properly trained, computer systems are running properly and all the software has been properly tested, all of which takes a considerable time. It is dangerous to rush into the process. If we are to deal with the problems that my hon. Friend's constituent fears, we need time to do it properly. It will be time well spent and it will pay dividends in the long term.

There seemed to be some doubt about the £850 million, so let us discuss it. It is made clear in the Red Book. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) exposed the issue. It was confirmed by the Inland Revenue to the House of Commons Library. *The Independent* highlighted it in an editorial. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury compounded the problem for the Government when he admitted in a letter to that newspaper that extra money would come to the Government because of

"bringing forward the moment when the tax bill has to be paid"—

his own words.

There will be a period of double taxation of profits, which will be relieved only in future years. As Ernst and Young has put it:

"The Government is effectively obtaining an interest free loan during the currency of the business".

It will mean that self-employed people will end up paying more in a specific year than they planned. Coupled with increased administration costs, possible penalties and confusion, that may be the final straw for many businesses.

Self-assessment is an important opportunity for a radical rethink of tax collection. It is too good an opportunity to waste in this way. We support the principle of self-assessment. The Government appear unable to accept the dangers of the haste. The amendment gives time to stop and think and get it right.

Let me finish by warning the Government of the consequences of not accepting the amendment. Using the words of the great Scottish poet whose bicentennial we recall today—Rabbie Burns's words, which will apply at the next general election if self-assessment fails, and if the self-assessment forms in their buff envelopes thud on to the mats of Conservative Members' constituents:

"Still o'er the field the combat burns;
The Tories—Whigs—give way by turns
But fate-the word has spoken;
For woman's wit and strength of man,
Alas! can do but what they can
The Tory ranks were broken."

I ask the House to support the initial amendment and those that are grouped with it.

**Mr. Forman:** I begin by declaring the interest that is recorded in the Register of Members' Interests—my role as parliamentary adviser to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. I hasten to add that I do not speak to any brief from that organisation today, because that would be inappropriate under the new rules that the House has adopted. I merely speak against the background of extra information that I have gathered during my time in that capacity.

I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). I am familiar with the hon. Gentleman because, until recently, he and I served on the Treasury Select Committee together, and I could see that he was enjoying himself and making a meal of a small set of points, if I may say so.

If I may distil the hon. Gentleman's argument, it was that there should be a further delay of one year in the implementation of that significant change for all taxpayers, whether individual or corporate, whether large firms or small firms, and that for a temporary period of one year—if I understood him correctly—the temporary penalties should be reduced from the 5 per cent. that the Bill specifies to 2.5 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman was making heavy weather of his arguments, probably because he did not give sufficient weight to some straightforward considerations.

*[Mr. Forman]*

As I understand it, the first consultative document, giving interested parties and the general public a hint that self-assessment was in the offing, was published as long ago as 1991, and the information that is the equivalent of a dummy run, in the sense of providing more hard signs of the way in which the scheme will work for taxpayers, has been available since 1994.

The hon. Gentleman based his argument on examples, which he described, of people being unaware of the changes and not being fully up to speed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said in his intervention, taxation is an unpleasant necessity in any society and individuals or corporations have a natural tendency, when they are busy, to place examination of those matters on the back burner until they absolutely have to do it. That is a human characteristic, an aspect of psychology; it applies to almost any deadline in human affairs. Taxation is no different; indeed, because taxation is unpleasant, there is obviously a natural tendency for people to put off thinking about it until the last minute. In all charity, to use the hon. Gentleman's word to him, all disagreeable deadlines tend to attract some responses of the type that he reported in his speech, and he should not make too much of that.

I happen to know, from contacts in my constituency, that most of my constituents are aware of many of the implications of self-assessment and are gearing up, with the help of accountants, or on individual initiative by investing in a tape recording or a videotape. In some ways, they look forward to the challenge of getting over the hurdle of the first year. That first year will obviously cause problems, but there are such things as photocopiers, and when one has got it right in the first year, that provides a model on which to base one's subsequent returns in later years.

To summarise, I am saying to the hon. Gentleman, first, that he has underrated the time that useful information that bears on the change has been in the public domain and available to taxpayers.

5.45 pm

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, at the moment, no one can say that he knows exactly how the system will work? The Bill may be substantially amended in progress in Committee, and that could result in enormous changes. The hon. Gentleman need only consider the length, in the schedules in the Bill, of the amendments on amendments that have been made. No one yet knows what the rules are, no one can be prepared now for self-assessment, and I doubt that we shall be able to place people in the position in which they can be fully prepared for very many months—even those people who are working hard at preparing themselves.

**Mr. Forman:** Hitherto, only a fairly small percentage of taxpayers have had complicated tax positions. That minority, on whom the change might bear hardest, is composed of people who are frequently in fairly regular contact with their advisers, whether they be chartered accountants or others.

The hon. Gentleman underestimates the extent to which, in the process of being in contact with those professional advisers, and in the process of the paper moving back and forth, not only between the taxpayer and the Inland Revenue but between the taxpayer and his or her adviser, the ordinary taxpayer learns and, as it were, comes to appreciate, not only the advice that he or she receives from advisers, but the position of the Inland Revenue.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman, even if he does not know it from experience, that, even as a layman, a person who has been in business or has had complicated tax affairs for some time learns about those matters, complicated though they may be. It is even easier when professional advisers are there to help out on difficult or contentious points.

To summarise, first, the hon. Gentleman underestimates the length of time for which useful information has been available to taxpayers and their advisers. Secondly, there is always a tendency for everyone to put disagreeable prospects in the drawer for a while and not pay attention to those things until nearer to deadlines. That would be true whether we adopted the deadline that the hon. Gentleman suggests of 12 months later, or stuck to our deadline, which I strongly recommend the Minister to do.

Thirdly, the hon. Gentleman did not mention the fact that, under the proposals, if corporate or individual taxpayers have considerable difficulties, they retain the option to ask the Revenue to help them or to provide what it judges to be the accurate figures for the taxpayer. In extremis, it is possible for a person who feels overcome by the burden and the complexity of the exercise to say, or write, to his inspector, "Please do it for me."

In those circumstances, the taxpayer always has the option, if he happens not to trust the inspector—which is unwise because in my experience, inspectors usually see to it that the people working for them treat those matters with accuracy and care, and mistakes are rarely made—to ask the Revenue to take on that task and to act, even slightly paternalistically, to help him through the transition period.

If things go wrong, there is an excellent person who may well be known to the hon. Gentleman and from whom I have had the benefit of a tax briefing: Elizabeth Filkin, the tax adjudicator. She can be brought in in extreme cases where the matter cannot be settled sensibly by discussions and correspondence between the Revenue and the taxpayer.

For all those reasons, I say to the hon. Gentleman, in a spirit of good will, that he exaggerates his case. He fans fears that have been expressed—to me, as well as to him—by the small business community. He would do a better service to his taxpaying constituents if he ensured that they received all the relevant information—if he acted as a conduit for the information, explanatory and otherwise, which is now being provided by the Revenue, and helped through the change. I believe that we must change. The net effect of the change, when implemented, will be beneficial to the country. It is a useful deregulatory measure that will simplify matters.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) has, at least, asked some important questions to which the Minister must respond. I accept that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) can readily find many sources, in his constituency and elsewhere, who are prepared for

self-assessment and who would regard a further delay for another year as a frustration and possibly even the cause of wasted expense.

I therefore agree that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington has an argument, but, by the same token, other people are less prepared and they will face the problem of not knowing what is going on. They will run the risk of incurring penalties through lack of proper support and advice. Others may feel that they will have to incur for professional advice costs that they did not previously incur. It may ultimately benefit those people if they obtain the right sort of professional advice at the right sort of price. The accounting industry is no doubt in favour of the change as it is likely to create a substantial amount of business for it—after all, that is what it is there for.

**Mr. Forman:** Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman says, if, after the transitional period, people can master the new tax demands placed on them and fully understand what is expected of them, their tax bills could be reduced. My point about the photocopier was meant to show that, once people have created the right model, they can use it as the basis on which to go ahead and fill in their tax returns fairly confidently.

**Mr. Bruce:** I wholly accept the hon. Gentleman's point. In the past I have filled in my tax forms—I currently use an accountant, but only because I am too busy. I pay my accountant a fee; it suits him and he claims, now and again, to get me a better deal than I would have done. He is probably right to say that—not because I could not have got the deal for myself, but because I did not have the time to do so—but I am merely one individual.

My serious concern does not involve individuals, who will—particularly those on a routine income—easily find a formula to suit them, although the transitional period may be painful and difficult, and they may not be properly prepared. Some business men with smaller businesses, who have slightly more complicated matters to determine, may find, as the hon. Member for North Warwickshire said, that the measure creates considerable additional stress for them, on top of everything else.

The Conservative party prides itself on having good connections with, and an understanding of, small businesses. Having run small businesses myself, I know how difficult it is to run the business and to deal with the practicalities of processing orders and invoices, handling inquiries, ensuring that everything comes together and dealing with value added tax. Another administrative burden will mean that there is less time for producing and selling, and securing cash flow. None of those arguments is against self-assessment per se—our debate is about the timing of it. I accept that, whenever the policy is introduced, it will have its disadvantages and there comes a point when one has to bite the bullet and get on with it.

Another concern, which I raised in my earlier intervention, is that the measure is being introduced at a time when the Treasury and the Inland Revenue have undertaken dramatic reductions in their staff. I am not merely point scoring; the Minister may well be able to explain how the matter will be resolved. The headline in an article in *Accountancy Age* states:

"Revenue cutbacks threaten chaos for self-assessment".

Such articles suggest that, within the accountancy profession, there is genuine concern that the Revenue will not be geared up for the volume of queries, complaints and requests for help and information that will flood in, particularly at a time when staff numbers have been substantially cut—by 3,000.

I shall give one or two quotes from the article at random. It states:

"Ernst and Young's self-assessment specialist Philip Davis, said the Revenue would ensure the system would be implemented 'come hell or high water', but warned the whole thing was being rushed through unnecessarily and too many problems remained.

He said: 'If you look at the Finance Bill'"—

which is what we are here to do—

"'for instance, there are 16 pages of amendments in the 80 pages of self-assessment legislation covering areas which they didn't get right before'."

I hope that the Minister will accept that I am simply raising the concerns of people working in the industry, who clearly believe that there is potentially a serious problem.

To some extent, I have an open mind on the amendment. I can see both sides of the argument. I am not in favour of pushing back proposals to which one is committed unless there is a good reason. If there are problems, such as cuts in staff and a belief that the issue's complexity has not been fully addressed, I would echo the argument of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire that the Government must recognise that, in an election year, this may not be the sort of chaos over which they want to preside.

I hope that there is clear good faith on the part of Labour Members that, if there is a change of Government in the next year, the principle of self-assessment will not be abandoned, its proposal to postpone the measure will be honoured and the measure will ultimately be implemented. I am not sure about—the hon. Member for North Warwickshire did not give it—the Labour party's policy on the delivery of self-assessment. It would be helpful to know whether the Labour party was in favour of it, against it or genuinely concerned about its timing. Having said that, I think that the hon. Gentleman made some important points and advanced his arguments very well.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The hon. Gentleman asked for our view. If, having heard some of the arguments, the Government agree with us, the law will be changed. We may win the vote on the amendment even if the Minister does not support us. Perhaps some Conservative Back Benchers will defect—we have seen that happen. If the amendment is passed, the law will be changed and implementation of the measure will be delayed by a year, as we wish. That would also happen if and when we come into office. What happens will depend entirely on when we come into office and the circumstances at the time. If the process is in train, we shall have to evaluate the situation. We wish to ensure that the measure is implemented properly. We have to decide how that can best be achieved when we take control.

**Mr. Bruce:** I am grateful for that intervention, although I am not entirely sure what it means. I may well be prepared to take the balance of argument in the hon. Gentleman's favour and suggest that we postpone the measure for one year. If I thought that that would lead

*[Mr. Bruce]*

to a further postponement, I would favour the argument of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington that, ultimately, we must bite the bullet. The question is whether we go ahead now, knowing that there will be problems, but confident that we can overcome them and create a workable system, or whether we acknowledge that the problems of staff cuts and the lack of information justify postponing the measure to ensure that we can overcome the problems.

I quoted from the article from *Accountancy Age* to show that there are clearly people involved in the business who know much more about the subject than me and who believe that the policy could become an unmitigated shambles. The hon. Member for North Warwickshire mentioned the problems that we have all had to face over the Child Support Agency. Hon. Members on both sides of the House supported the proposal for the CSA and believed that it would work, but we all agree that it has been unsatisfactory. I was talking to a High Court judge last night. When I said that the CSA was an administrative shambles, he said—as only a High Court judge could—"No, no. You can't get away with that. Parliament got it wrong. You brought the consequence upon yourselves." We are talking about a parliamentary decision now, and we should not be partisan about it. One's attitude to the issue should not depend on one's political views.

The question is how we shall implement effectively the biggest reform in tax collection in British history since the introduction of pay-as-you-earn, with a minimum amount of disruption. It would be impossible to make such a change without disruption, but it should be minimal.

The Minister should tell us how he would respond to the critics in the profession. He should also tell us how the Revenue will be able to handle the change, given the dramatic reduction in staff and its lowered morale. Of course, people in the Inland Revenue Staff Federation have a vested interest in maintaining the numbers, but that is not a good enough reason to dismiss the fact that it is odd to introduce the biggest change ever against the background of the biggest single reduction in staffing ever in the relevant department. It is difficult to believe that the reduction will not aggravate the problems.

6 pm

**Mr. Tim Smith:** I wonder, Mr. Morris, what the most boring thing is that you have to do every year. You may tell us that it is listening to debates on taxation in the Finance Bill Committee. I suspect that many people, if asked that question, would say that it was completing their tax return. People do not give a high priority to their tax returns. They eventually get round to doing them when they know that if they did not do it, they would be in trouble with the Inland Revenue. It is not the most exciting task, and it is difficult to persuade people to take an interest in the measure, although it will be a major change.

The timing of the change does not matter. Some people will not face up to it until it happens and the form arrives on their doormat. That is what happened with financial services regulation in the Financial Services Act 1988. Some people simply shut their eyes to it until the very day the Act came into force, when they woke up and discovered for the first time that they were going to be regulated.

Let me remind you, Mr. Morris, what small businesses have to do now. From the debate so far, anybody would think that small businesses have no problems, but every small business and every schedule D taxpayer has to complete a tax return. They often send their tax returns in late. Frequently, by the time a business sends its form in, it has already received an alarming estimated assessment from the Inland Revenue, which inevitably—in 90 per cent. of cases—is pitched at a level higher than the business's profits, to protect the Revenue's position. The arrival of that estimated assessment is often one of the spurs to completing the tax returns. When the tax returns have been submitted, there may be queries on them or they may be accepted by the Revenue, but more paper comes back to the small business because the estimated assessment has to be amended to a final assessment.

Lots of paper is generated by present system. One of the great advantages of self-assessment, for those who choose to complete the form in its entirety, will be that they can work out how much tax they have to pay and send a cheque with their return. If they get it right—and there is no reason why people should not get it right, either on their own, because it is designed to be done unaided, or with help from an accountant—they can send the money in and that will be the end of the process. That will be a considerable improvement and simplification.

The change to self-assessment was announced in principle, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said, in 1991 before the general election. The decision to proceed with it was announced in the 1993 Budget. We debated it in some detail in the Finance Bill debates in 1994 and 1995. I know that the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) has come rather late to the subject, but this is not the first time that Parliament has debated it.

More importantly, it is not true that the Inland Revenue has no experience of dealing with self-assessment. It has bent over backwards to consult on that issue. For example, in Leicester, 5,000 taxpayers volunteered to take part in an experiment. That is remarkable and we should pay tribute to any taxpayers who volunteer to take part in such an experiment, because they have done all other taxpayers a great service.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree—as he implied by his use of the word "remarkable"—that those taxpayers who volunteered to fill in an extra tax return might not be entirely representative of taxpayers as a whole?

**Mr. Tim Smith:** That is very true, and I agree. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that one of the reasons for the changes is to ensure that those who are not among the best taxpayers—who are, as he implied, those who would volunteer—get equal treatment. That will cause difficulty.

The system of automatic penalties will cause difficulty and we have experienced that before. The Government introduced automatic penalties for VAT in the mid-1980s, which ran a predictable course. The new system was introduced and most taxpayers coped with it reasonably adequately. A minority made a fantastic noise, said that they had heard nothing about it and considered the whole system desperately unfair. A few minor changes were made at the margin and we heard very little more about

it. I wonder how many hon. Members now receive letters from constituents complaining about the VAT regime, with its harsh penalties, which was introduced in the mid-1980s. Very few, I suspect.

Of course there will be difficulties, because some taxpayers will not wake up to the changes when they are introduced. I recognise that they will not be the taxpayers who volunteered to take part in the Leicester experiment, but it was a valuable exercise. Ministers and the Revenue are to be commended on the extent to which they consulted. My hon. Friend the Minister wrote to all right hon. and hon. Members as recently as 20 November 1995, explaining the changes that have been made to the new tax return. He also explained that, as a result of consultation, the number of schedules attached to the tax return have been halved and that other improvements have been made to try to make the whole system more user-friendly.

I do not believe that delaying the introduction of self-assessment by another year would result in more taxpayers listening to the audio tape or reading the guidance. Those taxpayers who want to do that will do it now, because they run their businesses efficiently. There will always be those who say that they are too busy to do it now—they will be too busy to do it in a year's time. We should reject the amendment.

**Mr. Bermingham:** Two features worry me about self-assessment. I declare an interest as a practising lawyer and one of those who will have to self-assess. First, not all tax is paid on invoice. Paying on invoice means that if one delivers an invoice, one is deemed to earn the money in the year that the invoice is sent. Some of us are taxed on what is called a cash basis. For those, the problem has become a nightmare.

The problem affects practising lawyers, some accountants in smaller firms—who have been taxed on a cash basis historically—and many solicitors. The Inland Revenue has tried to wean people off being taxed on a cash basis over the years. It is a rare gift from the Revenue that it has allowed those who are taxed on a cash basis—for example, most members of the Bar—to cling on to that for what life is worth. Why do we cling on to it? Every time I render a bill on a legal aid matter, I do not know when I shall be paid. At the moment, on major cases, if a bill has not been paid after six months, one is entitled to 40 per cent. of it.

**Mr. Tim Smith** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Bermingham:** The hon. Gentleman should come down and ask the lawyers what is happening.

**Mr. Smith:** It is crazy.

**Mr. Bermingham:** It is not only crazy, but to put it bluntly, it is a disgrace. The other day, I got a cheque for a case that I had finished six months before. I got 40 per cent. of my bill. That bill will now be taxed at some time in the next three to four months. I did a case last year that took a year to get paid. It was a small and simple matter, but there were no taxing masters in that area and everything was held up. How can I and many other lawyers actually project what we shall earn in a year, because that will depend on when we get paid? If we are on a cash basis, there is no way in which we can be accurate. We can have a good year or a bad year. A bill can be paid after the end of the tax year because someone is sick and the cheques are not sent out. That happened the other day at the Old Bailey, when 500 cheques were held up because someone was sick. On that basis, there is no way in which we can project our earnings.

Lawyers are not the only ones who will suffer; others will have the same problem for a different reason. For example, those who do not operate on a cash basis will be taxed on the bills that they send out. Small companies—there are a number in my constituency—complain that they send their bills to large companies and they are lucky if they receive payment within three to six months. One hopes that they will be able to project what their tax liability might be in the current year, but it is an enormous guessing game. For many of the self-employed who are not big earners, the game will not be worth it any more. They will run the risk of penalty year in, year out and their cash flow problems will be a nightmare.

The Red Book also states that in one year taxpayers will pay two years' tax. That year will prove a nightmare for self-employed people, whether they are lawyers or plumbers. We must examine the situation realistically. In 1997-98, the self-employed must pay tax on the previous year. They will be able to calculate the amount accurately because they have their books, invoices and receipts. People will know exactly how much they have to pay. However, they are then supposed to self-assess for the current year. They might have a pretty shrewd idea about the amount based on historical profit figures or intake or gross receipt figures. However, in many professions, it will be difficult to calculate. People do not know who will walk through their office doors the next day. Lawyers do not know whether they will have big or small cases, or whether cases will collapse. They will have no way of estimating, although they will do their best.

I shall give the House an example. Mr. X is a plumber who lives somewhere in the mid-shires. He has reckoned that each year he earns about £40,000 gross. After he has deducted his expenses, his earnings amount to £20,000 a year. On a medium tax figure of 25 per cent. after various expenses, he may pay tax of £3,000 or £4,000 per year. In the year in question when he does his guesstimate for the year ahead, he must pay last year's tax as well as this year's tax. In that year, he must pay £8,000 in tax on his income of £20,000 when he would usually pay perhaps £3,000 or £4,000. But Mr. X must still pay his mortgage and feed his children.

Unless the Government do something about that problem, an awful lot of people—perhaps millions—will suffer hardship in that changeover year. The original proposal said that we should take an average over a number of years and then proceed, but that has now been amended. What will the self-employed do in that problem year? They play an important part in our economy—in fact, they are far more important than most people realise.

The self-employed do not work alone: they may employ two or three other people. People are classified as "self-employed" because they own their businesses; they are not a limited company. When presented with a cash flow problem, they have two choices: they can lay off employees—which is not a good idea if our economy is to recover—or they can simply say, "I've had enough; I shall go and work for someone else."

*[Mr. Bermingham]*

It is very easy for Treasury officials—I mean them no disrespect—to think up a wonderful way of ensuring that everyone is on the same system, without considering the implications. The measure will not affect them as they are pay-as-you-earn, just like Members of Parliament. However, many people in my constituency are not PAYE. Every year they calculate their tax honourably and honestly and pay it on 1 July and 1 January. In the year that the measure is introduced, they will be faced with not only the bill for the year for which they have received the income, but the bill for the year upon which they are being assessed. Those who operate on a cash basis or those who have not been paid by large companies that have delayed payment will face an exaggerated cash flow problem.

I have already given the example of the young barrister, solicitor or accountant who estimates the income that he will receive in a year. However, he may find that, instead of several small cases, he has one large case. He then faces a central taxing unit problem and he may not be paid for a year or more—often he will receive no payments for at least nine months. He may then find that there is an enormous cash flow problem and, unless his bank manager is kind, there is no way that he will come through it.

6.15 pm

The Government should realise, in all fairness, that many of those in the professions and many of the self-employed borrow money from their banks in order to keep going, in the hope that the money will be forthcoming. Meanwhile, they continue to pay interest on their borrowings. There is a similar problem for those who are paid by large companies or Government bodies, such as the Lord Chancellor's Department—I do not wish to be personal in my remarks—or other Departments of State, which often make people wait three to six months for their money. While those Departments are earning interest, people are paying interest.

I know that part of one's overdraft interest is allowable against taxation, particularly on a business account, but it never quite makes up for the loss. By delaying payment to the self-employed who are working for them, the Government are making money while they are costing the self-employed money. In such circumstances, there should be a time limit for payment—two to three months seems fair, but six to nine months seems grossly unfair. I have made that point publicly on behalf of the professions and that is why I declared my interest at the beginning of my speech.

I outline two problems to the Minister. Those who operate on a cash basis will face a difficult guessing game. We are professionals and we shall cope with it somehow, but we need more time to get our advisers into position to deal with it. That is why I support the amendment. I say very earnestly, on behalf of millions of people, that the new change, which will effectively mean a year of double taxation—

**Mr. Tim Smith:** No.

**Mr. Bermingham:** The hon. Gentleman denies it. I invite him to reassure me and millions of others like me, because that is how it reads in the Red Book.

**Mr. Smith:** As I understand it, during the transitional period we shall take two years' profits, add them together, divide by two and we shall be taxed on that amount. Effectively, one year is left out, so there can be no question whatever of double taxation.

**Mr. Bermingham:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is an accountant and I respect his knowledge of accountancy. However, that is not how my advisers and their accountants or the professions' advisers have said that it would work. We are very concerned about the interpretation of the Red Book. If the Minister will come to the Dispatch Box and tell me that I, and millions of others, will not be doubly taxed and that we shall pay about the same rate of tax in that year as in the year before and the year after, I shall sit back and say, "One of my worries has gone." At least I shall have that concession.

**Mr. Forman:** The hon. Gentleman should come here more often.

**Mr. Bermingham:** Mr. Morris, he is a very rude man; but academics are always rude because they are always ignorant.

I conclude with this simple cri de coeur. I have met many tax inspectors and employers, and they have always been extremely helpful and kind. However, many ordinary people will need a lot of help during the transition period. Therefore, I believe that training should take place and that the period must be extended. I seek the Minister's assurance on the second part of my great worry. If I receive it, I shall go home—notwithstanding the odd crack from the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman)—a much happier man. But, then again, I was always a simple person at heart.

**Mr. Jack:** Opposition Members know that, from time to time, I have been known to be combative on particular subjects for debate, but on this occasion I shall put aside my sword and shield and deal rationally with some of the important points that have been raised. Light and enlightenment is what I shall deal supply this evening.

I thank all hon. Members who contributed to the debate, because if there is one thing that self-assessment still requires, it is discussion. The more we discuss it, the more knowledge we shall gain about it. I do not want to stand at the Dispatch Box and make outrageous claims that there will not be problems between now and the introduction of self-assessment, as it is a big change, and it is complex, but it is being managed by the most professional people with whom I have had the very great pleasure to deal—the Inland Revenue.

I shall put on record precisely what we are dealing with in self-assessment. We are dealing with the collection of information, albeit in a new way, to determine people's liability and the ultimate payment of taxes, which will not change as a result of self-assessment. People will know about their tax liability, in the sense that they have a tax on their income, on their investment, on the profit that they receive from rent, or on the profits that they receive from their business. That area will be familiar.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who made a balanced and helpful contribution, asked about the enormity of the introduction of self-assessment. Indeed, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) asked whether it would be the equivalent of the Child

Support Agency. I was relatively new to self-assessment when I took over my present appointment, and I can remember some of the difficulties. Let me try to put their minds at rest.

The CSA was doing two things: first, it was introducing a brand new policy; and, secondly, it was putting in place a brand new information technology system to deal with it. With self-assessment, the Inland Revenue is wholly familiar with the taxes, the way in which collection has to be carried out, and, most importantly, the volume of business that it will have to deal with. It was meticulous in the specification of the system that it requires to deal with that volume. I hope that hon. Members will be reassured by that.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** Has not the Financial Secretary dug the hole deeper for himself by saying that the CSA's problems arose because it did two things at once? Are not the Government doing the same by changing to self-assessment and changing the basis for assessment from the previous year to the current year? They may be separate exercises, but they will greatly complicate procedures for the self-employed, and the experience will not be dissimilar from that of the CSA.

**Mr. Jack:** I shall deal with that in a moment. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is already confusion in the way in which the current tax system operates. For example, for a business that has trading profits and an income from, say, renting accommodation, the accommodation is dealt with on a current year basis, and the trading profit is dealt with on a previous year basis. Self-assessment is about bringing them on to the same timetable. Surely that is a recipe for clarity, not confusion.

My hon. Friends the Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) shone an important light on the reality of what we are dealing with, in their sage, short, but very important interventions. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington helped to tease out the fact that self-assessment will not affect some 20 million taxpayers. For them, the world will not change. Their only instruction, if one likes, at this stage is to ensure that they keep hold of their records, because their circumstances might change in future, and they could become the subject of self-assessment. For those who do not receive a tax return, the basic message is that nothing will alter. We are discussing the situation for the 9 million taxpayers who receive a tax return.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield was right when he pointed out that the matter has been thoroughly debated in the House. It was unworthy of the Opposition to worry people unnecessarily by picking up in the press at the beginning of the year a number of factors on self-assessment, for what I deem to be rather cheap party political advantage, when we are striving to reassure and educate people.

We have been working very hard on information for the taxpayer. None of this has been the invention of minds in the Inland Revenue or the Treasury. We consulted very thoroughly indeed in all the preparations. We have the self-assessment consultative committee. It is representative of individual taxpayers, all sections of business, whether large or small, and it has contributed fulsomely to ensure that we refine the system to a state where it will work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield touched on the trial in Leicester. I am not certain whether the hon. Member for North Warwickshire has been to one of our presentations in the House.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Jack:** I am delighted to see that he has. He will know how thorough we are on self-assessment. I wanted to know whether it would work, because I had rehearsed in my mind some worries, which hon. Members put before me this evening.

I was advised that a real-life trial was under way in Leicester, with 5,000 real taxpayers, who had been recruited by the Inland Revenue, which had written to employers, including local authorities and individual taxpayers, some with advisers and some without. The trial was proceeding successfully. The tax office was dealing with the forms. I said that I did not want to go on a glossy trip or just to see the computer screens. I wanted to meet some of the real taxpayers who were taking part.

Six people were selected. They included representatives, agents, self-employed people, a consultant—a whole range of individuals, even PAYE. They gave me quite a hard time. They gave a candid assessment of what it was like. It was interesting. Some had difficulty—those who, like me, take the video recorder out of the box, plug it in, press the buttons and wonder why it does not work. But those who read the carefully tailored instructions and went through them completed the form successfully. They made points to me about revising and refining the questions, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said, we have substantially cut the paperwork involved. We learned from the practical trial.

6.30 pm

I must tell the hon. Member for North Warwickshire that we are planning to go to Southampton this year with a trial of 13,000 real taxpayers. That makes this exercise fundamentally different from other major changes involving new information technology systems. We are trying the system out. We are not dealing with the untried and the unknown. We are making certain that we proceed on the basis of fact. It is a great pity that the hon. Member for North Warwickshire, who has teased out everybody's concern to form a speech in the debate, had not reflected on what we are doing.

The hon. Member for Gordon asked important questions. He posed an interesting point when he asked whether the Opposition had truthfully considered their position on this matter. He was right to ask that, because it strikes me that there are some consequences that they have not considered.

I wondered why, for example, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire did not take us through all the consequences of his amendment. He invites the House to support three amendments—two on delay and one on penalties—but he did not take us through the knock-on consequences. That is just shoddy. The hon. Member for Gordon might like to know that the Opposition did not propose any alternative mechanism for the Inland Revenue to collect taxes and make assessments in 1996-97.

*[Mr. Jack]*

The opposition did not tell us precisely which parts of the self-assessment reform package they propose to defer. I wonder if they have given any thought to what is involved in delay. Cost savings will result, so has the hon. Member for North Warwickshire the express permission of the shadow Chancellor to say that he will underscore the extra cost involved in dishing out a further 4.5 million assessments, which result from delaying the system for another year? The hon. Gentleman seeks to delay the benefit that will accrue to the self-employed and those who are required to fill in a tax assessment.

I could go on, but it is clear that the hon. Gentleman, who gave the impression of having looked meticulously at every detail, has not considered the matter in detail. He is advocating that the House tonight should support a recipe for chaos. If the amendments were agreed to tonight, they would result in a complete muddle. The hon. Member for Gordon is right. He has teased out an omission in the Opposition's case.

The hon. Member for Gordon also rightly asked about resources. The Inland Revenue is appropriately staffed to meet the requirements. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Inland Revenue is adequately resourced. The resulting staff reduction will be achieved by natural wastage. The very fact that we have invited EDS, one of the world leaders, to help to develop the IT system, shows our determination to ensure that the project is properly managed.

This week, I had the pleasure of going to the central point in the Revenue which is monitoring the implementation of the project. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that each and every aspect is being meticulously managed—from the point of view of IT, personnel and training. It is one of the most remarkable project management exercises. When it is done—I believe that it will be done successfully—people will admire the Inland Revenue for its professionalism and thoroughness. However, it is realistic. It knows that there will be problems. It does not shy away from that. But the hon. Gentleman was right to ask about that.

A moment ago, I centred on the facts of the matter. Why are we having self-assessment? I am grateful for the acknowledgement of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire that his party accepts self-assessment in principle. It has supported it in principle for two years. But all of a sudden, we hear various disparaging comments.

What we are seeing is the introduction of the Keith committee's recommendations. That process has been on the go since 1983. The current system of tax assessment is time-consuming, confrontational and, I think all would agree, unsatisfactory.

At present, the Inland Revenue will issue an estimated assessment to a self-employed taxpayer and, perhaps because of a delay in drawing up accounts or filing returns, there may be problems. If the assessment is not agreed, an appeal will have to be lodged and an application made to postpone tax payments. Every year, about 1.5 million such processes have to be considered by the special commissioners. If the taxpayer concerned has a source of income other than that from his business, he must go through the same process all over again.

Under self-assessment, self-employed taxpayers—of whom there are about 4 million, so we have an interest in them, to which the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) adverted—will find that their self-employment income is taxed on the same basis as other income, as I said a moment ago. They will pay tax only on profits earned—no more, no less. That deals with the Opposition's attempt to run the scare story that there would be some double tax hit.

Let me take the hon. Member for St. Helens, South and his hon. Friends through a little exercise that I undertook. I wanted to be certain that I did not stand at the Dispatch Box and mislead people about the averaging process. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield put his finger on the important point that that process of averaging and catching up has now begun. If we were to support the Opposition's request for a delay, we would have an even more muddled situation on our hands.

I asked for an example of what would happen to a business earning a constant stream of taxable profit, which would mean that the tax demand would not change. The analysis was that neither would the payments. They would be the same in January and in July, throughout the years of introduction.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Minister is right to say that, if there is a constant level of the same profits, the payments will be the same, but if there are rising profits, will there not be a higher burden in any given year? The Minister, in his letter to *The Independent*, put the £850 million extra tax yield in the Red Book down to business profitability and bringing forward the moment when the tax bill has to be paid. How much of that £850 million is due to rising business profitability, and how much is due to bringing forward the date of payment?

**Mr. Jack:** The hon. Gentleman has practically answered his own question. A rising trend of profits means that there will be more profits to tax. That is why, against a rising trend of profits, the Red Book shows an increase. If the hon. Gentleman had read the fine print, he would have seen that it was against original baseline figures. Therefore, we are acknowledging that there is a change.

It is a bit like putting the clocks forward. There is the same amount of taxable profit, but we get at it a bit earlier. Do not forget that those are profits that business has already earned. The money is in the bank. Businesses on any given level of profit will not pay any more or any less tax than is necessary.

Other factors affect the figure in the Red Book. I have already said that other forms of income are subject to the change in the tax—we believe that it amounts to about £713 million in terms of rising profit trends. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have been rather pleased about the fact that we are projecting rising business profitability. Perhaps it embarrasses him because it is a sign of the growing strength that we anticipate in the British economy.

I think that I heard the hon. Gentleman accept that, if we had a constant level of profit, there would be no double hit.

**Mr. Andrew Smith** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Jack:** I am delighted to see that the hon. Gentleman agrees. If he agrees with that, he must agree that there can be no double tax on business. I am glad that we have settled that across the Dispatch Box.

**Mr. Smith:** Is there or is there not an extra £850 million tax yield in the year shown in the Red Book?

**Mr. Jack:** If the hon. Gentleman reads the fine print, he will clearly see that, against the index level, more tax is coming in because more taxable profit is available. That is a most important point.

**Mr. Bermingham** *rose—*

**Mr. Jack:** Time is against me. The hon. Gentleman has had his say, and I need mine.

I pray in aid some supporters of not slowing down the process of introduction of self-assessment. Colin Sharman, a senior partner of KPMG, said:

"Recent calls for delay in its implementation and re-examination of its scope are misplaced."

He went on:

"The project has been well managed by the Revenue with a thorough communication process. Fundamental change of this nature is never easy, but it is well overdue."

That is an important supporting point.

Mr. Brodie of Taxaid said:

"This really is a major improvement."

Those and the many others who have spoken in favour of self-assessment should be heeded.

Mr. Grant Thornton of the *East Anglian Daily Times* said that he believed that self-assessment represented a significant simplification of the old system and that once the new rules were in place it would be much easier for everybody to understand.

The Inland Revenue is well prepared. It is carrying out a massive information exercise. Many thousands of people have already come to our seminars. Much information will be given during the course of the year. I assure the House that no stone will be left unturned to ensure that all concerned understand self-assessment. But if we were to follow the Opposition's line on delay, it would be a recipe for disaster and problems. As for their point about the penalty, it only applies to the penalty on the final payment. I do not think that they would want laxity to creep into the arrangements for the necessary regulation to ensure that people pay their taxes on time.

For all those reasons, I urge the House to reject the amendments.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Minister, and Conservative Members generally, will come to rue the day that they turned down the opportunity to defer self-assessment to enable it to be introduced more efficiently. In this context as in so many others, one word screams out from the Conservative Benches: complacency. Conservative Members are complacent about the scale of the problems posed by the introduction of self-assessment, and they are complacent about the effects on millions of self-employed people and small businesses, and the other costs that business will incur.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said that the proposal had been announced in 1993, and had been in the Finance Acts 1994 and 1995. Given that we have been through the process so often, why does the current Bill contain all these clauses? Why have the Government not managed to get it right in all that time?

The Minister assured us that, following the Leicester trials, further trials are now to take place in Southampton. How will the errors be corrected if those trials show up matters that will require further change? The Government are not allowing the time that is needed. A stream of accountants, commentators and representatives of small businesses—cited by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien)—are alarmed by the way in which the Government are rushing ahead.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) seemed to place considerable reliance on the assistance provided by photocopiers. Valuable though such devices are, if the hon. Gentleman thinks that he will get away with simply photocopying last year's tax return and sending it in for the following year, he will come a cropper. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce)—who has left the Chamber—recognised the problems, but did not seem sure whether he and his hon. Friends would join us in the Division Lobby. We shall note how they vote, and we shall remind the electorate if they do not support this opportunity to provide time to get the self-assessment regime right.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) drew attention to the problems facing professions involving variable cash flow, and to what he rightly described as the guessing game that would confront them in the event of a gap between the sending of an invoice and the receipt of cash. He spoke of the devastating effect that the bungled introduction of the regime could have on prospects of self-employment, and on people's confidence not only in the tax regime but in enterprise and self-employment as a way of earning a living.

The Minister has not given us the assurances that self-employed people and small businesses would want to hear. He has not dealt satisfactorily with the issues that we have raised in relation to the £850 million extra tax imposition. We had an interesting discussion about cash flow and the fact that people might be affected differently in different circumstances, but the Minister cannot deny the existence of the extra £850 million tax yield, which is in the Red Book. Someone will be paying that extra money, and it will not be the Minister; it will be the 9 million self-employed people and small businesses.

**Mr. Jack** *rose—*

**Mr. Smith:** It seems that the Minister is about to volunteer to pay the £850 million.

**Mr. Jack:** I thought that the hon. Gentleman had followed the argument. The answer is that there will be no extra tax hit on businesses. There is no double taxation. As I told the hon. Gentleman, the extra sum against indexation was a result of the rising profit trend. He agreed with me a moment ago; this shows how confused he is.

**Mr. Smith:** The Minister does not deny—he cannot, because his own Red Book shows it—that there will be

*[Mr. Smith]*

an extra tax yield of £850 million. However much they may wriggle and squirm, it is small businesses and the self-employed who will pay that extra money. I promise the Minister and his hon. Friends that we shall remind the electorate, and the small businesses and self-employed people who suffer the consequences of that imposition, who is responsible for the way in which it has been landed on them.

The Minister also did not deal with all the problems of complexity, and the difficulties that the Revenue is experiencing—notwithstanding its professionalism, to which I pay tribute—in completing the final version of the tax form. He did not deal with the recurrent costs to the self-employed. He did not deal with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire about the danger of a different and more confrontational relationship between taxpayers and tax authorities; and he did not deal with the additional burdens on employers of all kinds, who will face more demands for extra information from both tax authorities and their employees.

There can be no doubt that self-assessment, as introduced by the present Government, has enormous and damaging potential to turn an important change into a formidable crisis for small businesses and the self-employed. Opposition Members urge the Government, even now, to start listening, and to provide the time that will allow us to get the position right. It is clear from everything that the Minister has said that it is not right yet.

*Question put*, That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided*: Ayes 213, Noes 268.

**Division No. 36]** **[6.45 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Eric Clarke and**
**Mr. Greg Pope.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Mr. Simon Burns.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Clause 112 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Bill (Clauses 36, 105, 112 and 139 and schedule 15), as amended, to be reported.*

*To lie upon the Table.*

# Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill

*Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.*

7.1 pm

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not think that you were in the Chamber during business questions, when I raised the issue of when the Scott inquiry report was to be published. The Leader of the House quite specifically replied—it has been carried by the media—that responsibility for the publication of that delayed report was down to Scott himself. I know that that is not true.

I do not know whether that reply was a slip of the tongue, but people outside are concerned that the House has been misled by the Leader of the House. This is the earliest opportunity that I have had to raise the matter, and I think that it is important to put on record the fact that the Leader of the House was wrong in his assertion that the publication of the report was down to Scott. In fact, it is down to the Government.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot make a judgment on that matter, but of course he has made his point.

## New clause 1

GUIDELINES FOR INVESTIGATIONS (MATTERS OF CLINICAL JUDGMENT)

'In section 11 of the 1993 Act (procedure in respect of investigations) after subsection (6) there shall be inserted—

"(7) Without prejudice to the provisions of subsections (1) to (6) above, the Secretary of State may, after consulting the Commissioner and such representatives of health service professions as the Secretary of State thinks fit, by regulations made by statutory instrument make provision for the conduct of investigations which arise in consequence of the exercise of clinical judgment.

(8) Regulations under subsection (7) above may make provision for—

(a) the criteria to be used by the Commissioner in the selection of specialist medical advisers to assist him in that investigation;

(b) the level of proof necessary to satisfy the Commissioner that a complaint is justified;

(c) the circumstances under which the Commissioner may delay an investigation or refer it to another body; and

(d) such other matters as the Secretary of State thinks fit.".'.—*[Mr. Galbraith.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Sam Galbraith** (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

As the House knows, and as I have said before, this Bill is an excellent advance for the national health service. The Bill is considered to be an extension of the complaints procedures and systems within the NHS, which are important. I think that it has another important role, which is to improve the standards of care in the NHS, and we should not underestimate its value in achieving that.

It is important for us to be clear about how the Bill will operate, and that is the basis of my new clause. There will be two consequences as a result of the Bill introducing clinical judgment into the competence of the commissioner. I suspect that many more complaints will be raised than the Government and the health service ombudsman have anticipated. However, there will be some disappointment for many complainants in that no clinical incompetence will be found in the majority of cases. I have had many medical negligence cases presented to me and, in my experience, in about 85 or 90 per cent. of the cases that I was asked to review, there was no case to pursue. That will probably be the case here.

If the system is to be seen to work properly, fairly and openly, while remembering that we are calling into question someone's clinical judgment, a number of factors should be put on record. From what I have read and heard, and from what the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), has said, I have absolute confidence in the ombudsman and believe that he will get it right. I have been impressed by his paper and by the various communications we have had. However, allowing for that, it would be nice to raise the issues that we hope that he will address.

The first of the regulations that I am proposing in my new clause concerns the criteria that should be used by the commissioner in the selection of the doctors who will conduct the investigation. That is the crux of the matter. Doctors, obviously, have to be judged by their peers. The judgment of general practitioners will have to be judged by other general practitioners and the judgment of hospital consultants by other hospital consultants because of the various clinical judgments that are involved. If a complaint is raised against a registrar, obviously, the question of clinical incompetence will vary depending on whether a consultant is involved. If the ombudsman finds that a registrar made a decision that should have been made higher up the line, I hope that the ombudsman will not shirk from his duty. He should examine not just whether the person who made that decision had sufficient knowledge to do so, but whether it should have been made by someone higher up. That is important.

Another issue is the level of proof that will be necessary. That will be difficult because often there is a dispute about clinical judgment. I hope that that will be sorted out and that those who give the ombudsman advice will admit that there might be a dispute and that a reasonably large number of doctors would have done something one way and that other doctors would have done it another. We should recognise that there may be a dispute, which is the purpose of the second regulation that I have proposed.

The next issue is the one that worries me the most. The ombudsman suggested that when he raises a complaint, he might like to say he will not pursue it because it should be pursued by the General Medical Council or the courts as a case of medical negligence. The ombudsman should not have that power within his remit. He should have a case referred to him and he should investigate it. Should the complainant seek to pursue the case through the GMC or the courts, as the ombudsman has made clear, he should have the power to delay the case and to reconsider the matter. The ombudsman should not have the power to suggest that it should be pursued in another manner because he cannot make judgments about serious professional misconduct or negligence, which are matters for law.

Those are a few of the points that I wished to raise. The Bill is a worthwhile addition to the complaints procedure. We should look at it as a method of improving clinical competence. I hope that the ombudsman will listen to the points that we have made and take them into consideration when he is dealing with such cases.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) for the manner in which he has presented the case. We had an extensive discussion on it in Committee, when he mentioned a number of points. As he will be aware, we do not believe that it is right to put the new clause into statute in the form that he has proposed. The hon. Gentleman has spoken of his confidence in the ombudsman, and we believe that the ombudsman should have the final say in such matters. As we know, the ombudsman has set out clearly in his report how he will consider these matters.

The points raised by the hon. Gentleman and delineated, one by one, in the regulations that he suggests are certainly worth studying and are extremely valuable. I can draw the ombudsman's attention to the hon. Gentleman's points and I am sure that he will study them with great care because they deserve attention. In the light of that assurance, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be prepared to withdraw his new clause.

**Mr. Galbraith:** I thank the Minister for his reply. In the light of his comments and my confidence in the ombudsman, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

## Clause 9

COMPLAINTS: REQUIREMENTS TO BE MET

**Mr. David Hinchliffe** (Wakefield): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 5, line 32, leave out 'In' and insert '—(1)'.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 1, in page 5, line 33, after 'complaints)', insert

'shall be amended as follows.

(2) After subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(4A) Without prejudice to the provisions of subsections (1) to (4) above, the Secretary of State may by regulations made by statutory instrument make such provision for the receipt of complaints as appear to him likely to expedite and facilitate the making of complaints.

(3)".'.

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** As I said on Second Reading, the Bill has my full support. However, we need to examine the wider complaints procedure and some of the issues—perhaps policy issues—that lead people to make complaints. My amendments would provide a mechanism to improve the complaints procedure.

On Second Reading, I gained the impression that the Under-Secretary thought that there was some sense in what I had said. Indeed, he referred to my Yorkshire common sense, and that encouraged me to come to this Report stage and repeat some of my arguments. He may want to rephrase his remark when he responds later.

I shall explain why I want to amend the Bill at this stage. I was involved with the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 throughout its passage in the House. Unfortunately, the Act has caused considerable confusion among users of and complainants about the health service, as well as among those who work in the service, about the responsibilities of various elements of the NHS. Therefore, we need to simplify the complaints procedure, which is why I tabled the amendments.

On Second Reading I cited the example of a constituent who had a lump in her breast and was involved with four separate agencies during her treatment and after care. Her complaints related to three of those four agencies. Her complaints were serious and I felt that there should be a simpler method than having to write to each of the agencies. We need to consider how we can improve the system for people like my constituent who encounter serious problems with the care they receive.

I am sorry to see the Minister for Health leaving the Chamber. For some reason, whenever I get to my feet he leaves and then returns when he sees on the monitor that I have sat down. One of my arguments on Second Reading, which was not fully refuted by the Under-Secretary, was that the commissioner needs to examine the increasing examples of buck passing between the various elements of the NHS during the early stages of the complaints process. I have had experience of the purchaser blaming the provider, the provider blaming the purchaser, the hospital trust blaming the community trust and vice versa. With community care and continuing care, the NHS blames the local authority and vice versa. The whole issue of alleged bed blocking is a classic example.

We need to recognise that the climate surrounding the structure of the NHS has changed. Even with the improvements proposed in the Bill, I do not believe that the complaints procedure recognises the complexity of the new NHS, especially the internal market.

Another issue in my constituency and west Yorkshire generally is competition between similar providers, both for contracts for the provision of services and for patients themselves. That causes difficulties for patients who are referred from one hospital to another, yet those two hospitals are competing within the internal market. There are many arguments between providers in west Yorkshire. I represent Wakefield, which has arguments with Leeds because, within the internal market, it is removing services from Pinderfields hospital. Within the district, there are arguments between Pontefract general infirmary and Pinderfields hospital because of the competition for contracts. Therefore, patients who move between the hospitals for treatment are occasionally victims of that competition when they want to make a complaint. The Bill needs to include a mechanism for dealing with that competition which, on occasions, causes difficulties for people with legitimate complaints, many of which may end up in the hands of the health service commissioner.

7.15 pm

I shall be interested to hear the Under-Secretary's response to another point that I raised on Second Reading. The role of the commissioner in examining the causal factors in a specific complaint is too narrow. My amendment would achieve a wider consideration of complaints within the commissioner's changed role.

*[Mr. Hinchliffe]*

Also on Second Reading, I made a point about resourcing arrangements that impact on patients' treatment. How does the commissioner's role fit into that? He needs to be able to consider the wider issues. Another example is fundholding, although I do not want to go into the merits or otherwise tonight. Nor shall I go into the merits or otherwise of the new resource allocation formula. My point is that occasionally those factors have a clear bearing on the serious complaints of patients, which may well end up in the commissioner's hands.

When I spoke on Second Reading, the Minister for Health left at the start of my speech and returned at the end of it. I asked him to read my speech. To my surprise, the best present I had for Christmas was a response from him showing that, to his credit, he had read my speech. I was not entirely happy with his letter, dated 19 December, in response to my comments about the Bill and the wider issues that I felt should be dealt with in Committee. I had made two points—the first, which I said I had made four times previously, related to fundholding. The Minister for Health wrote:

"You claimed that complaints handling in the NHS is characterised by buck-passing. I presume that you were unaware that buck-passing was possible until this Government introduced a formal complaints procedure into the health service. It is ironic that you should make this claim during a debate to further strengthen and clarify the new complaints procedures.

You also claimed that Wakefield has lost resources. That, too, is nonsense."

I shall deal with those points in a moment or two. I was pleased to note that at the end of his letter the Minister said:

"Seasonal greetings and best wishes for a better-informed 1996."

I reciprocated those greetings in a reply to the Minister, which the Under-Secretary may have seen.

It is difficult for me to argue the case for the amendments without referring in detail to some of the concerns in my area. I want briefly to explain why we need to widen the complaints procedure in the way proposed in the amendments. I am currently receiving complaints from patients relating to the two-tier system. I do not intend to go into detail about this matter, as I have done so on several previous occasions.

I have argued with the Minister and with the Secretary of State, and I have corresponded with both. I have met every agency concerned with the NHS in Wakefield, and I have got nowhere in looking at the role of the health service commissioner. Who is the referee in these affairs? Who can give me an objective and definitive view of what is happening?

I want to mention a specific case as an example of where constituents believe that the two-tier system is impacting upon their personal experiences. Pinderfields trust is the main provider in my constituency, and it has a current contract with Wakefield health authority for roughly 20,900 finished consultant episodes across all specialisms. The projected outturn at present is approximately 25,800, a much higher figure than the actual contract. Of the difference between the contract figure and the projected figure, some 3,500 are covered by additional funding, but the balance remains to be sorted out.

That is why people in Wakefield believe that they are experiencing a two-tier system. That is my view, but it is also the view of a number of GPs and—I suspect—that of a number of people who work within the health service in Wakefield. But I cannot prove that that is the case. Hon. Members with similar opinions end up in the Chamber bandying claims about, perhaps for political reasons and perhaps for genuine reasons of concern about constituents' experiences. Some of the cases that I have dealt with are certainly very negative.

There should be a mechanism whereby the commissioner, in investigating complaints, can look at some of the wider issues currently affecting my constituents and those of other hon. Members. I was speaking to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who followed me at Health questions in November and made exactly the same claim in relation to fundholding and the two-tier system in his area as I was making for Wakefield. I am trying to address the principle, rather than simply the practical examples from my constituency.

In my view—I stress that it is my view—the commissioner has a role to play. Two-tier systems arise when there is a disparity in funding and, in this case, we have that between the district health authority and the fundholders. On the one hand, the fundholders are able to purchase, while on the other the district health authority cannot. There is either a disparity in funding or an imbalance between the elective and emergency contracts made with the provider trust. These issues must be looked at not by someone who is involved in the political arena, but by someone who is objective and has a role in investigating complaints.

The amendment points to the need to examine such problems in the context of specific complaints, and I appreciate that these complaints may be more serious than those that I have heard from my constituents which deal with orthopaedic operations and other operations that have caused discomfort. How do we get an objective evaluation of the resources available to fundholders compared with those available to non-fundholders in an area such as Wakefield? That will clearly have a bearing on the complaints that may well end up in the hands of the commissioner.

I turn briefly to buck-passing. The Minister of State wrote to me to say that it was nonsense to argue that buck-passing existed in the health service. I received that letter shortly after I received another letter from a local provider trust concerning a severely handicapped 16-year-old young man who was living with his family in the community in Wakefield. I felt that the letter was a classic example of a matter that could be addressed by the commissioner, or by the complaints procedure that would be introduced if the amendment is accepted.

I wrote on 14 November to the Wakefield and Pontefract community health trust with regard to the young man, who was severely disabled. I worked, as one or two people know, in social work for more than 20 years before I came to the House. The young man was one of the worst cases that I have ever seen living in the community and being cared for by parents. He is completely bedfast. He cannot feed himself, wash himself or dress himself. He cannot speak, and some people refer to him unkindly as a cabbage because, frankly, he can do nothing for himself. He is totally dependent on two extremely dedicated parents who have given up their lives to care for this young man.

The parents contacted me for the simple reason that they wanted respite care above and beyond the brief care that they had at the time. In short, they could see that if they did not get some more relief and support, they could no longer go on caring. I have seen young men like him before, but always in a hospital environment. I cannot recall seeing anyone as vulnerable and as multiply handicapped as that young man being cared for by parents within the community.

I wrote to the Wakefield and Pontefract community health trust to ask them to consider the request for additional respite care for the family, because I felt that if anyone was deserving of such care, these parents were. I asked the chief executive to do as I had done, and pay a personal visit to the family. Hon. Members will know that one can read and write about people, but until one sees the situation, one does not know what is going on. With permission, I will quote the chief executive's reply to me. While I will not go into great detail, I want to make an important point about a specific case that relates to the amendment. I shall not name the young man or his family. The chief executive's reply was dated 5 December, and said:

"Thank you for your letter of 14 November.

I am sure that you are aware of the range of services which we provide, namely, Rose Garth Respite Care Bungalow and the Community Team: Learning Disabilities (Children and Adults) which provides care to many, many children, adults and families throughout the District. The volume of work we carry out and the value of the care and respite given to families is often not appreciated other than by those in receipt of care. The present staff and facility resources are now fully stretched. I do not believe there is any slack in any part of the service.

The Health Authority is fully aware of the demand for additional services and is familial with the number of families who are at the end of their tether. In their future plans they are sympathetic to funding additional services. It is now a matter of priority and funding, which can only be resolved by the Health Authority.

This Trust will respond quickly to the availability of additional funds and extend the service to those families in real need."

When that letter came to me, I had to ring the chief executive to ask, "What are you saying to me?" In short, he was saying, "It's not my problem. It is the problem of the health authority." I have written to the provider of existing respite services to ask for more. To me, this is a classic case of buck-passing. If it is not buck-passing, frankly I do not know what it is.

Having sent a copy of the letter to the family shortly before Christmas—they were not entirely happy, as one might imagine—I had to raise the matter with the health authority. My query to the Minister is, "Was I wrong to write to the provider of services to ask for more?" Do I need to raise every complaint or concern with the purchaser? If so, do we extend that to complaints received on community care, where the local authority is involved? Do I have to write to the Government, who provide the special transitional grant for community care funding? It strikes me that the principles at stake here would result in enormous complexity—even more than we have now—if they were followed to their obvious conclusion.

I am pleased to report that the outcome of this case has, eventually, been positive. The chief executive and the chair-designate of the Wakefield health authority visited the family, and were totally overwhelmed by the care and dedication of the parents. They then agreed to an extra 12 hours of respite care. Understandably, the family were aggrieved by the response of the trust, and my concern is whether I handled the matter wrongly. Did I write to the wrong people? In future, should I write to the health authority on every issue? I have done that in the past, but have been referred to the provider.

I served on the Standing Committee dealing with the Bill, and I have been an Opposition Front-Bench member. I have been involved in the NHS for many years as vice-chair of a community health council and as member of a health authority. I have been actively involved in working in the NGS through social services. I am totally baffled, and I am supposed to know my way around the issue.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, may I remind him that he said that he was not going to go into too much detail. It is important that he makes only points that support his amendment. He is going very wide and I have been very tolerant owing to the nature of the subject under consideration.

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** I appreciate that you have been very reasonable, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that you understand that, in illustrating why the amendments are necessary, I needed to go into such detail about individual circumstances.

7.30 pm

Finally on buck-passing, my amendment is aimed at improving the response to complaints, so that distress is not caused to families such as that of the constituent whom I mentioned.

In his reply to me, the Minister of State implied that I had misled the House about funding. When arguing that concern on Second Reading, I was simply pointing out that we need someone who is empowered to consider whether any funding issues have a bearing on a complaint. I was questioning, not whether we have enough money in the national health service—whatever the Government, we all accept that there will never be enough to deal with all the demand—but the Government's allocation formula for individual health authorities. That was my point on Second Reading and I do not think that the Minister of State fully understood it.

In my area—Wakefield health authority—the major purchaser of services such as those to which I referred has been told that the authority is over-funded to the tune of £7 million according to the Government's new formula. I will not go into detail about why the formula is wrong because you will not allow it, Madam Deputy Speaker. I mentioned that briefly on Second Reading and I was ruled out of order then. I simply must say, however, that the report of the district health authority of 20 December 1994 details the implications of the authority losing £7 million.

I moved the amendments because I believe that, if resourcing has a bearing on a complaint, it is appropriate for the commissioner to consider it, or for the complaints procedure to allow an objective overview by someone who understands the health service and is not a political figure, and who can conclude what is fair.

My area has been badly done to by the changes. The impact will come through this year. There will be more cases and I will have to write more letters about individual complaints. The commissioner has a role to play, if he can see objectively that we are getting a bad deal.

*[Mr. Hinchliffe]*

On that subject I shall conclude, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for your tolerance and for allowing me to make those points. I hope that the Minister understands that I am simply asking that we consider ways in which we can clarify and simplify the complaints procedures. At the moment many people are going round in circles, including many hon. Members. If the hon. Gentleman reads the Second Reading debate, he will see that I had support from Conservative Members when I mentioned the huge increase in our work load since the internal market was introduced. We are writing letters that we did not have to write before. It is causing us work and it is causing our constituents many difficulties.

**Mr. Horam:** I referred to Yorkshire common sense when I dealt with the points raised by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on Second Reading. I also thought that Yorkshire qualities included a certain taciturnity, but that was not so evident this evening, I am afraid. None the less, the hon. Gentleman made some important arguments.

First, on complexity—a point that he has made strongly in the past—let me assure the hon. Gentleman that the idea of establishing the new three-stage procedure is to simplify and clarify the present complexity.

Secondly, if buck-passing exists, one of the functions of the ombudsman is to nail it. He is the final court of appeal and can certainly decide whether responsibility for something has been passed unreasonably between one authority and a general practitioner, or whatever the case may be. So, there is a recourse.

On the important subject of resources and the two-tier system and so forth, while it is obviously not the case that the ombudsman can look into general questions of resources, as that would be second guessing the national health service and its allocation of resources, he will be able to look into cases of individual hardship in which he considers that there might have been an unreasonable allocation of resources. I assure the hon. Member for Wakefield about that.

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** I am grateful for those comments. I was not clear whether, by an individual case, the Minister means that of a patient, a health authority, or both.

**Mr. Horam:** No, I am talking about the patient, because we are dealing with individual complaints.

I am afraid to say that the amendment is defective. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman tried hard to get it right, but it is difficult. It would change matters only for complaints made to the health service commissioner and the hon. Gentleman is concerned with complaints made at stages 1 and 2. Therefore, his amendment would not do what he wants it to do.

In the light of the hon. Gentleman's letter to me—I have it in front of me—as a consequence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State writing to him, and what he has said in the past half hour or so, I will consider what he has said and consider the letter and reply to him on the matters that he has raised. In view of that, I hope that he will withdraw the amendment.

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** I am grateful for the Minister's response. I recognise that the amendments have certain technical deficiencies, but we have done our best to ensure a debate on some areas of concern. I think that the Minister understands our concerns, which are reasonable. On the basis of his assurance that he will write to me on those matters, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

## Clause 10

### Reports

**Mr. Henry McLeish** (Fife, Central): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 5, line 44, at end insert—

'(2A) After subsection (1) insert—

"(1A) Before making the report of the results of an investigation the Commissioner—

(a) shall send a draft factual summary of the matters investigated, excluding his findings and recommendations, to the person and body referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c) in subsection (1) above, and shall give them an opportunity to indicate any factual inaccuracies or omissions;

(b) may, for purposes specified by him, send to the person and body referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c) in subsection (1) above, a draft of either his findings or his proposed recommendations or both, but shall not send such draft to one party only.".'.

Again, I do not want to detain the House on this item. It was discussed extensively in Committee and the Minister has provided a helpful letter to my hon. Friends regarding the commissioner's views.

The amendment was tabled merely to ensure a completely level playing field. At present, the summary of facts is submitted to the complainant, but it was felt that all the details should be passed to the complainant at the conclusion of the case because the factual content of the initial summary provided to the complainant by the commissioner and that of the final report could differ.

Clearly, the ombudsman has said that he would be happier for the power to be left with him to allow him to use his discretion under section 11 of the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993 and we have the greatest confidence in Mr. Reid. No criticism is implied by our amendment; it is merely designed to find out whether the Minister wants to consider the matter further to ensure that we take away the feeling of bitterness and anger in any complaints procedure—the feeling that there is not a level playing field—which would surely help the procedure. I ask the Minister to respond on the basis of those brief comments.

**Mr. Horam:** I well understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Indeed, it was made with great strength and clarity in Committee. I said then what we could hope to do and I talked to the commissioner, Mr. Reid, about it. As a result, he wrote the letter.

In the light of the general concern in the House and in the Committee, I am prepared to take the matter a stage further—as a response to the amendment and the hon. Gentleman's comments. I will ask the commissioner to consider further his practice and invite the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to look into, not only the question of the health commissioner, but that of the parliamentary commissioner—perhaps a larger part of the total

framework—and decide whether it is fully satisfied that the procedures that the commissioner has outlined are totally correct, and whether it should seriously consider moving towards the hon. Gentleman's suggestions and those made in Committee. Allowing a senior, important Committee of the House to consider the matter fully will take it forward in the appropriate way.

**Mr. McLeish:** That is a fair and positive response to the concerns of Opposition Members and of organisations such as the National Consumer Council. It satisfies us that the matter should be reconsidered. It will be discussed by the Select Committee. We welcome the further wisdom of Mr. Reid. With those assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

7.40 pm

**Mr. Horam:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The proceedings on the Bill have, I am pleased to say, been marked by complete agreement on its fundamental objectives. The harmony between hon. Members has been a reflection of the general consent that the proposals have commanded in the NHS and among consumer groups.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and his colleagues, such as the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and others, for their constructive attitude both this evening and throughout proceedings. I also thank my hon. Friends for their support for the Bill. I am grateful to the professions, which have adopted a constructive attitude, and to the ombudsman, who has been willing to make himself available to discuss the points that arose during our proceedings.

I am confident that, with stages 1 and 2, which we will take separate legislative action to implement, we have a new procedure which will ultimately be of great benefit to NHS patients.

**Mr. McLeish:** I agree with the Minister's comments. This is the third building block in the new complaints procedure and we wish it well in its implementation. As with many other things, there will be problems but if there is a consensus among professional groups and if the patients and families involved take the matter seriously and support the system, it will improve dramatically the health service complaints procedure.

In the commissioner, we have an excellent custodian of fairness. If he can ensure that what we have talked about is properly put into practice I have no doubt that the procedure will be a significant improvement for patients and help the health service. It illustrates to people outside that the House can agree on certain matters despite the fact that we tear each other apart on other aspects of health care.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.*

## Parish Councils (Fareham)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

7.42 pm

**Sir Peter Lloyd** (Fareham): As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, the Local Government Commission recommended the creation of two parish councils in the Warsash and Sarisbury wards of Fareham borough in my constituency. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made his response last March to the commission's proposals on Hampshire generally, and recommended to the House, inter alia, that the arrangements in Fareham should remain unchanged, it was naturally taken by those in Fareham who followed those matters, not least myself, as the end of matter—including parishing.

There was, therefore, considerable surprise, pleasant to some but unwelcome to many others, when in July, in response to a written question, the Secretary of State announced that parish councils were to be set up in the two wards. The shock for those opposed was all the greater because they had had no inkling that the Secretary of State was minded to come to such a decision or that he had power to do so without notice, debate or parliamentary approval such as is required for changes to district and county authorities.

I immediately met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and told him that I did not believe that there was the sort of local support that would justify the decision and hoped that he would [illegible] with care the objections that I was sure that he would receive. Shortly afterwards, all parties on the borough council combined behind a motion to secure a reversal of the decision with 36 out of 38 councillors present voting for the motion and two abstaining. None was against.

The council observed that the meetings to discuss the possibilities of parishing had been sparsely attended and that the commission's consultation leaflet, issued after it had published its provisional recommendation, produced a response from seven people in Sarisbury and 12 in Warsash—insufficient numbers, the council noted, even to man the proposed parish councils in the wards in question.

In addition, the ward councillors stressed to me that their soundings made it clear that there was no general desire for parish councils; rather there was widespread opposition among those who knew of the decision—opposition which they believed would include the overwhelming majority of the local population when the inevitable extra charges were added to their council tax bills.

As my hon. Friend the Minister will remember, we have had a number of exchanges on the matter. In one, he conceded that his Department had received only six letters from the public on the issue, three opposing parishing in Warsash, two against parishing in Sarisbury and one in favour. He explained that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's decision was based on what he described as

"the strong level of public support expressed to the commission during the consultation exercise."

He went on to say, reasonably—I am grateful to him for this—that, if there were clear evidence that the majority of the electorate in the two wards were against the proposed

*[Sir Peter Lloyd]*

parishing arrangements, he and his colleagues would certainly reconsider the decision. Meanwhile, he would delay implementation of the commencement order so that such evidence might be produced.

I told the six ward councillors of my hon. Friend the Minister's comments and explained that if they were to carry conviction, they would need to provide objective, additional evidence that could not be dismissed as hunch or hearsay. Petitions would not do; generally they are signed only by those in favour so those against are not recorded. Pleas in the press for letters to be sent in are usually ignored and there is no way of knowing whether the people who respond are representative.

The six councillors agreed to select three residential roads at random in each ward and call on every house, going back to houses where no one was in, so that they would have the view of a genuinely representative sample. I have already passed on the result of those surveys to my hon. Friend the Minister. They show that, of those responding in both wards, 84 per cent. were against parishing in Sarisbury and 77 per cent. against in Warsash; 2 per cent. were in favour in Sarisbury and 5 per cent. in Warsash. "Don't knows" were 18 per cent. in Warsash and 14 per cent. in Sarisbury. More than 200 households were canvassed in all.

It is significant that quite a number of those households were unaware that there was a proposal to give them a parish council. I believe that the survey is crucial because it is, I understand, the only genuinely random survey that has been conducted in the whole parish consultation exercise and its results are unambiguous, as my hon. Friend can see.

The Local Government Commission made no such study. After it had published its provisional recommendations for Hampshire, the commission circulated a leaflet with a tear-off reply slip to all houses. The leaflet described the commission's proposals concentrating, properly, on the options for the district and county councils and specifically asked for responses. Elsewhere in the leaflet, there was an easy-to-miss reference to the commission's parish recommendations across Hampshire, to which it did not specifically ask for responses.

The borough council observed that only seven replies were received from Sarisbury and 12 from Warsash. I am told by local councillors that they know of at least four other letters against the proposal that were sent to the commission. It was no doubt because they were not on the official slip that they were not included in the 19 responses I mentioned earlier.

The Local Government Commission did its work and made its provisional parish recommendation in its normal manner, not—this is vital to the argument—by trying to make its own assessment of local opinion. It did not regard that as its job. It thought that its job with parishing was to give a fair wind to proposals from local groups that convinced it that they had put together a well thought-out proposition, were seeking to involve local people and had evidence of some local support.

In that respect, the Warsash and Sarisbury residents' associations, with the advice and backing of the Hampshire Association of Parish Councils, deserve praise for setting the ball rolling, convening public meetings and endeavouring to interest local residents in the issue. It was their proper role to do so and they obviously made great efforts to discharge it as well as they could.

Warsash residents held a public meeting in March 1993. Some 300 people attended, although many had left by the time a vote was taken and the decision to set up a steering committee to investigate the matter further was made with a comparatively small majority. Later that year, 2,000 questionnaires were distributed. Of those, 214 were returned—145 in favour of setting up a parish council and 74 against. A local census was also taken with similar results. It is worth noting that Warsash has more than 6,000 electors.

Similarly, the Sarisbury residents' association called a public meeting in June 1993, which representatives of the Hampshire Association of Parish Councils addressed. Some 20 to 30 people attended and agreed unanimously to set up a steering committee to examine further the proposition for a parish council. Many local organisations were then invited to send representatives to join the steering committee, and seven or eight did so.

The steering committee decided to place a questionnaire with a reply slip in the local free magazine, *The Informer*. It received 37 replies in favour and one against. The committee held a final open meeting in October 1993, at which the 20 to 30 people present decided unanimously to submit its proposal for a parish council to the Local Government Commission. Sarisbury has some 4,500 electors.

It is clear that both associations and steering committees made genuine attempts to involve the wider public and canvas residents' views and support, but, in the light of those figures, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will want to look again carefully at the advice that he received that

"there was a strong level of local support for parishing expressed during the consultative exercise".

Despite the spirited endeavours of the residents' associations, there was clearly very little.

There was undoubtedly some interest in parishing and, in the early days of the commission's work when all the talk was of boroughs amalgamating into larger, single-tier authorities, more people were prepared to see merit in a new, very local elected body. That mood passed with the Secretary of State's widely welcomed decision to leave the borough and county structure unchanged.

My hon. Friend the Minister will agree that that review of local government was special in that, unlike its predecessors, it sought to take note of local preferences. County and district councils are needed to deliver services efficiently and effectively, so the Secretary of State cannot surrender his final judgment on them to an opinion poll, however seriously he takes public opinion. With parishing, however, it is different. Parishes are not essential for providing services. If they were, there would be a national policy to set them up throughout the country. The uneven pattern of parish distribution clearly depends on history and local preference, not on utility or policy.

Parish councils are valuable in local communities that want them. I should be happy to have them in Warsash and Sarisbury if I were convinced that they would be welcomed, and so would the local councillors. Indeed, I have them in the rural Winchester parts of my constituency, where some city councillors also sit on

parish councils and find it rewarding and useful to do so. This debate, however, is not about the merits or otherwise or parish councils; it is focused narrowly on the question of local support for the Local Government Commission's recommendation for Sarisbury and Warsash.

On that essential point, local opinion is such that there is no basis on which the Secretary of State can reasonably confirm the order to set up the councils. I am sure that he does not want to impose them on an unwilling electorate. If he did, I fear that he would simply ensure that the majority thought extremely unkindly of him whenever it paid the extra on its council tax bills. However, I am certain that his objective in the matter is the same as mine: to ensure that his decision corresponds with the general tenor of local opinion.

My hon. Friend the Minister and the Secretary of State postponed implementation of the original recommendation so that they could look carefully at the evidence. If they still feel that they do not have enough, I should be glad if they would speedily commission some more independent research or studies on another genuinely representative sample, perhaps through the good offices of the Local Government Commission. I would be content with the suggestion, put to me in a personal capacity by the chairman of the Warsash residents' association, to hold an officially organised referendum. I suppose that it could be along the lines of a town vote, which used to be a feature of local government between the wars.

However, I am certain that no one—locally or in Government—would be in favour of another long, drawn-out consultation. Some of those most in favour of parishing would prefer a clear-cut decision soon, even if it is no, which, as I believe that I have shown, is the only decision that my hon. Friend the Minister can properly come to on the considerable evidence that I have put before him.

7.55 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford):** I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) on his success in the ballot. I am genuinely delighted that he has used this opportunity to clarify many of the figures and spell them out succinctly, so that it will be possible to take them away and consider them again.

Until we can consider the points that my right hon. Friend has made, it is worth touching on the scene as we now see it. As he said, during the early stages of its review in Hampshire, the Local Government Commission received proposals for the creation of seven new parishes, including the two that he mentioned this evening. Those proposals were put forward by local steering committees set up in Sarisbury and Warsash to look at the question of emparishing. Both groups held public meetings and conducted surveys, which provided some evidence that local residents supported the creation of parishes for both areas. My right hon. Friend covered that matter carefully. A report in the *Local Government Chronicle* of August 1993 said that business in Warsash favoured a parish council.

The commission consulted on all the parishing proposals when it included them in its draft report for Hampshire. As it received only one representation against the emparishment of Sarisbury and none against the emparishment of Warsash, it included both in its final report. The representations that we then received about the final proposals did not suggest that we would be justified in overturning the commission's recommendation for Fareham. Both those consultations took place against a background of draft and final recommendations for no change in the county and district structure in Fareham. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accepted the parish recommendations in his announcement of 11 July.

Following further correspondence from my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham, we agreed to look again at our decision, should evidence be provided to show that the majority of the electorate was clearly against the parishing proposals. As my right hon. Friend said, Fareham councillors have now carried out surveys in selected parts of both Sarisbury and Warsash, the results of which suggest that the majority of the residents who were approached were against the proposed parishes. A cynic suggested to me that, because a letter went out earlier highlighting the levy of just one nearby parish, that could have influenced the response. At the same time, I also received letters that continued to support the recommendation and asked that we proceed with creating the new parishes.

I should like to take away the points that my right hon. Friend has made this evening, look at them carefully and put them before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, so that we may consider them before reaching a final decision. I am therefore grateful for the opportunity that my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham has provided for us to look at this matter clearly and afresh, with the figures succinctly before us.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Eight o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Friday 26 January 1996*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

9.34 am

**Mr. Alan Meale** (Mansfield): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Let me first thank the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the League Against Cruel Sports and other animal welfare organisations that have helped me with the preparation of the Bill for its First and Second Reading.

As Members will know, this is the third Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill to be considered in the House in the past three years. The first was presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and was considered on Second Reading on 14 February 1992. Clause 1 of that Bill would have made it an offence wilfully to inflict any suffering on or cruelly ill-treat any animal. Clause 2 would have outlawed all hunting with dogs. Members may recall that the hunting clause caused palpitations among some Conservative Members; however, no one appeared to object to clause 1.

History records that the Bill was defeated by 187 votes to 175 votes. That defeat was due in part to the unprecedented intervention of almost the entire Cabinet, none of whom had appeared in the Chamber that day until the Division bell sounded. Quite why Cabinet Members found it necessary to abandon Government business to intervene in a debate on a private Member's Bill has never been explained, particularly as the 1992 election was to be held within two months, so there was little chance of the Bill reaching the Statute Book.

The second Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill received its Second Reading on 3 March 1995. It was presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who sits beside me today. Like the previous Bill, it received huge public support. It was estimated that Members received more than half a million postcards and letters of support from the public. I confirm that, during the past few weeks, Members on both sides of the Chamber have received a similar amount of correspondence.

Members will recall that the only part of that Bill to raise hackles was clause 2, which sought to ban hunting with dogs. Clause 1 sought to make it an offence to cruelly kick, beat or torture any wild animal. Many of those who regard the hunting and killing of foxes, deer and hares as a proud sport again declared no objections to clause 1. The Bill was passed by 253 votes to nil—the biggest ever majority for a private Member's Bill.

What followed, however, was a catalogue of parliamentary filibustering tactics to stop the Bill making any further progress. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton, who is a devote and able campaigner on animal welfare, managed to get it into Committee but, because of time constraints, he was forced to give up the hunting clause. What remained was a much diluted Bill that sought to make it an offence to cruelly kick, beat or torture wild animals.

Amazingly, despite the assurances that had been given, fox-hunting supporters in the House announced that they could not accept the offence of torture, as their legal advice was that the hunting and snaring of animals would probably be interpreted in the courts as cruel torture. I have a feeling that that admission may return to haunt them.

The outcome was that hasty negotiations took place between all sides and resulted in my hon. Friend's Bill being reworded so that it would make it an offence cruelly to kick, beat, impale, crush, burn or drown any wild animal. In that form, it had the agreement of the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), chairman of the British Field Sports Society, and passed Report stage and Third Reading without objection.

In the other place three months later, the vice-chairman of the British Field Sports Society, Lord Mancroft, and other fox-hunting supporters—knowing full well that even one small amendment would almost certainly cause the Bill to run out of time—insisted on tabling seven or eight amendments, to wreck the Bill's chances. Nevertheless, so desperate was the need to create legislation that would at least acknowledge that wild animals are capable of suffering cruelty, that amendments were agreed. However, the lack of just a few seconds of parliamentary time prevented the Bill from progressing further.

We are again searching for justice for wild animals. My Bill's sponsors, together with the RSPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports, accept that the measure is not a vehicle for outlawing blood sports. The hon. Member for Wimbledon and I spent many hours discussing the Bill's wording. There have been intense negotiations with BFS officials and lawyers, the RSPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports. Discussions have been cordial, with a willingness to find solutions.

They led to considerable concessions on my part, and I reluctantly accepted one or two amendments in the other place. I waived the opportunity, after guarantees had been given, to resubmit the Bill in the form that it left this House last year. That would almost certainly have led, under the Parliament Act, to the Bill being passed without any fear of Lords amendments.

**Sir Michael Marshall** (Arundel): Many hon. Members in all parts of the House wished to be present for this debate. Some of us may not be able to participate in any vote if these proceedings run the full length of the day, but the hon. Gentleman has much support and good will in principle. We understand his remarks about reaching a compromise. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can give me two assurances, in case there is not another opportunity.

I am anxious to be clear why domestic animals are excluded from the Bill—many of us wished to see it broadened in that way. Can the hon. Gentleman assure the House that the Bill will assist the RSPCA in the difficulty that it has encountered in bringing prosecutions in the past?

*[Sir Michael Marshall]*

**Mr. Meale:** I can reassure the hon. Gentleman on both points. The RSPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports have been deeply involved at all stages. The Bill is about wild animals, and it replicates the protection given to domestic animals in the Protection of Animals Act 1911—although I agree that further legislation is probably needed to protect domestic animals.

I gave way in some of the negotiations because Conservative Members gave me their word that they would give the Bill a clear passage—including Government Whips, who are satisfied that I have taken into account the Government's technical amendments. After I met the Under-Secretary of State and civil servants and the amendments were passed to me, they were considered and included in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton accepts that there was a technical flaw in his Bill, and it was removed.

The RSPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports have recorded horrific offences not covered by the original list, and they were added so that they would be outlawed by the Bill. I believe that the Bill in its present form has the total approval of the Government, British Field Sports Society, RSPCA, League Against Cruel Sports and many other organisations.

Hopefully, it will soon be illegal to mutilate, kick, beat, nail, impale, stamp, burn, stone, crush, drown, drag or asphyxiate any wild animal with intend. Other cruel acts should be examined, but that list is a good basis for protecting wild animals. I hope that the hon. Member for Wimbledon and other hon. Members who support blood sports will not view the Bill with cynicism, but will accept that its progress should not be halted. In that way, we shall establish a measure that outlaws brutal and sadistic cruelty to wild animals.

I refer hon. Members to recent incidents where such a Bill would have helped to bring offenders to court. Near Sittingbourne last summer, two walkers found the carcases of two foxes smouldering over a fire in a quarry. A post mortem revealed that one of the foxes had been thrown on the fire while still alive, after being half strangled with a wire. The other fox was so badly burnt that the remains could not be fully examined and the cause of death established. No prosecution could be brought, as no offence in law existed to deal with the culprits.

The same year, a vixen—having been dug out of its earth by a terrier gang—was nailed to a tree while still alive and left to die, with its cubs pathetically waiting at the foot of a tree. In Charlton in south-east London last summer, a gang of youths caught a fox on open ground, tied a rope around and dragged it behind a motor bike, causing it to die from horrific injuries.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid-Staffordshire): Has the hon. Gentleman seen the report in yesterday's *Daily Express* about "graffiti yobs" who

"sprayed Kelvin the hedgehog with bright red paint.

Aerosol chemicals caused its spines to drop out and now, two months later, he is naked.

He would have died left out in the cold. But Kelvin is lucky."

Kelvin, whose photograph accompanies the report, is now being looked after and is healthy and well. Will the spraying of paints or other substances, which is sadly a growing trend, be made illegal by his Bill?

**Mr. Meale:** Yes, because spraying an animal with paint is an act of cruelty.

In July 1993, in Hollington, Kent, a hedgehog was killed when a man kicked it 40 ft against a wall. That hedgehog had recently given birth to five young, and was being fed by a family in their garden. In May 1995 in Portsmouth, a hedgehog was killed by teenagers, who pulled a slab from a wall, carried it across a field on their backs, placed it on top of a hedgehog and took it in turns to jump off a bench on to the slab until the animal was crushed to death.

Those are just five instances, and the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) described another. The RSPCA, the League Against Cruel Sports and other animal welfare organisations have catalogued tens of thousands of similar cases every year in which charges cannot be brought.

Many of my friends and the majority of the public will be disappointed that my Bill does not outlaw the hunting and killing of wild animals using dogs or the strangulation of animals on wire snares. So am I—but the reality is that, if I had brought such a measure before the House, it would have stood little chance of becoming law at this time. My discussions with the relevant organisations took into account the possibility of a general election being held and opposition in the other place to a measure that tackled such heinous crimes.

We went for a Bill to protect animals as quickly as possible, because of the scale of the problem. I would have preferred a Bill that tackled other forms of animal cruelty, but it was in the interests of the animal kingdom to proceed as we did. Perhaps the House will soon have a meaningful opportunity to examine and change the unfair preservation of certain interests—particularly in the other place, together with an examination of their Lordships' mansions, tens of thousands of acres of land and privileged position in society. Public opinion is with me in that respect, as with animal welfare. I hope one day that we will be able to have a full and frank debate on that aspect.

If any Conservative Members are thinking about opposing the Bill today, I wish to point out that it is a genuine attempt by Members of Parliament of all parties, who care about the animal kingdom, to start to put proper legislation into place. I believe that if any Member of Parliament—of any party—allows this country to continue without proper legislation to stop thugs and hooligans horrendously and cruelly torturing and killing wild animals for sport and personal enjoyment, he or she does not deserve to be here at all. I commend the Bill to the House, and I ask for the support of every hon. Member in the Chamber.

9.50 am

**Sir John Cope** (Northavon): I am a member of the British Field Sports Society and have been for many years, much longer than I have been a Member of Parliament, but I am glad to support the Bill today. The hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), who moved the Bill in a measured way, was very sensible to limit the objectives of the Bill as he has described, and also to seek wide agreement before introducing it.

I took a little part in some of the negotiations that took place between the hon. Member for Mansfield and the British Field Sports Society. I wish to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, and especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), the chairman of the BFSS, who took part from our side.

We are all concerned about the cases of terrible cruelty that have been brought to our attention by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, some of which the hon. Member for Mansfield has described this morning, and for which the society has not been able to prosecute successfully those people who should be brought to book.

At the same time, I wish to make it clear that I would not have been able to support the Bill if it had also attempted to ban hunting and other field sports. I own no land, and I do not fulfil the other criteria mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, but I am a strong supporter of field sports. The properly conducted, traditional field sports of this country have my support. Many of my constituents take part in them, they provide considerable employment, and they continue to contribute to the preservation of wildlife and of the countryside as we know it.

I am therefore opposed to any attempt to ban hunting and other field sports, and will continue to oppose any such attempts vigorously. I could not have supported the Bill if, directly or indirectly, it threatened to do so.

I recognise that the hon. Member for Mansfield and many others take a different view. We have in the past debated whether certain field sports should be made illegal, and no doubt we shall do again, as the hon. Gentleman has previously suggested. I am ready to defend field sports again if necessary. However, the Bill is not intended to attack field sports. The hon. Gentleman made that clear, as has the RSPCA in its briefing on the Bill.

I entirely accept those assurances, but those of us who support field sports have to be vigilant not only against full frontal attack, as happens occasionally, but against possible incidental effects of the wording of Bills that may not have been intended by the promoters. That problem gave rise to the difficulties at the end of the discussion of the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill last year.

I originally had three concerns about the possible wording of the Bill. The first was that farmers, gardeners, motorists or other people who accidentally maimed or killed a wild mammal in the course of perfectly legitimate activities might find themselves facing the same charge as someone who was deliberately cruel in the way described by the hon. Member for Mansfield. My second concern was that legitimate agricultural activities, such as pest control or the deliberate dispatching of wounded animals, might be affected by the Bill. My third worry was that traditional field sports might be threatened, not by the deliberate and stated intention of the RSPCA, but by the misuse of the wording of the Bill.

In the course of the discussions over the wording of the Bill, the hon. Member for Mansfield may have thought that we were sometimes overly concerned about the ways that the wording might be twisted and used, but we were right to be concerned. There are some fanatical people, who are viciously anti-farmer and anti-hunt, and sometimes both. This week, my local paper reported an outbreak of arson against local farms. Three separate farms have been attacked, and three barns full of hay and other buildings and machinery have been destroyed.

Anti-hunt activists also go far beyond mere protest on some occasions. In my constituency, they tried to dig up the grave of the late Duke of Beaufort, which is only a few yards from his family home, not long after his funeral. I regard that as disgraceful, and I am sure that every hon. Member would agree. I mention that incident only to show the lengths to which some people will go, and not because I think that any hon. Member would condone such activities.

If some people were given even the ghost of a chance, they would be prepared to try to twist the wording of any Act of Parliament—whatever the intentions of the promoters—and chance their luck in court if they thought they could damage legitimate field sports. It is not acceptable to me that the lives and the jobs of my constituents who are farmers, fox hunters or both should be subject to that.

However, it would also be wrong for the House to accept a Bill if its wording was vague enough to be the subject of argument in court about its intention. Sometimes, of course, that can happen accidentally, and we all know the difficulties of drafting from our experience in the House. However, the courts would have to decide a case by trying to dig out a precise meaning from ambiguous wording, not on the objective merits of the issue. If we accepted a vaguely worded Bill, that would be a dereliction of our duty as legislators, and would not be the right way in which to make the law of the land.

However, the hon. Member for Mansfield and my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon, in their discussions, have made great efforts, with expert advisers from both sides of the argument, to achieve a satisfactory wording that would protect wild mammals from the cruelties that have been listed and described so graphically without damaging legitimate, properly conducted field sports and agricultural activities. I am reassured that a wide range of legal expertise has been brought to bear on the drafting of the Bill to achieve those aims. I welcome the agreement that has been reached and is expressed in the wording of the Bill.

On that basis, and with those reassurances, I support the Bill, and I am glad to help to advance protection for wild mammals.

9.58 am

**Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): I am delighted that, within 12 months of my Bill, the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, receiving—as my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) mentioned—almost the largest majority for a Private Member's Bill in the history of Parliament, he has taken up the issue and ensured the current Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill a Second Reading.

The Bill has massive support throughout the country. A MORI poll showed that 90 per cent. of the public favoured the 1995 Bill, but it stood little chance of getting through Parliament. Given that glaring cruelty is still occurring in the country, I felt that it would be worthwhile, if possible, to obtain some measure of agreement so that, for the first time, a wild mammals Bill could be passed.

I should like to thank my hon. Friends for their support in reaching that goal, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield for his generosity in promoting the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill. I should also like to thank the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) who, throughout the discussions on my Bill last year, and during the past few weeks, has been straight and direct about the intentions of the British Field Sports Society and others. He deserves our

*[Mr. John McFall]*

thanks for that. The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) served on last year's Committee and willingly helped to find points on which we could agree.

My Bill was number seven in last year's ballot, and stood little chance of going into Committee. Ultimately, less than a week before the expiry date for the Bill's Report stage in the House, I found a free slot for my Bill in Committee. That meant that the House had two days to examine the Bill. Hon. Members from both sides of the House put their heads together to find something everyone could accept. The then Minister had the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Home Office. In that time, we came up with what we thought was agreeable wording. The Bill was amended in the other place, however, and its chance of success was therefore limited.

I think that the public feel that the rules of the House of Commons are rather anachronistic, and perhaps a bit antique because my Bill needed only to be subject to effective orders and for its title to be read out in a few seconds for it to be passed by Parliament. Alas, that did not happen. I was determined, as a result of the many thousands of letters of support that I received, that the Bill would eventually become an Act. Hon. Members therefore deserve to be congratulated on that success.

The right hon. Member for Northavon mentioned the Bill's purpose. Since the landmark case of Pepper *v.* Hart of 1992, the courts and lawyers have been able to understand the intentions of Parliament. Our intentions will be made clear in this debate: to put legislation on wild mammals on the statute book for the first time, and to outlaw wanton acts of cruelty. That is the sum and the substance of our intentions.

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths** (Edinburgh, South): My hon. Friend puts the case very well. Is he aware that tens of thousands of people were outraged by the acts in the other place, which virtually sabotaged his Bill and raised serious question marks about the role of the other place—

**Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Eltham): We do not need to go over all that.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the current Bill? It reflects the good work that he has done, with support from both sides of the House—in spite of the sedentary comment just now. Will he join me in wishing good speed to the Bill, and agree that, if it is blocked in the same way at a later date, there will be further outrage out there, and that the people who block it will not be forgiven?

**Mr. McFall:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, but I do not want to spoil a good party this morning.

**Sir John Cope:** The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is right to mention the case of Pepper *v.* Hart. That was a tax case, and I can never remember whether Pepper or Hart was the tax inspector, and the other one was a schoolteacher. It was an extremely important case, which is why I attach great importance to the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the intentions of the Bill, and which I set out.

I think that last year's activities in the other place have been misrepresented. I do not want to refight the battle in detail, but some important issues were raised there. Unfortunately, with the best will in the world—as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged—we had not foreseen all the snags in the last-minute drafting of the Bill at this end of the Corridor. I believe that those in the other place made some sound points, which have been taken account of in the Bill, and which I hope will not cause further difficulties.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. Before the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) continues, I should tell the House that this morning's interventions, though interesting, are getting rather lengthy. The House will know that I appreciate short interventions. While passing reference may be made to other Bills and actions, this is a Second Reading, to which primary attention should be directed.

**Mr. McFall:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will be pleased to know that I am taking the statesman's route this morning, and I will not focus on other issues. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's comments—

**Mr. Paul Boateng** (Brent, South): I am not obliged, Madam Deputy Speaker, to take the statesman's route, and do not hesitate to be a party-pooper. No one should be under any doubt—I hope that the right hon. Member (Sir J. Cope) will agree with me—that many hon. Members are absolutely opposed to the abominable cruelties that are associated with field sports, and we look to this Bill to deal with them. There should be no doubt in the minds of the promoters of the Bill that many us are here to ensure that that happens. Those cruelties should be brought to an end.

**Mr. McFall:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I agree with the thrust of his comments, but I should like to see the Bill secure a successful passage today. We can then go on to debate the issues that surround blood supports.

I have mentioned the all-party support in the House. We also have all-party support throughout the country. A Scottish politician, Baillie John Young, a Conservative who has been in regular contact with me about this issue, said that he supported my original Bill, and that he would continue to support similar Bills. One of my Bill's strongest supporters was Diane Wilson, a Conservative who is involved in the Somerset anti-blood sports group. There has been tremendous support throughout the country for the provisions of my original Bill and today's Bill.

The reason for the support is that the public are perplexed by the 85-year wait, since the Protection of Animals Act 1911, for provisions to protect wild mammals. It was not only an anomaly but a glaring omission that an individual who had a pet fox and maltreated it could be prosecuted, while an individual who maltreated a wild fox could not be prosecuted. I believe, as do many of my hon. Friends who have contributed to this debate, that this matter one of social reform.

Last year, in the Second Reading debate, I mentioned "Roads to Ruin", by E. S. Turner, in which he dealt with a number of issues. He told of another book that was

about torture, and which was dedicated to the chief of the imperial general staff. He wrote that, many years ago, some in the House argued that it would not be a good idea to abolish the jobs of chimney boys, because that would endanger country houses. Thankfully, we have moved on since those times, but I view this issue in the same context as those which were debated 100 years ago.

The Bill reflects a feeling that has been running through British society for 150 years. We are on the verge of passing the Bill this morning because of the dedicated work that has been done throughout the country for those 150 years. We stand on the shoulders of social reformers throughout the ages. If the Bill receives passage through the House this morning, I can guarantee that many hundreds of thousands of British people will be happier for it.

On Second Reading of my Bill last year, I said that this sort of provision should be on the statute book before we enter the new millennium. There are many reasons for that, not least that it is only by securing such legislation that we can call ourselves a truly civilised society. We are taking the first step down that road today, and I think that the public will gain succour from the fact that, for the first time in Parliament's history, there is genuine harmony in the Chamber this morning for passing legislation to protect wild mammals.

10.10 am

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): I shall not detain the House for long, but, like the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), I should like to refer to history. For some time I was the co-licensee of a public house called The Castle in Cowcross street near Smithfield market. Two hundred years ago Smithfield was the centre of all sorts of rumbustious and nefarious activities, not least because it was the national centre for cock fighting, bear baiting and dog fighting.

The Castle is unique in that it holds two licences. The Prince Regent came to Smithfield for the cock fighting in those days. He lost all of his money on the first two fights and repaired to the nearest tavern where he was able to persuade the landlord that his watch was worth a few guineas. He then returned to bet on the other fights. The watch was redeemed by a palace courtier the following morning and The Castle in Cowcross street was granted a pawnbroker's licence in perpetuity.

We have come a long way since cock fighting, dog fighting and bear baiting—or have we? I understand that those unpleasant activities continue to flourish in certain parts of the country. I appreciate that today we are discussing wild mammals rather than domestic animals, but I shall relate one of the first constituency cases that I dealt with when I was elected to this place in 1983. It concerned a young gentleman who put his puppy in the oven and roasted it alive. That puppy could easily have been a hedgehog, a rabbit or another wild animal and it is incredibly sad that some people continue to indulge in those sorts of activities. One has only to read clause 1 of the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) to realise how many forms of torture and unpleasant activities people inflict upon wild animals.

I have no hesitation supporting my guv'nor in the parliamentary beer club, the hon. Member for Mansfield—he is chairman to my vice-chairmanship of that excellent organisation—in his attempts to bring the law regarding wild mammals into line with that which presently prevails for domestic animals through the Protection of Animals Act 1911. I support the Bill.

10.13 am

**Mr. Eric Clarke** (Midlothian): As a sponsor of the Bill, I stress the need for legislation to protect wild animals. I am a fisherman—there is no conflict of interest—and, as I travel around the country, I see wild animals in their natural habitats. We must have the will to pass legislation to protect wild animals and Members of Parliament would be very foolish to ignore that fact.

I receive a tremendous amount of correspondence from my constituents—particularly from young people—after the screening of television programmes about cruelty of any kind to any wild animal, including whales or dolphins. My postbag is always full on those occasions. The people are telling us that they desire this type of legislation and I believe that we would be very foolish as politicians and as humanitarians to ignore them.

I do not go as far as some who use violence to protect domestic and farm animals. Such people seem to think that it is all right to stick it to the police and others and to use violence in support of their cause. I do not believe that the use of violence is justified. One must put across one's point of view democratically and peacefully. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) on introducing the legislation and my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on raising the issue originally.

We are judged as a nation according to how we treat our children and our animals. I think that that is how it should be. If we have detailed legislation to protect youngsters and other vulnerable people, we should have legislation to protect wild animals also. I hope that the spirit of co-operation in the House this morning will be accepted and that there will be no recriminations or awkwardness at this stage.

10.15 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville):** I take this opportunity to confirm the Government's very strong support for the aims of the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill. The Bill, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), seeks to add to the protections that exist already for certain animals and certain habitats and to fill an existing gap while protecting pest control and legitimate agricultural practices.

My Whip's training tells me that Fridays are not the time for Front Bench interventions, so I shall be brief. I shall make two points. First, I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said: it is a sad reflection on our society that such a Bill is necessary. It is disappointing that a despicable minority of people are prepared to commit acts of cruelty against animals and it is appropriate that the Bill introduces imprisonment as the penalty for committing such acts. Those who are thinking of behaving in that way should be made well aware of that fact.

Secondly, I pay tribute to the two sides of the argument. There are very firmly held views about matters close to the Bill and there have been negotiations between those who represent the interests of agriculture, the British Field Sports Society and the Royal Society for the Prevention

*[Mr. Tom Sackville]*

of Cruelty to Animals. It is a tribute to all concerned that they have managed to achieve a consensus which I hope that the House will accept. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), to my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) and particularly to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) for their work in negotiating with the hon. Member for Mansfield to agree the text of the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, perhaps you appreciate better than anyone that we are a nation of animal lovers. The Bill reflects that fact and it is a credit to the House that we are witnessing the proceedings today.

10.18 am

**Mr. Elliot Morley** (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I must state at the outset that I receive research assistance from the political animal lobby. I do not believe that that is relevant to the debate, but I make that point clear.

I begin by echoing the Minister's comments: it is a sad reflection on our society that a measure of this kind is necessary. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is long overdue. It enjoys the overwhelming support of the people of this country, and that is why I, and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) from the shadow Home Office team, give it our full support.

I also add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and to my hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) who have brought forward similar measures and who have advanced the campaign to ensure that there is protection for wild animals. I was privileged to be a sponsor of all three of those Bills, which were supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. They were also supported by all the main animal welfare groups, including the RSPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports, which have given considerable technical advice.

Despite all that support and advice, however—and the drafting help given by the Minister's private office—the Bill should be seen as only a first step in the removal of anomalies connected with the protection of wild animals. It would have been better if it had been based on the wording of the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which is tried and tested and has served animal welfare organisations very well when they have brought prosecutions relating to cruelty to domestic and captive animals.

The Bill's wording is not based on that of the 1911 Act, because the Act includes the words "torture" and "mistreat", which were not acceptable to the pro-blood sports lobby, including the British Field Sports Society. A justification of the society's attitude, contained in a briefing, is completely unconvincing. In fact, it would not accept the wording because, if a case involving dogs being set on other animals were brought to court, those responsible would almost certainly lose. That explodes the myth that setting dogs on other animals for entertainment is a humane form of pest control.

**Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes** (Wimbledon): The hon. Gentleman suggests that the Bill should have been based on the Protection of Animals Act 1911. It should be noted that the word "animals" rather than the word "mammals" appears in the title of that Act. Does the hon. Gentleman envisage an extension to cover wild birds and fish?

**Mr. Morley:** The Opposition have no argument with angling or, indeed, responsible shooting. Clearly, if the 1911 Act were amended, it would have to be amended in a number of ways to take that point into account, and also to take into account the legitimate needs of farming and pest control. Nevertheless, it would not have been difficult to amend the Act along those lines. We would then have benefited from a form of words that has been well tested in law.

The British Field Sports Society's conversion to support for a measure to protect wild mammals is a comparatively recent enlightenment on the road to Damascus. The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) shakes his head, but a leaflet distributed by the society at the time of the last general election, entitled

"Will your sport be safe after the next election?",

states:

"Fact three: Labour's plan for a bill to protect wild mammals is pure window dressing to create an opportunity for a free vote on hunting. There is no need for a new law. Since 1911 it has been an offence to cause suffering to a captive wild animal."

That ignores the facts: the Bill deals with wild mammals. Nevertheless, I suppose that we should be grateful for late conversions to the cause.

Although we believe that the Bill does not go far enough, it is welcome. For the first time, bodies such as the RSPCA will be allowed to take action against acts of gratuitous violence and cruelty to wild animals. We have heard a number of examples today. Hedgehogs seem to be prime victims, perhaps because they are common in densely populated areas. For some reason, there seem to have been some particularly bad cases in my region. A hedgehog in Hull was painted with spray paint, whereupon its spines fell out; in Pocklington, north Humberside, youths used a hedgehog as a football. They were taken to court, but the prosecution failed because there was no protection in law.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has given me a petition organised by a Mrs. Blyth from the hedgehog care centre in Cleethorpes, which calls for this legislation because of the increasing number of cases of cruelty. I have also received a lengthy petition organised by a Mrs. Duran in Oxford.

Anomalies still exist. For example, it will be illegal to set a dog on a captive fox—and rightly so—but the Bill will not deal with the cruelty of sending terriers underground when a fox is trapped. That will still be legal.

**Mr. Boateng:** Not for much longer.

**Mr. Morley:** My hon. Friend is right there.

The public will be puzzled by the difference between the way in which captive and wild foxes are treated. We shall, however, have an opportunity to return to the subject of cruelty associated with blood sports, and I accept that this is not the occasion on which to discuss such matters. For the moment, let me repeat that we welcome the Bill and the measure of agreement that has been reached, and hope that the legislation will complete its passage through the House of Lords without further

amendment. It is a better Bill now: the Bill that came to us from the other place was a mess. Although I concede that there were anomalies in the original legislation, some of the Lords amendments were unhelpful and some were downright stupid—especially the one relating to beating, which would have wrecked the purpose of the Bill.

I know that there is widespread support in and, particularly, outside the House for measures to protect wild mammals from deliberate cruelty. Although the effect of the Bill will be limited, it will enable action to be taken against the appalling people who inflict cruelty on wild mammals.

10.27 am

**Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes** (Wimbledon): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this civilised debate, whose tone was set by the hon. Members for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). What they said reflected the manner in which we have conducted negotiations over the past few months.

Let me declare my interest as chairman of the British Field Sports Society, which is recognised as the unifying body for political lobbying on behalf of all country sports. It represents the views and interests of hundreds of thousands of people of all political persuasions. In the present climate, I should also declare that the appointment is unpaid.

I welcome the Bill. It is a carefully targeted, sensible animal welfare measure that will help to prevent cruelty, and it will be strongly supported by the public. I congratulate the hon. Member for Mansfield not only on his good fortune in securing the debate, but on his wisdom in introducing the Bill in this form. I am grateful to him for the trouble that he took in consulting me so that an agreed, workable measure, acceptable to those in the countryside, could be presented.

For the last 100 years, every piece of animal welfare legislation has been passed by the House on the basis of political consensus. That is a proud record, and the hon. Gentleman has been wise to follow it. Real progress has been made, because all of us who genuinely care about animal welfare were prepared to put aside our differences and identify the common ground represented in the Bill.

We have dwelt to some extent on the history of the matter, but a few points are worth recording. If the Bill had been introduced in its present form in the last Session and had been sponsored by the hon. Member for Dumbarton, it would now be on the statute book. It was clearly unwise to couple such measures with clauses to abolish hunting and attack shooting. We could never have accepted the Bill in that form, and its fate should have been perfectly obvious to anyone.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton and I did everything that we could to secure an agreed Bill after he dropped the anti-country sports measures at the eleventh hour. Unfortunately, there were real flaws in his Bill, as the other place soon pointed out. I am afraid that the drafting efforts of the hon. Gentleman and me, assisted by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), were found to be defective—perhaps we would not make a very good firm of lawyers; hence the amendments that were tabled in another place.

My noble Friend Lord Mancroft needs absolutely no protection, but the hon. Member for Dumbarton said that my noble Friend tabled vexatious amendments in the other place. I absolutely refute that. The other place did its traditional job extremely well, and the expertise there was represented in the tabled amendments, which were accepted by Labour Front-Bench spokesmen in that House. As a result, we ended up with a much better considered Bill.

It is a matter of history that, despite the joint efforts of the hon. Member for Dumbarton and me, it was simply not possible within the procedural framework to have those amendments considered here. However, if the amendments had not been sound, we would not now be considering a Bill that, to a large extent, incorporates all those amendments.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), to my right hon. Friend at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and to officials for all their help to ensure that the Bill was as near perfect as we could make it. It would be remiss of me not to pay a warm tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), who, in his typically sound, able and measured way, played an important part in the negotiations with the hon. Member for Mansfield and the RSPCA, and also to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson).

Since the passing of the Protection of Animals Act 1911, Parliament has passed a succession of specific measures to outlaw particular forms of cruelty to wild animals. For instance—this is in direct contradiction to what the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe maintains—the gin trap and self-locking snares have been abolished, and the gassing of some species has been outlawed with the support of the BFSS. There are other examples. Field sports are regulated under the game laws as well as by their own codes of conduct. If we want to deal with a specific form of cruelty, we should do it in the established way—incrementally and by consensus. The Bill falls into the category of sensible animal welfare as opposed to measures that are pursued by the animal rights lobby. It thus deserves to succeed.

I once again express my gratitude to the hon. Member for Mansfield for making it clear in the Bill and in his speech that, despite his personal views and those of his sponsors, of whom we saw a glimpse today, the Bill is not intended to attack country sports, pest control or farming activities. His reassurance may be a watershed in the ending of single issue politics on rural issues. He now rightly expects, as I do, that the Bill will have a fair wind through the House and, I hope, in another place.

The hon. Gentleman has spent many hours discussing the measure with us. Legal advisers from the RSPCA and the British Field Sports Society have worked together with the common aim of producing good and workable legislation. This is an excellent day for the House of Commons and for wildlife, and I wish the Bill well.

10.34 am

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid-Staffordshire): In principle, one of the most elegant pieces of English law based on the Judaeo-Christian ethic is the duty of care. We owe a duty of care to each other, and this place has a duty of care to its citizens. In that context we cannot rule out the duty of care that we as mammals ourselves owe to other mammals. The Bill is long overdue.

How times change. John Evelyn recorded that just 300 years ago in 1690 in a debate in this very place a Bill failed to become law by just 10 votes because the majority

*[Mr. Michael Fabricant]*

of hon. Members were away watching a pack of dogs baiting a tiger just two miles down the road. The situation has changed, although, sadly, it has not changed enough. Hon. Members have spoken about the way in which some hedgehogs and other animals have been treated. It is extraordinary that human beings can behave in that way towards other animals. It is almost as if they are psychopathic and have no empathy of feeling for other living creatures.

It is sad that it has taken so long for the Bill to come to the House, because the present law is riddled with loopholes. A hedgehog or a fox when kept as a pet is protected by law, but the same animals in the wild can be cruelly treated or tortured. The Bill will ensure that that cannot happen in future.

I noticed with a little distress that clause 7 of the Bill, which I hope will become an Act, cannot apply to Northern Ireland. Perhaps the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) could explain why that is the case.

**Mr. Meale:** It is quite simply that Scotland and Northern Ireland are covered by other Acts, and have to be dealt with by those mechanisms. Hopefully, the Bill's provisions will be repeated in the appropriate Acts.

**Mr. Fabricant:** If the Bill becomes law, I hope that the will of the House will be seen to be clear, and that a mechanism can be contrived, which happens if the will is there, to see that the Bill's provisions apply to Northern Ireland as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** That was an interesting exchange, and perhaps we could return to it on Committee. I think that the only requirement would be to find in Northern Ireland legislation words that are equivalent to those in clause 3.

**Mr. Fabricant:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, which was as helpful as ever. If he is correct, it seems that there is no impediment to the Bill covering Northern Ireland.

As hon. Members have said, there is considerable public feeling in favour of the Bill. I have received many letters in my constituency, particularly from people in Lichfield, supporting it. A few months ago, the RSPCA conducted a survey which showed that some 94 per cent. of the population—I am surprised that the percentage is so low—are keen to see the Bill in force.

In the past, the police have tried to take offenders to court for wanton cruelty to wild animals. The RSPCA has dealt with cases involving hedgehogs being burnt, beaten and impaled on sticks, and of live fox cubs being nailed to trees or set alight with petrol.

As I said, I cannot believe that people behave in that way. What sort of minds they must have that they treat other living creatures in that manner. Prosecutions have failed because of the many loopholes in the law. I am pleased that political correctness and political dogma have been overcome to enable the Bill to come to the Floor of the House.

We all owe one another a duty of care. If we, as human beings, fail to accept that that duty extends also to the animal kingdom, it does not serve the human race well. Nor does it serve the human race well that it has taken so long for the Bill to come to the Floor of the House.

10.40 am

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I welcome the Bill, not least because it is based on the concept of compromise. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) said, for 100 years, all measures in the House to protect animals have been based on consensus. That is the British way—the sensible way. This Bill will pass into law because it recognises that, in a free society, progress affecting the rights of minorities has to be based on consent.

The Bill last year, sponsored by the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), was doomed to failure, because it sought to ride roughshod over that principle. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has told us today that the Bill is merely a first step, but the League Against Cruel Sports will, I suspect and hope, ultimately fail, because it seeks to criminalise the activities of hundreds of thousands of decent, law-abiding people. That is why there is an internal crisis and a sense of frustration in the league, and why I suspect that the Bill is the work more of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals than the league.

**Mr. Morley:** Will the hon. Gentleman explain to many people why, under the Bill and existing law, it is illegal to set dogs on a tame fox, but why—even under the Bill—it will still be legal to set dogs on a wild fox?

**Mr. Leigh:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has made that point, because I was coming to that matter.

James Barrington, the league's executive director, who has just been forced out by the extremists, sought to raise that point. He dared to suggest—as, apparently, the Bill, by its uncontroversial nature, suggests—that field sportsmen are perhaps respectable members of society with rights and views that need to be taken into account. He suggested simply that, if terrier work were abandoned by hunts, they could enjoy greater public recognition, and that the league could conceivably change its attitude towards them. I personally have some sympathy with that view. It may be a compromise that is worth investigating.

No doubt Mr. Barrington is right in saying—or perhaps the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe is right in saying—that the case against hunting would be even weaker if terrier work were banned, although no doubt the hon. Gentleman and others would go on suggesting that hunting should still be banned. I should like to know his view on that point.

**Mr. Meale:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that, in the preparation of the Bill, there has been equal partnership: equal advice has been given by the RSPCA and the League Again Cruel Sports. My advisers during the preparation of the Bill have been someone from the RSPCA and John Bryant from the League Against Cruel Sports.

I urge the hon. Gentleman not to dwell on the background of an industrial incident at the league because I know some of the background of that matter, which will be decided outside this place at an industrial tribunal. My impression is that I think the league was correct in what it did.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Before the debate continues, may I make the point that we are debating the

Second Reading of the Bill, and that, although passing reference may be made to other issues that bear on it, we must not become diverted from the main purpose.

**Mr. Leigh:** I am happy to leave Mr. James Barrington—I have made that point.

The Bill recognises what should be a cardinal feature of our debates: in a free society, we cannot suddenly legislate away in a private Members' time on a wet Friday afternoon rights that have existed since time immemorial. At the very least, a Government would need to be elected with such a provision in their manifesto. Perhaps a referendum would be required. It is interesting that the Labour party, which could take that course, chooses not to do so. It recognises, as we all do, that this is primarily a moral and not a political issue.

Do I then argue that, in a pluralist and liberal society, which, like everyone else here today, I support, people should be allowed to do exactly what they like? Of course not, which is why I support the Bill, and why we will all allow it to go through. People should not be allowed to derive gratuitous pleasure simply from torturing animals. I suspect that only a small minority do so, and I know of no respectable field sportsmen who derive such pleasure from any pain inflicted on animals.

There is another point. If, for some extraordinary reason, hunting with dogs had never been invented, it would have to be invented now, because sometimes it is not possible to control pests without dogs. Hunting, shooting and fishing as sports have been a feature of rural life for centuries. In those circumstances, it is neither morally right nor feasible to criminalise something undertaken every weekend by millions of people.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of my previous guidance. We must consider what is contained in the Bill rather than do a general survey of other matters that, although they may be related, are not in the Bill.

**Mr. Leigh:** I am happy to take your guidance on that point, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is worth saying, however—this is the point that I really wanted to make in my few remarks—that, if we are going to make any progress in these matters, as I believe we have to, we must recognise that there are people in this country who have alternative views.

**Mr. McFall:** As far as I am aware, the hon. Gentleman has not taken part in any negotiations on either my Bill or this Bill, unlike the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) and the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope). Frankly, the hon. Gentleman is coming across as shrill, partisan and out of keeping with the tone of this morning's debate, when we have focused solely on the issue of animal welfare. It would do the hon. Gentleman good to take a leaf out of the book of hon. Members debating the issue this morning.

**Mr. Leigh:** I am simply making the point that the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon and my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon have said, is a watershed, because it recognises that, when we are dealing with matters affecting city and countryside, we have to proceed with consent.

Like the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), who has moved the Second Reading, I was fortunate to come near the top of the private Members' ballot some years ago, and I introduced a Bill on footpaths. I was careful then to gain advice from the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union and ramblers' organisations. That Bill became law—I think that it was the first Bill on footpaths to become law for many years—because it was based on consent.

The point that needs to be made is that, if we are going to make any progress in these matters, we must realise that there are differing opinions, that a large number of people hold strong views, and that we can make progress only on the basis of consensus. The hon. Member for Dumbarton did not recognise that with the proposals that he included in the Bill he introduced last year.

I see from the hon. Member for Mansfield today a realistic determination and understanding of our procedures, and a determination to achieve a Bill that becomes law. I hope that our proceedings this morning are a portent for the future, and that what happened last year and in 1992 will not be repeated. If it were, there would be a rather arid stand-off between two opposing and strongly held views.

However much the hon. Member for Dumbarton may disagree with some of my points, I am sure that he recognises that people who hunt, shoot or fish have a valid point of view that should be respected. They are part of the countryside. The hon. Gentleman is here to support the Bill, which does not affect the rights of those people. Indeed, it is based on the traditional British way of debate, compromise and consensus. That is why it will become law, and why I support it and wish it well.

I hope that, when the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe considers these matters in the coming months, he will draw some conclusions from this debate. If there were to be a Labour Government, I hope that he would take the view that these matters are better dealt with by private Members' legislation. If such Bills are to become law, the proceedings must be by consent. It would be intolerable if a Labour Government, not having included these matters in their manifesto, were then to change the traditional ways in which Parliament deals with them, by, for example, providing extra time to allow a Bill banning hunting to become law.

However, from what the hon. Gentleman said today and the measured tones he used, I think that he recognises that, in a free, pluralistic society, we have to proceed by consent, and that we need to conduct these debates on the rights of animals and country sports in a civilised way. We all recognise that animals do not have rights because they do not have duties, but we have a duty of care to them.

That duty is different for different animals in different sets of circumstances. For example, Labour Members may believe that they have to poison a wild rat because it is the only way to kill it. The rat may die a painful death, but it is the only way to deal with that pest. However, if somebody poisoned a domestic rat, he would justifiably attract the attention of the RSPCA. Animals do not have rights in the way that human beings do, and they should not be equated with human beings. Nevertheless, we have a responsibility not to mistreat, torture or harm them in any way.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Is not it a strange irony that, while we debate this issue, there are traps set to poison rats in the Palace of Westminster and other parliamentary buildings such as Norman Shaw North.

**Mr. Leigh:** No doubt such traps are felt to be necessary.

I find it extraordinary that the Bill contains nothing about cruelty to fish. Perhaps it would contravene the anglers charter—

**Mr. McFall:** Focus on the Bill.

**Mr. Leigh:** I am. This is a Second Reading debate, and I am entitled to speak on what is in the Bill. I am amazed that something of great interest to so many people is not included. Perhaps there are good political reasons why the Labour party does not wish to offend the millions of people who go fishing every weekend.

**Mr. McFall:** My tummy churns when I hear the son of Baroness Thatcher talking about consensus—something that was missing from all the Bills that have littered the past 15 years. I can only say to the hon. Gentleman, come off it.

**Mr. Leigh:** The hon. Gentleman obviously needs educating. It is true that we cannot always proceed by consensus, unless the Bill affects the rights of minorities—not small minorities either, because they encompass millions of people who have enjoyed certain rights for hundreds of years or even from time immemorial. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that, when dealing with the rights of those minorities, we should proceed by coercion, that would be a dangerous principle, and the House should not countenance it.

I may be wrong, but I cannot recall Lady Thatcher introducing legislation that affected the deeply held views and rights of minorities—[*Laughter.*] I shall be happy to give way to any hon. Member who can give an example.

**Mr. Meale:** I could mention trade unions, but I want to bring the hon. Gentleman back to the Bill, which has a consensus. I want us to proceed, so that we can get the Bill on the statute book.

**Mr. Leigh:** It is only 10.55 am. I understand that this debate can continue until 2.30 pm. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I do not intend to speak until then—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. If the hon. Gentleman tried to do so, I would have to remind him not to be repetitive, and to keep to the subject matter.

**Mr. Leigh:** I shall be happy to keep to the subject matter, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The House can be at its most dangerous when hon. Members are being polite to each other. It creates dangerous legislation, such as the Dangerous Dogs Act. I sometimes feel that, on a Friday morning, I am the little bit of grit in the oyster, out of which a pearl of truth can come. We all know what is happening in the real world. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon said, unless the Bill is carefully drafted, some violently inclined people might use a weakly drafted clause to attack the traditional pursuits of millions of people.

I understand the difficulty of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe. The only logical point of view is that taken by me, my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon—that we should ban gratuitous torture but not affect the rights of people to conduct themselves in the way that they have always done. The other view, which is taken by such people as Mr. Bryant, who is now the chief spokesman for the League Against Cruel Sports, is that all hunting, fishing, shooting, and any sport involving animals, is wrong.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe is being hypocritical, and he knows it. He tried to skirt around the issues and say that the Bill was a first step. If he were honest, he would admit that he is opposed to angling, shooting, hunting and all the rest. However, he knows that he could not get away with that politically—

**Mr. Morley:** I am sorry that we seem to be going down this road, but as the hon. Gentleman is attacking both my position and the Labour party's agenda, I must put the record straight. The Labour party is committed to a free vote on the abolition of fox hunting, hare coursing and stag hunting. We will put that matter to all Members of the House of Commons, recognising the moral dimension.

On a personal note, I will always argue that there is a moral and philosophical difference between shooting and fishing and those sports that involve inflicting prolonged pain and stress on animals for no reason other than entertainment. This is not the place to argue those differences, but I am prepared to do so with the hon. Gentleman on another occasion.

**Mr. Leigh** *rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I must point out that, although a fair degree of tolerance is given at Second Reading to discussion about what is or is not in the Bill, we cannot have a general discussion unrelated—or becoming unrelated—to the Bill itself. I offer that as guidance—very strong guidance.

**Mr. Leigh:** It would be a very brave hon. Member who tried to ignore your strong guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I would never seek to do so. Your point has been made.

I wish the Bill well, and I hope that we will learn lessons from this morning. If there is a Labour Government and a free vote on the issue transpires, I hope that the House abides by the tradition of dealing with such matters in private Members' time—the way we have always dealt with them. We must ensure that minorities and their views—which may well be minority views, but are valid for all that—are protected by the House of Commons.

11 am

**Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Eltham): The chances of that happening are slender. The chances of a Labour Government are not as great as some people may think, and the chances—if there were such a Government—of Labour leaving a private Member's Bill to find its own way to the dustbin are limited as well. But, as has been rightly said by most hon. Members, that is not what today's Second Reading debate is about.

I join in the tributes to the hon. Members for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), and the compliments paid to my right hon. Friend the Member for

Northavon (Sir J. Cope) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes). It seems to me that we are back in the positive mood that existed in Committee in July. I had hoped at that time that a number of us had helped to create the conditions in which it would be possible for hon. Members to get what they agreed on through both Houses. Sadly, that did not happen.

When a case of deliberate cruelty to a wild animal came forward, people were shocked and horrified to discover that it is possible to torture a wild animal without committing a criminal offence. Essentially, the Bill's first clause proposes that those who deliberately torture a wild animal will suffer the same penalties if brought to a court and convicted as if they had tortured any other animal, and I welcome that.

I did have one question about why birds were left out of the measure, although they may be included in other legislation.

**Mr. Morley** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Bottomley:** I understand from the hon. Gentleman that birds are dealt with elsewhere.

Everyone is saying that they expect that Parliament—albeit following a delay of a year—will pass the measure that was rightly brought before the House a year ago by the hon. Member for Dumbarton. I have raised the question of how to deal with Northern Ireland issues, but it might be sensible for the Bill to receive its Second and Third Readings in the House first, and then perhaps the Government could consult people in Northern Ireland to find the best way of making sure that any anomaly is blocked there in the same way as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

**Sir James Molyneaux** (Lagan Valley): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning my part of the United Kingdom. There would be two methods of introducing the provisions in Northern Ireland. First, the Bill could be amended at a later stage to include Northern Ireland. After all, the exclusion of Scotland from two particular aspects of the Bill produces rather more real exclusions than could possibly apply in the case of Northern Ireland. Secondly, there could be a fallback position. If we were so inclined and thought it desirable, the Bill could be extended to Northern Ireland by the negative resolution order.

**Mr. Bottomley:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his positive suggestions. I hope that those dealing with the Bill, both here and in another place, will be able to consult the Government and the interests in Northern Ireland to find a way forward. The right hon. Gentleman has shown that, as most of us would expect, there is widespread agreement in Northern Ireland that the provisions of the Bill should extend there as soon as possible, and in the same way as they apply to the rest of the UK.

The Bill rightly does not try to deal with other issues of concern. Clearly, there is disagreement in the House and in the country about country sports. In Committee last year, I stated that I would not go along with the abolition of fox hunting or attempts to do so, but that is not an issue for us today. I should, incidentally, declare my involvement with the International Fund for Animal Welfare, although that is presently an honorary association.

It would not be right for the Bill to deal with some of the crying shames in the European Union. I hope that other European countries come to understand that veal-crate breeding should be abolished, as that would solve the terrible problem of exporting calves for fattening in veal crates—a practice forbidden in this country.

There are a number of other issues, but I shall put them together: town and country; Labour and Tory; all those without political affiliation who care for Parliament's provisions to prevent deliberate cruelty to wild animals; they all want to see the Bill succeed. I am grateful to the voluntary organisations such as the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and others for keeping the issues alive at a time when Parliament is not as concerned as it should be with taking action that will have broad support in the country. I hope that Bill has a better fate than its predecessor, and I pay tribute to those who have pushed it forward so far.

11.5 am

**Mr. Meale:** I am grateful to the House, and the only thing left to do is put the matter to a vote.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Meale.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I must tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that the Chair customarily deprecates a Committee stage being taken without notice, especially in a case where a Bill has been recently published.

*Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported without amendment; read the Third time, and passed.*

## Employment (Homeworkers) Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

11.8 am

**Mr. Dafydd Wigley** (Caernarfon): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am glad of this unexpected opportunity to present a Bill on an important issue—the rights of one of the most neglected groups of workers in these islands, namely, home workers—and thank the National Group on Homeworking for its support in drawing up the Bill and campaigning for it.

I realise that the prospects of getting a "behind-the-Chair Bill", as they are called in this place, on to the statute book must be limited—indeed, as limited as time is today. I hope, however, that we can get the issue on to the agenda by virtue of this short debate, and I particularly hope that the Government will produce a Minister to listen to it—I am glad to see an instant Minister appear. I hope to secure indications from him that the Government are prepared to take the issues seriously and to make progress on them. I would also like the Bill to go into Committee, where we could explore the issues in greater depth. I thank hon. Members from every party in the House who signed early-day motion 335, calling for progress with the Bill.

Some people will ask why a Plaid Cymru Member of Parliament has introduced such a Bill. Hon. Members know that social issues have always been high on our agenda. At our conference this year, we were lobbied on the topic, and we promised to do everything we could to help those who are concerned with it.

In Wales, 69,000 people are identified as home workers and, according to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, in 1991 there were 6,210 home workers in Mid Glamorgan, of whom 2,180 were identified as manual workers and 1,020 as intermediate and junior non-manual—in other words, way over half the total number of home workers were clearly employees. In my county of Gwynedd, more than 9,000 people were identified as home workers in 1991; two thirds of those may well be self-employed, but a substantial group fall into the category of employees.

Social justice has always ranked high on the list of political priorities in Wales—across party lines. This issue is a cause for concern for people, not only in Wales but in all parts of these islands. When we get our own Parliament in Wales, this is the sort of legislation that we will most certainly want to put on the statute book. I hope that some progress will arise from today's debate.

Who are the home workers towards whose plight the Bill is addressed? It is estimated that about 1.25 million people in the United Kingdom are paid to work in their own homes. About half those may be classified as self-employed, but nearly 700,000 work under the control of an outside employer and are known as home workers or sometimes as out-workers. They are mainly, but not exclusively, women and they work from their own home for a combination of reasons—mainly because they desperately need the money on which to live and cannot go out to work because of family responsibilities, usually young children and sometimes disabled or elderly relatives. In the larger cities and conurbations, many home workers are from the ethnic minority communities.

Home workers do a range of work, including assembly work for manufacturing industry, sewing and knitting work for the clothing industry, routine clerical and processing work, which increasingly includes data processing, and telecottaging. Home workers even manufacture Christmas crackers, for which the pay rate is abominably low.

We need to differentiate between a home worker, who is dependent on an outside employer for the work, and a genuinely self-employed person, who controls for him or herself critical aspects of the working pattern. In differentiating, there are large grey areas of definition. I must impress on the Minister that those are the areas to which I shall return, and that is why I regard the Bill, or a Bill along these lines, as necessary.

One aspect of the problem with which the Bill deals is that of definition and the plight facing many thousands of people who, while they are clearly dependent workers and not self-employed in any normal meaning of the term, are not treated as employees because of the interpretation of the law—although, if the work they do were done in a factory or an office and not in their homes, it would most certainly lead to their being categorised as employees. As a result, they suffer from the problems, frustrations and difficulties that arise from working at home: low pay, unfair remuneration systems, the unreliability of the supply of work, unreasonable deadlines, inappropriate working conditions, bad lighting and bad seating, and the lack of health and safety advice.

There are the dangers to health, not only for the workers but for their families, the lack of employee rights, training for the job and adequate supervision, and the lack of national insurance cover, which partly arises from the low pay. Their legal status is uncertain—investigations have shown that, while a third of home workers are clearly self-employed and another third may clearly be defined as employees, a third are acknowledged as being in a grey area. Finally, many home workers feel isolated. They have no one to whom to turn for help and advice.

Clearly, the Bill cannot solve all those problems, but it tries to deal with some. Home workers fall between the two stools of employee and self-employed. In consequence, they can face enormous deprivations. They suffer financially because of payment levels, which in some instances can be described only as scandalous. They suffer from an absence of legal rights, which they would have by virtue of employment law if they were properly recognised as employees. They suffer dangers, and would be protected under health and safety at work legislation if they were doing the same work in a factory. They miss out on entitlements that they would get under the national insurance system, if they earned enough to be above the lower threshold for contributions and were properly registered for national insurance purposes.

I must dwell on the financial plight of these people—not that the Bill can directly overcome that problem, but it can help indirectly. I shall give the House some examples. The National Group on Homeworking produced a valuable report in 1994, written by Ursula Huws, who is a leading worker in the area—her work is widely acknowledged, including, I believe, by the Government.

The report is entitled "Home Truths" and is based on a detailed survey. It shows that most home workers are paid on a piece-rate basis. The average weekly pay was found

to be £46 two years ago and the average hourly rate was £1.28. Only 15 per cent. of home workers got more than £70 a week and 35 per cent. were earning less than £30.

The report gives graphic examples. A woman known as Nasreen was sewing skirts and blouses and getting 11p per garment, which generated £10 a week for 50 hours' work. A woman called Jenny was earning £12 to £15. In her most successful week she earned about £30 for 60 hours' work, including working in the evenings and at weekends. That is the background to the issues with which we want to deal through the Bill.

Secondly, on health and safety, clearly there are potential dangers even in fairly light work undertaken at home. There are dangers in cutting canvas, sewing leather, soldering circuit boards and having chemicals in the home—certainly if there are children around. In that context the "Home Truths" report states:

"Employers' duties to self-employed homeworkers are fairly limited. However, where the homeworkers have the status of employees, their employers have a responsibility for ensuring their health and safety (under the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974) on the same basis as any other employees. However, the evidence of this survey is that few are exercising this responsibility.

Home workers said that they had been given health and safety advice by the employer in only 4 per cent. of cases, and the employer had only provided safety equipment in the same, tiny, proportion of cases. The percentage of employers insuring home workers against accidents was even lower, at 3 per cent. of cases."

That graphically demonstrates the problems faced by home workers and the degree to which, even where people are recognised as employees, employers are not fulfilling their responsibilities under the law.

In a factory, employees would be given firm guidance on how to do—and how not to do—jobs. There would be safety equipment, protective clothing and inspectors to keep an eye on how a job is done. The Health and Safety Executive would pay periodic visits. No such safeguards exist at home. Some may be impractical, but the safety of the workers still matters enormously, and the House should note that.

Thirdly, there is the lack of cover under the national insurance system. Many home workers do not currently pay national insurance contributions, and nor do employers on behalf of workers who are, or may be designated as, employees. Consequently, home workers miss out on national insurance dependent benefits. Non-contribution arises partly from the low earnings of home workers, who often earn less than the lower threshold of £58 per week.

If home worker status were clarified as fully equivalent to that of employees in factories or offices, that would at a stroke improve the home worker's financial lot. There could be an increase in wages of between 20 and 30 per cent. at the very least. That would bring around 200,000 people into the national insurance net. I put it to the Minister—I would be glad if he would respond—that if, by such a stroke, we brought 200,000 people into the national insurance net, that would generate at least £100 million for the Treasury. If the Government are turning their back on such resources, I want to know why.

Unfortunately, among home workers there is an element that is in the black economy. They may be earning more than £58 a week. Greater clarity in law will help many of them come openly into the system. Again, there is potential for substantial income for the Treasury. I address the problem from the point of view of not only income for the Treasury but basic national insurance benefit rights for employees who most certainly need them.

The fourth problem is the main one dealt with by the Bill—the absence of legal employment rights for home workers compared with those for similar employees who do identical work in factories and offices. Two major enactments safeguard the rights of employees: the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, as amended, and the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993. They provide, inter alia, rights for a written contract of employment, statements of itemised pay, appeal mechanisms against dismissal, redundancy entitlement and maternity provisions.

The stark truth is that home workers are, in practice, widely denied those rights. The survey that I mentioned showed that only 34 per cent. have itemised pay slips; only 18 per cent. have any form of employment contract; only 6 per cent. have redundancy entitlements; and only 6 per cent. are allowed maternity leave.

The overwhelming majority of home workers do not have the rights that are provided by law for other employees; nor do they have the rights of collective representation that are recognised by trade union legislation. If ever a group needed such rights, it is home workers. The effectiveness of the law as it stands can be measured only by the way in which it works in practice. Clearly, the law is not working in practice.

If the Minister tries to argue that the law regards every home worker who has not opted to be considered self-employed as an employee, he will have to explain why employee rights are being denied in case after case to the overwhelming extent shown by several surveys.

The problem of definition of home workers and whether they are classified as employees was highlighted by the Employment Select Committee in 1981. In paragraph 9 of its first report in 1981-82 on home working, it commented:

"There is an unsatisfactory area of doubt over the employment status of many homeworkers: it seems to be unclear whether many such workers are self-employed or are employees of the firms for which they work."

In paragraph 10, the Committee recommended:

"Homeworkers should be regarded as employees . . . Homeworkers should enjoy the same employment protection as other workers."

Patently, 15 years later, Parliament has failed to provide such protection for those workers.

Interpretation of the law by the courts and the agencies of Government is a hopeless mess. I have been advised that case law is contradictory. The recent case of Mrs. Vasanti Patel of Leicester shows the difficulties. She was an out-worker working from her home for a clothing company. Her company regarded her as a self-employed person, as did the Inland Revenue, but an industrial tribunal classified her as an employee. After the case, the Inland Revenue commented that the problem arose because no definition of employment, and hence of employee, exists in law. It said that the definitions are blurred.

In a publication endorsed and presented by the Government a few months ago, "A Manager's Guide to Teleworking", the Government themselves recognised the problem. The document stated:

"Whether someone is an employee or self-employed depends upon the terms and conditions on which he or she is engaged and works. There is no statutory definition of employment or

*[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]*

self-employment but the Courts have considered the question on a number of occasions and have identified a number of criteria as helping to determine someone's employment status. The conditions running through these judgments show that no one factor is conclusive."

The Government's own publication recognises that a problem exists. Mrs. Patel won her case, but we cannot expect every home worker to go to court to obtain what should be basic employment rights.

I have so far addressed the plight of the group of home workers who historically have been badly done by. I want to broaden the debate and look to the future.

Telecottaging is already a growth industry and modern technology such as fibre-optic links, the Internet and interactive digital systems open up the prospect of much greater home working, albeit of a nature different from that of the traditional groups that I have already described. The opportunities provided by telecottaging can be a major blessing, especially for scattered rural areas such as that which I represent. If it is to be an area of growth, it is vital that the employment rights of people who work from home by way of telecottaging are protected.

The development of telecottaging is important environmentally. It will reduce the need for car travel by employees, decentralise economic activity and sustain small local communities. That all points to the need to welcome telecottaging and the concept of home working, as do considerations of care in the community. If we are to go down that road, it is vital that we sort out the glaring anomalies in law for people who work at home.

The Government want to increase flexibility in the labour market. They want to encourage home working, especially teleworking. How can they do so honestly if those involved find that they are to lose out on their employment rights? Teleworking is a growing sector, but it has already encountered those problems. A survey undertaken by the Department of Employment in 1993, again by Ursula Huws, showed that 57 per cent. of teleworkers are considered permanent employees; 8 per cent. are temporary employees; and 32 per cent. are self-employed.

Last May, the Department of Employment launched a book entitled "A Manager's Guide to Teleworking", by Ursula Huws, to which I referred. In a section on advice to managers on the contractual arrangements that should be drawn up, it stated:

"Drawing up contracts for teleworking can seem a daunting task. But in practice it presents problems only in a minority of cases. Nine out of 10 telework managers report no problems at all in this area.

The ED Teleworking Survey showed that in half the organisations teleworkers have the status of employees, usually permanent employees. This means that they have normal contracts of employment to which extra clauses have been added to cover their situation as teleworkers."

The Government's publication goes on to detail the extra clauses that must be added to a contract of employment to look after a teleworker's position. It says:

"Extra clauses in an employee's teleworker contract might cover: the hours when teleworkers are expected to be at their desk or in the employer's office; any extra responsibilities or duties relating to being home-based, (e. g. procedures for regular reporting or for a safe delivery of work); health and safety issues; details of which expenses can be claimed from the employer and/or any additional allowances payable to the teleworkers to cover heating, lighting and other costs; and insurance."

That specific advice is given in a report presented by the Government to people intent on developing more home working by way of telecottaging. If that advice is relevant to employees working at home in that context, it is equally applicable to home workers in all other sectors of the economy where home working is undertaken.

It is worth reminding the House what the Minister said in a press release published when that document was presented. The press release, "Plug into teleworking—Ann Widdecombe tells UK businesses", says:

"To make a success of teleworking management arrangements must be adapted to new working arrangements. Teleworkers need to be clear about what is expected of them. Effective methods are needed for monitoring performance and giving workers feedback . . .

One of the main messages of the guide is that teleworkers should be as highly valued and integrated members of the organisation as any others. They should not be left out of consultation and planning. They should have equal access to training and promotional opportunities. These points do mean that managers need to give extra thought and care to teleworking arrangements."

Those are the words of the then Employment Minister, the current Minister of State, Home Office—the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe)—and those provisions should apply equally to all home workers. That position should arise from their status in law. That press release shows that at least one Minister recognises the problem and the fact that steps need to be taken in some circumstances.

A change in the law along the lines proposed in the Bill is needed to resolve the problem. Clauses 1 and 2 provide that the two basic Acts that deal with employee rights—the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 and the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993—should have the term "worker" inserted in place of the word "employee". Clause 3 adopts the definition of "worker" as that given in the Wages Act 1986, sections 8(1) and 8(2), which essentially say that a worker is

"an individual who works under a contract whereby the individual undertakes to do or perform any work or services for another party to the contract whose status is not that of a client or customer".

I am advised professionally that that is an appropriate definition because it already exists in law and that, by adopting it, we would close the loopholes in current legislation.

If the Government insist that, because of rulings such as the one on the Patel case, the law is adequate, there is a crying need for employers, the Inland Revenue, the national insurance authorities, the Department of Social Security and the health and safety at work people to be told that fact. There is a crying need also for mechanisms to be set up to enable home workers to secure their rights without recourse to courts or industrial tribunals in every instance.

Four steps now need to be taken. First, a formal Government circular should be sent to all employers of home workers, informing them that home workers have the same rights as the employer's other employees. Secondly, a body similar to the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission should be set up to assist home workers to obtain their rights. Thirdly, local authorities should designate someone to advise home workers. I am glad to say that the new Caernarfonshire and Meirionnyddshire authority which comes into force on 1 April plans to do exactly that.

Fourthly, if employers contend that a home worker is self-employed and not an employee, the burden of proof should fall on the employer. Until and unless it is so proved, the home worker should be treated as an employee, with all the rights under the law that that entails. Those four steps are the minimum to which the Government should respond if they are not prepared to take on this Bill. However, it would be much easier if we gave a Second Reading to the Bill and went on to examine the details in Committee.

The law must be changed to accomplish that and, if the Government contend otherwise, they must explain why overwhelmingly in practice the law stands in contempt. Laws that are systematically ignored are bad laws and need to be amended. The Bill provides a mechanism and, if its detailed wording is inadequate, the Government can table amendments or new clauses in Committee.

This issue is on the political agenda here and in Europe. A draft European Commission recommendation on home working defines the term "home working" and calls on member states to review, revise and develop laws, regulations and policies to provide home workers with: contracts of employment; statements on pay and deductions; maternity and social security safeguards; health and safety provisions; a method of resolving disputes; and a number of other safeguards. It also highlights the need for local advice centres for home workers, and for collecting and collating reliable statistics on home working, which are clearly desperately needed, according to all the publications on which one can lay one's hands in the Library.

The draft European document also emphasises the need for employer organisations and trade unions to develop measures to implement the Commission's recommendations. I should have thought that it would appeal to the Government that the parties involved should sort out the problems. I urge the Government to approach the negotiations with the European Union in a positive frame of mind.

An International Labour Organisation conference on home working will be held in Geneva on 4 June this year, when the comprehensive home working recommendations will be considered. The proposed text, of which I have seen a copy, includes provisions for: first, a competent authority at national or regional level to keep a register of home workers; secondly, employers when they first give out work to a home worker, to notify the authority and keep a register of home workers employed; and, thirdly, employers to keep a record of the work assigned, the rate of remuneration, the time allocated, the allowable home worker costs reimbursed, the deductions from pay, the gross and net remuneration and the date of payment.

The Government must recognise that those basic provisions are necessary for home workers if they are to be fairly treated under the law, because home workers miss out on them at present. The ILO document could provide an excellent basis for securing fair treatment, and a source of reliable information.

In summary, the Bill will not increase the amount of employment protection legislation on the statute book; nor will it increase or extend employment protection. The Bill is about social justice and making it easier for workers to claim the rights to which they are legally entitled and which are set out as the statutory minimum in current law. The Bill will put no further duties on employers. It will not extend rights to genuinely self-employed workers, but it will give protection to those workers who are wrongly classified as self-employed by their employers or are unsure of their legal status.

The problems and confusion created by the current wording of employment legislation make challenging employment status through the industrial tribunal system complicated, requiring great legal expertise. The current provision of accessible, free specialist advice to home workers is patchy. If the rights of home workers were more accessible, standard advice agencies would be able to handle their inquiries easily and effectively.

Parliament intended that workers should have statutory minimum rights at work. The present loophole means that employers can make a mockery of the basic rules that were laid down by the House of Commons. It is not just a home working problem. Increasing numbers of workers have been classified as self-employed by employers who seek to avoid their statutory obligations. That is particularly true in such sectors as construction and publishing. As the Bill could produce more money for the Treasury, it would be beneficial to the Government, as well as result in new benefits to employees.

I urge the Government to take the Bill seriously. I have outlined issues that often lie the below the surface. Home workers do not have strong organisations to speak on their behalf. Many are vulnerable people who are uncertain of their legal status as employees or their right to work in their own homes. They need help. It may well be that the Government and their predecessors considered the existing legislation to be adequate. The figures that I have quoted demonstrate that it is not. As the current law is not working, I appeal to the Government to say that they are prepared to change it to ensure that home workers in all parts of Britain can obtain the rights that they require and deserve.

11.42 am

**Mr. Stephen Byers** (Wallsend): I congratulate the hon Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on the topic that he has selected as the subject of his measure. The plight of home workers is all too often ignored, and we should welcome the opportunity that the Bill provides to discuss it today.

More than 1 million people in Britain work from home. The majority are women and many are black or Asian. They are often isolated, and they have no collective voice to speak on their behalf. They are extremely vulnerable and they look to the House to defend and protect their interests. They are perhaps one of the least protected sections of the work force.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that home working is a growing sector. As the profile of the labour market changes, it is important that employment law is amended to reflect those changes. The traditional view of the home worker is someone working from a Victorian terrace, perhaps somewhere in the east midlands. That has changed dramatically. Many new home workers live in rural areas and often work in rather professional employment. Nevertheless, their needs remain clear.

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the point that he is making. Does he accept that, since 1981, the proportion of home workers in manufacturing jobs has decreased from 21 per cent.

*[Mr. John M. Taylor]*

to 12 per cent. and that the real increases in home working have been in the better paid managerial, professional and secretarial occupations?

**Mr. Byers:** Yes. I accept that point absolutely. However, we should not ignore the employment needs of those individuals. Although there has been a change in the nature of home working, and many of the individuals concerned are in managerial and professional employment, they still need the protection of employment legislation; that issue is at the heart of our debate.

Although the nature of home working has changed, individuals working in that sector continue to be exploited. A recent survey by the National Group on Homeworking shows that many people work exceptionally long hours for as little as 30p a hour. The average home worker works 36 hours a week for £46.

In addition, we should reflect on the conditions in which those people carry out their work at home. Approximately eight out of 10 home workers have children. About 70 per cent. of them work in the same room as their children play. One in five care for a dependent relative while working at home. Many home workers struggle to provide a living for themselves, their children and their dependants, often in difficult circumstances. They are often vulnerable and open to exploitation, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the legal difficulties surrounding the definition of an employee, as opposed to someone in self-employment, are not helpful to people in those circumstances.

One would have hoped that the Government would recognise the vulnerability of many home workers and be prepared to take some positive steps to assist them. Unfortunately, in the last couple of months the Government have taken steps that will create difficulties for many home workers.

The Minister will be aware that on 28 November 1995 the Government repealed section 133 of the Factories Act 1961 as part of their attack on red tape, as they see it. That section required employers to notify the names and addresses of their home workers to the relevant local authority. The purpose was to allow authorities to ensure the observance of health and safety measures and to offer welfare advice. It was a key part of local authority strategy to tackle poverty among home worker families. The Government, in their infinite wisdom and as part of their bonfire of regulations, decided to remove section 133. That has created difficulties, because that modest measure was of benefit to many local authorities in helping home workers in their areas.

The Minister may say that the Health and Safety Executive was not a greater promoter of retaining section 133 of the 1961 Act. I was disappointed that the executive was not prepared to oppose the Government's repeal of that measure, but many sectors of society and organisations regret that the Government felt it necessary to repeal section 133.

At the heart of the Bill is the legal definition of "employee". The distinction between employees and the self-employed has, for a variety of reasons, become blurred. The Patel case is particularly significant. That individual was regarded by many organisations and bodies as self-employed, but the industrial tribunal held her to be an employee. Government clarification is needed.

**Mr. Wigley:** Given the forthcoming ILO conference and European Union discussion document, and in the event of the Government failing to tackle this important problem, can the hon. Gentleman indicate whether an incoming Labour Government would tackle it as a matter of urgency?

**Mr. Byers:** That is always an interesting question. Later, I will outline Labour's approach.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Does it have anything to do with stakeholders?

**Mr. Byers:** Much of Labour's policy reflects our commitment to the stakeholder economy—and that covers home workers as well as other employees.

The Patel case has important practical and legal consequences. Perhaps the Minister will reflect on that decision and say today how the Government view the blurring, legally, between employees and the self-employed. Given the changing labour market, it is in the employer's interests for people to be self-employed—although in practice they are employees. In journalism, teaching and the construction industry, people are increasingly encouraged—some might say forced—to seek self-employed status because of the benefits for the employer. It removes statutory obligations and offers substantial savings in terms of the employer's national insurance and tax payments. Employers should not be able to use a legal loophole to escape those liabilities—they are stakeholders too, and they have a responsibility and duty to the public purse.

Home workers are especially vulnerable. They are isolated and have no collective voice. The Government should not stand to one side and allow them to be exploited. Home workers need the protection of the House and the Government. Labour's approach to employment law is to provide minimum standards for all in the world of work, whether work is done in the factory, office or home. That principle, and our commitment to it, will affect our approach to home working as to other aspects of employment legislation.

11.54 am

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) for his clear explanation of the concerns that led him to introduce the Bill. I have been most interested in what he had to say. May I also thank the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) for his balanced contribution? I am sorry in retrospect that I diverted him into the subject of stakeholding, but perhaps he feels at home with the concept even if the rest of us do not understand it.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon spoke on behalf of a group of people whom he considers to be especially vulnerable. Today is not the first time that he has spoken in this place for the underdog. The hon. Gentleman is highly regarded in the House and I, having been the Welsh Whip for almost four years, also hold him in high regard. I recognise that this is a matter on which he feels

strongly, and I have listened carefully this morning. While I cannot make any promises, I hope that I may have some success in persuading the hon. Gentleman that the legislation already extends significant protection to home workers.

One difficulty is the definition of the group of people about whom the hon. Gentleman is concerned. The technological changes that we have seen in recent years have meant that more of those people who work from home do so through choice. Furthermore, many are highly skilled, well paid and well trained. The term "home worker" can cover computer experts, local solicitors and accountants.

The spring 1995 "Labour Force Survey" revealed that nearly three quarters of those who work from home are in managerial, professional, technical, clerical and secretarial occupations. Only a small proportion are unskilled manual workers falling into the traditional view of the home worker who fills envelopes or sews eyes on to soft dolls. There is nothing wrong with those occupations—they need doing and are done. In any event, many home workers, whether they sew or write programmes for computers, are employees who are already covered by the full protection of employment legislation.

As the hon. Member for Caernarfon will be aware, case law has established that just because people work in their own homes, rather than on the employer's premises, that does not necessarily mean that they are not employees like those who work in a factory. Like employees who work in a factory, home workers who are employees can complain of unfair dismissal if the employer stops giving them work. They can claim a redundancy payment if they are no longer needed, and they can also take maternity leave. While they are working, their employer should deduct tax and national insurance contributions as for any other employee. Those who are not employees can nevertheless benefit from protection against discrimination and unlawful deductions from their pay, and from health and safety provisions.

I recognise that it may not be easy to tell whether an individual is employed or self-employed. That is common ground between the hon. Member for Caernarfon, the hon. Member for Wallsend and myself. The individual home worker himself—or herself—may not always be sure. However, hon. Members may be interested to know that research has recently been carried out on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment, which will soon be published. It shows that only one third of unskilled home workers consider themselves to be self-employed and that they generally look after their own income tax arrangements. The research shows that those who consider themselves to be employees leave it to their employers to look after those matters.

**Mr. Wigley:** I am grateful to the Minister for his detailed response. He has based his argument on the fact that a large proportion of the vulnerable people to whom I have referred are employees in law. If that is the case, why is it that 66 per cent. of them—according to the survey I have quoted—do not receive an itemised pay slip; 82 per cent. of them do not have a contract of employment; and more than 90 per cent. do not receive the other benefits which employees should expect to have? If they are employees in law, the law is not delivering the rights that they should have as employees.

**Mr. Taylor:** I know the answer to that question, and I shall give it to the hon. Gentleman, although I know that it will not satisfy him completely. Employees such as those he mentioned are entitled to written particulars of their employment—what is commonly called a contract of employment—and to an itemised pay statement. There is no question about those entitlements. It is absolutely right that they are entitled to a statement of contractual employment terms and to an itemised pay statement.

The redress for an employee who does not receive them is to take the matter to an industrial tribunal—on that, I think that the hon. Gentleman and I would part company. I think that he is of the opinion that such tribunals are complex and legalistic. My opinion is that they are innately and culturally informal, and that people may be helped by taking their complaints or inquiries to tribunals. We might reach out and agree with each other on the desirability of doing everything possible to ensure that tribunals are simple and user-friendly and that they are not legalistic. That tribunals should be as informal and friendly and helpful as possible remains very much in my thoughts.

**Mr. Wigley:** The Minister will accept that many of those who work at home are among the most vulnerable. They do not have backing from any organisation, and find it difficult to pursue cases to industrial tribunals. Given that fact, and the fact that he is predicating his case on the basis that the overwhelming majority of those people are employees, will he consider, as a practical and serious proposition, drawing up guidelines for employers which make it clear that those home workers are employees, and that, without doubt, employers have a responsibility to provide such things as contracts of employment and itemised pay slips? If there is any doubt about whether a person is an employee or self-employed, the guidelines should make it clear that the onus of proof is on the employer.

**Mr. Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman knows that I will remain available to discuss the issues with him in the Chamber or elsewhere. I will go this far: I will ask my officials to consider carefully whether there is any way that the guidance material that is produced by my Department could be more helpful, not least in explaining who is likely to be considered as an employed or a self-employed person. I should like to be constructive, because the hon. Gentleman was entirely constructive in his arguments.

I accept entirely that there are people for whom obtaining legal guidance or determination can be difficult or hard to find, and a process with which they feel culturally ill at ease. As president of the citizens advice bureau in Shirley in my constituency, I recommend the wholly admirable—and often unsung—services that it provides. I am sure that, like mine, the hon. Gentleman's constituents will find that the advice that is available from their local CAB is better than they could ever have imagined. The culture, which is friendly and informal, is one that we seek to encourage for those who, by definition, are troubled and who come to the bureau burdened with a problem.

I shall develop my remarks further. I do not wish to trespass upon eternity, but there are more things to say. Those who are not employees can nevertheless benefit

*[Mr. Taylor]*

from protection against discrimination, protection against unlawful deductions from their pay, and from health and safety provisions. I recognise that it may not be easy to tell whether an individual is employed or self-employed. That is a recurring theme, and the individual himself or herself may not always be sure.

In the final analysis, it will be for the industrial tribunal to decide whether the home worker is an employee and can complain of unfair dismissal or enforce other rights under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978. In making its decision, the tribunal will consider all the circumstances surrounding the employment relationship to see whether there is any reciprocity of obligation between the two parties, which is the necessary condition of a contract of employment.

The Government's position has always been that it would not be right to require employers to carry the full burden of the legislation without the minimum degree of mutual obligation which must be present in any contract of employment. To add to regulation in that way would considerably constrain employers' freedom to run their businesses in the manner they think best. It would add to employers' costs, reduce work opportunities and inhibit the strong economy which we aim to encourage.

I hope that my remarks have in some way convinced the hon. Gentleman. While I have not found it possible to sign up to his proposed legislation, I have listened with great attention to what he has said and I shall continue to bear it in mind. I am grateful to him for giving us the opportunity to consider those important issues.

12.7 pm

**Mr. Wigley:** I shall not detain the House unduly. I am grateful to the Minister for his response and I have noted the points that he has made. I am grateful also for his undertaking that he is prepared to look at the possibility of drawing employers' attention to their responsibilities under existing legislation. Those responsibilities may not be entirely clear to employers not for some malicious reason, but because there is a grey area that must be addressed. I shall be very glad if the Government can make progress along those lines.

I noticed a slight contradiction in what the Minister said—particularly in his closing remarks when he suggested that my legislation might impose additional burdens and costs on employers. However, earlier in his speech he based his argument on the fact that employee rights exist already. Therefore, those burdens—if that is what they are—and costs should be on employers' shoulders already. I invite the Minister to ponder that point.

We are trying to ensure that all employees are recognised as such and have the reasonable protection of law when they are working in their own homes. In some circumstances, the provisions that apply in the factory or at the office cannot apply at home. However, there should patently be protection in other areas, and that protection does not exist at present.

I am glad that the Minister is prepared to look into the matter—particularly in light of the Patel case, which may provide a basis for insisting that people who are not receiving fair treatment should be treated fairly. I accept that the Patel case moves things forward in that direction. I also accept that the measures that will be introduced at a European Union level and in the International Labour Organisation in coming months may add dimensions to the considerations that the House should take on board in legislation, if legislation is necessary in that field. We may have to return to the matter in a year or so.

I urge the Government to act on the positive implications of the Minister's speech. I shall take advantage of any opportunity to discuss the issues further with him outside the Chamber on a formal or semi-formal basis. I hope that, as a result of Government action along the lines that he suggested, it will be possible for home workers who have missed out on their entitlements in the past to secure them in the future without having to resort to industrial tribunals.

If they need to go to such tribunals, I hope that they will note the Minister's assurance that assistance is available from, for example, citizens advice bureaux, and that local authorities will inform them of their rights. It would be better, however, if employers delivered those rights, because—as the Government say—that is the position in law. Employers should note what has been said here today, and recognise that responsibilities go with the employment of home workers.

I hope that this short debate, and the Bill, will at least promote that argument. If, in the fulness of time, we find that substantial progress is not being made, we shall want to table further legislation. I thank the Minister for his response.

*Question put and negatived.*

## Offensive Weapons

*Order for Second Reading read.*

12.11 pm

**Lady Olga Maitland** (Sutton and Cheam): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Frances Lawrence, the widow of murdered headmaster Philip Laurence, made a very true statement when she said: "A knife is an inanimate object, and it needs a human being to invest it with murderous properties." Her husband was brutally stabbed to death before Christmas outside the gates of his school, when he bravely intervened to protect a pupil from a violent attack. The letter sent by his eight-year-old son Lucien to Santa Claus asking for his father back for Christmas was one of the saddest things that I had ever read.

But we also think of John Killick, the security guard who was stabbed to death in Scunthorpe last December. We think of pensioner Frank Dempsey, who died after being stabbed in the throat, and of the frenzied slaughter of Imtiaz Begum and her three children with a nine-inch kitchen knife. That happened only last weekend. I have boundless admiration for WPC Jill Spencer, who disarmed the attacker. Every act of mindless brutality produces a double tragedy—the loss of a life, and the distraught family that that person leaves behind.

I first came into contact with a family struck by such a tragedy in 1987, when I was a parliamentary candidate in Bethnal Green and Stepney. There I met Bill and Valerie Dennison, whose 17-year-old son John had been stabbed to death. He was a model son, liked by all, good at sport and with everything to live for. He became another innocent victim of mindless violence, and his death nearly destroyed his parents. Closer to home, only last Sunday my 20-year-old research assistant Jay Therell was the victim of an attempted knifepoint robbery in Paddington. The weapon was a flick knife.

Above all, we should remember the price that the police pay when trying to protect the rest of us while we are going about our business. It is a humbling experience to talk—as I have—to officers who have been viciously stabbed; they deserve all the protection that is going. We should include in the roll of honour Sergeant Derek Robertson, the father of two children who was stabbed to death after being called to the scene of a robbery at a sub-post office in Croydon in 1994. In that year, more than 1,000 police officers in England and Wales were seriously assaulted and injured.

Police officers who are in contact with the problem are in no doubt that it is getting worse. Worryingly, research suggests that the problem is at its worst among males in their mid-teens. A 15-year-old is currently being held facing charges in relation to Mr. Lawrence's death.

In the year to April 1995, 2,550 offences of violence against the person in the Metropolitan police force area involved knives or other sharp instruments. That compares with 2,332 during the preceding 12 months. In Sutton, which is hardly an area notorious for violence, there have been two stabbings and one knifepoint robbery, and two 13-year-old boys were found carrying knives in the past month alone.

Prosecutions for the offence of carrying a knife in public with intent to use it rose sharply, from nearly 1,000 to 3,367, between 1993 and 1994. Those figures may show only the tip of the iceberg, because knife carriers almost always carry their knives concealed. Of the 677 people who were murdered in this country in 1994, 236 were stabbed. In London, 41 per cent. of all murders involved knives or other sharp instruments. The number of people who have been injured by knives probably runs into thousands.

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): Of the horrific number who died under the knife, as it were, how many of the assailants were not known to the victim and how many were so-called domestic murders?

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I thank my hon. Friend for his interesting question. I regret that, at this time, I cannot give precise answers, but perhaps I shall be able to do so later. It is worth looking into that matter.

It is salutary to note that the knives amnesty, which ended on Sunday, binned 38,000 knives across England and Wales. That was a worthwhile exercise, which I hope will be repeated. In Sutton, there was a haul of 100 serious weapons, which included carving knives, bayonets and machetes. Other weapons included knuckledusters, throwing stars, cut-throat razors and a gruesome array of flick knives, lock knives, and stiletto-type knives that are known as widow makers make us realise how enormously important and valuable are such amnesties.

Scotland had a successful amnesty called Operation Blade, from which Strathclyde police had a haul of 4,569 knives. Such amnesties should be encouraged, because, although some people will maintain that the binned knives were probably not from criminals, who are we to know or guess? However, it is certain that the binning of those 38,000 knives means that 38,000 people are less likely to become victims of knife attacks. We owe it to Mr. Lawrence, Sergeant Robertson and all the other good, decent people who, one way or another, are the victims of stabbings to take tough measures against those who, for whatever twisted reasons, carry knives and are prepared to use them.

**Mr. Alun Michael** (Cardiff, South and Penarth): It is a humbling experience to note the incidents mentioned by the hon. Lady, and the fact that police officers in ordinary community roles often face danger and actual injury. It may be helpful for the hon. Lady to be aware of our support for the measures in her Bill, which my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has long urged, and to be aware also of my hon. Friend's offer to assist the Home Secretary in ensuring that these measures have a swift passage through the House. I hope that that is of some assistance to the hon. Lady in considering the way that the debate proceeds.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind message, and I enormously appreciate his party's support. It is a wonderful example of where society can together work for a great and common good and it is deeply valued.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid-Staffordshire): Although my hon. Friend welcomes the Labour party's support, has she noticed that, apart from its spokesman, there are no Labour Members in the Chamber?

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I am disappointed about that, but I am sure that the Labour party will work to our

*[Lady Olga Maitland]*

benefit. It says that we will genuinely together, but it would have been nice if more supporters had been on the Labour Benches.

It is worth noting the words of Cardinal Hume at Mr. Lawrence's memorial service earlier this week. He pointed out that violence cannot be separated from family life and the serious commitment of the marriage bond. Police report to me that the vast majority of the teenagers they arrest come from chaotic family backgrounds.

If for no other reason, I urge couples who plan to separate to think carefully about the effects that separation might have on their children, because no doubt exists that children with two parents—together, committed, living in one household, who know exactly where their children are, what they are doing and what they are carrying—are much less likely to end up in the sort of trouble that we have discussed today.

Many people have asked me whether there should be a ban on the sale of knives to youngsters. I have great sympathy with that, and I hope that, following further consultations, it might be brought within the scope of the Bill. I tell the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) that many discussions have already taken place on that score between myself, the Home Office and parties outside. Such a ban would be a deterrent to some young people. Certainly it would make it more difficult to obtain the more vicious-looking knives, although I concede that, in truth, they can still turn to the kitchen drawer.

Such a ban, however, would send a powerful message of disapproval of such weapons. The more disreputable shops selling knives tell me that they will sell knives without thinking twice. The respectable ones will always quiz people carefully about their age. Often, they will sell them knives only if they are accompanied by an adult.

It should be remembered that there is already a ban on the sale of 16 types of knives and other offensive weapons. The Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959 bans flick knives and gravity knives. An order made under section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 bans a range of bladed and other offensive weaponry.

None the less, a ban on the sale of knives to young people is worth pursuing. Even as I was coming into the Chamber, the Police Federation sent a message saying that such a ban would send the right message.

**Mr. Michael:** I am pleased to hear the hon. Lady's comments. That is again the sort of thing which, if there is agreement across the House, should be dealt with quickly. Does she agree that the same should apply to advertising of some of these items? I refer to advertising not of ordinary knives or things that are used in sport, but of weapons that are referred to as "Rambo sidearms". Such advertising sends a horrendous message to young people who read it. If it is possible to have co-operation across the House, and in particular from Ministers at the Home Office, about knives, does she agree that it would be a good idea to speed control of such advertising through the House as well?

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important matter. He has my wholehearted sympathy. I feel strongly about the whole question of advertising and the easy availability of commando and survival knives.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on her initiative in bringing forward this Bill. However, a high proportion of knife misuse involves kitchen knives, so, for a sales ban to be effective, it would have to include banning the sale of kitchen knives to those under, say, 16. Is there not a strong case for identity cards, so that people could prove that they were over the age of 16, or whatever is deemed to be the appropriate age? Will she bear that in mind in her discussions with the authorities?

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I thank my hon. and learned Friend for his remarks, with which I agree. An identity card would remove doubt for retailers, and make it easier for them to follow the law. When I meet my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, we will discuss that point in some detail.

I find the whole question of advertising worrying I have been looking at some of the advertisements in mail order catalogues. They contain language that could probably incite immature youngsters to buy knives. It includes such phrases as "Razor sharp stainless steel", "Nearly half a foot long when opened", and "Belt sheath keeps knife neat, safe, ready for action". One advertisement refers to a "viper knife". Another says, "Thumb-flick action, stylish". Yet another says, "Birds of prey—imagine a fantasy battle knife" and "commando dagger", which at £9.95 is described as "excellent value".

**Mr. Fabricant:** Although I share my hon. Friend's concern, I need some reassurance. I, like many others, carry a penknife. Would it be illegal under her Bill?

**Lady Olga Maitland:** No. A penknife that is less than 3 in long, especially if folded, is safe and can be carried in public without fear. Of course, if it were being carried in a threatening way—

**Mr. Fabricant:** Like this?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. The hon. Gentleman must close his knife and put it away immediately.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I want to continue dealing with the important point raised by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, which we should discuss further in Committee. Should we, indeed, extend the ban to include, for example, Rambo and combat knives? I cannot imagine that they have any legitimate use; I would not use them to cut up onions.

There is a difficulty with legal definition. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary wants to examine whether there can be a clear distinction in law so that those knives can be banned outright.

There are doubts about the strength of self-regulation in the advertising industry, but I am assured that the Advertising Standards Authority will investigate any advertisement that does offend, and will take action. It maintains that such action is effective. The ASA tells me that it receives relatively few complaints on the

subject, and I gather that it has received only a dozen in the past few years. It may be that the fact that the ASA has received so few complaints does not necessarily reflect the number of people who are concerned about the issue.

**Mr. Michael:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for dealing seriously with this point. I raised the issue during a debate on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, and the Minister referred then to the powers of the ASA. When my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) raised the issue with the ASA, it became clear that it was unable to take the sort of action that the hon. Lady, other hon. Members and I would want to see.

The problem is clearly that the ASA is unable to be pro-active. The association should see adverts such as those to which I and the hon. Lady have referred as the sort of thing that the public would want removed from the pages of magazines. The ASA should not need lots of letters of complaint to stimulate it into action in this area.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** One point that the hon. Gentleman and I have overlooked is that the ASA has recently undertaken a review of weapons advertisements in the printed media. Perhaps he and I could have a word with the authority to see what progress has been made in this regard.

To strengthen the House's determination to look carefully at a ban on the sale of knives, I shall read a letter from a headmaster to his local Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight):

"Yesterday I gave this term's haul of weapons to the police for destruction. This included 3 air pistols, 7 knives, a large catapult and two screwdrivers; one of which was used to stab another boy in the chest during a fight in November . . . Please, please, please support Lady Olga Maitland's bill and urge your colleagues to curb the sales of these weapons, which have no obvious purpose other than to appear offensive. It would also be helpful to ban the display of knives too, as many youngsters are enthralled by such displays."

Another illustration of the importance of the matter is that the son of one of my constituents was recently threatened on a train by a 16-year-old with a knife. The boy is just 11 years old.

There are other examples: a 15-year-old pupil in Tyne and Wear, stabbed in the back after becoming caught up in a feud between his fellow pupils and a gang from a neighbouring school—in other words, his peer group; a 14-year-old, knifed in the leg during a playground argument in Birmingham; a 15-year-old boy, stabbed several times in Liverpool; a 14-year-old boy, knifed three times outside a school in east London; a 14-year-old girl, stabbed in the chest when a petty row at a comprehensive school in Cardiff exploded into violence.

All these are examples of young people who have somehow obtained knives are using them on each other. A ban on the sale of knives would go some way to dealing with the problem. I could carry on for some time on the subject of—

**Mr. Barry Porter** (Wirral, South): On the problem of young people carrying knives, many years ago, when I was in the scout movement, I carried a sheath knife to whittle sticks, skin rabbits, or whatever scouts did in those days. Will members of respectable organisations, such as the scout movement, or perhaps Army cadets, who may well carry a bayonet or something in the course of their activities, be affected by the Bill; or would the fact they are members of such highly respectable organisations constitute a "lawful authority" or "reasonable excuse"?

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I can reassure my hon. Friend. Such people would be covered by having a "lawful authority" or "reasonable excuse". The Bill applies to people who are clearly carrying knives without a lawful excuse. There is an enormous gulf between the two, and I would not want members of the public to fear that the Bill will interfere with the legitimate carrying of knives.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth mentioned banning the sale of knives. I have here some newspaper coverage from which we should take heart. It shows that many shop owners are calling for a clear ban on the sale of knives to youngsters, because it would make their lives easier. Both *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* have carried out extensive investigations in that regard.

Illicit knife-carrying is an unmitigated evil, but I recognise that some people may have a good reason to carry a knife, and their position is fully safeguarded under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. To clarify the matter, it is a defence to prove that one has a good reason or a "lawful authority" to carry a knife.

Perhaps a man needs one for his work. He may be a carpenter with a bag of tools containing a knife, or a carpet layer. He may be carrying a knife because he is on the way to his allotment to cut cabbages. Men carry knives for religious reasons, such as Sikhs, who carry ceremonial daggers, or as part of national dress—for example, a Scotsman in full Highland dress, bearing a skean dhu.

Interestingly, I received a letter from English Heritage, which pointed out that its members have a legitimate reason for carrying knives when historic battles are re-enacted. English Heritage is anxious that, when members and followers are dressed in full traditional historic costume, carrying a variety of knives and blades, it might be misunderstood and construed as a criminal act. The letter mentions that, when police officers stop participants, the fact that the knives are intended as part of a re-enactment of an old battle and that they are safe after all needs a bit of explaining.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Is my hon. Friend aware that there were no arrests in Staffordshire in 1988-89 for offences concerning knives, which is reassuring, because, as she will be aware, every year the Civil war battles are re-enacted in Lichfield and knives are carried?

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I thank my hon. Friend for pointing that out. It is a good illustration of the fact that knives can be carried in a legitimate context.

We must arrest the culture of carrying and using knives. We must ensure that the police and the courts have effective powers to deal with the evil of carrying knives, which I regard with the same seriousness as carrying guns. We have to break the trend. There is already a range of legislation to cover that, but I trust that the Offensive Weapons Bill will strengthen it at certain vital points.

First, the Bill will make it easier for police to arrest people carrying knives. The police find it intensely frustrating when they find a person carrying a knife

*[Lady Olga Maitland]*

without good reason and all that they can do is to issue a formal warning, a caution or, at best, a summons. Curiously, a police officer can arrest a suspected burglar carrying stolen property, but not a man with a knife that can kill. The police will find that the Bill will give them the power to arrest such people on the spot.

The Bill will give the police full powers to arrest people carrying knives or offensive weapons such as flick knives, coshes or knuckledusters without a good reason. I know from talking to the police that they very much want this power, which will allow them to be more proactive and demonstrates the seriousness of the offence.

In dealing with juveniles, the police will be able to insist that a responsible adult comes to collect him or her. Personally, I would make it mandatory for both parents to come to the police station and be made fully responsible for the actions of their child.

The penalties I propose, which are fully supported by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, reflect the gravity of the offence. First, carrying a knife or blade without good reason carries a maximum penalty of a fine of only £5,000 under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, but in Scotland it is two years gaol, a fine or both. I propose to bring our law into line with that of Scotland.

Secondly, carrying an offensive weapon such as a cosh or knuckleduster with the intention of causing injury currently carries a maximum sentence of two years in prison. As that is a much more serious offence, it deserves a stiffer penalty. I therefore propose that the maximum penalty under section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 be increased to four years, or a fine, or both. That will apply to Scotland as well.

It is important to mention that the increase in penalties for knife carrying will also apply to Northern Ireland. From my recent discussions with the Royal Ulster Constabulary, I can report that the problem of knives is making its appearance as drug and street crime develop. As a Unionist and a firm believer that Ulster is a part of the British Isles, I think that it is entirely appropriate for their needs to be dealt with in this Bill rather than in a separate, later one.

I was glad to learn that RUC officers already have the powers of arrest that the Bill proposes to introduce in England and Wales. My Bill, in its introduced form, will extend the two-year imprisonment penalty for knife carrying to Northern Ireland. I intend that it should be amended in Committee to extend to the Province the four-year imprisonment penalty for carrying an offensive weapon.

Powers of summary arrest and the introduction of much tougher penalties will send a clear message to thugs and bullies. If people carry knives without a good reason, they will get the full punishment they deserve. Serious crimes deserve serious punishments. It is time that we wiped the smirks off the faces of the hooligans who make other people's lives such absolute misery. Public opinion is firmly behind these measures, and the police want them. Once they are law, it will be for the courts as well as the police to use them to the full whenever the circumstances allow.

I urge parents to keep a more watchful eye on their children and to be tough if they find that their son is carrying a knife. Take it from him; warn him of the dangers. I am grateful to the Opposition for supporting the Bill, and for the support that I have received from the Association of Chief Police Officers and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I commend the Bill to the House.

12.44 pm

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this debate, which is important in terms of my constituency because Philip Lawrence was my constituent and his family—his widow, children and mother—remain my constituents.

I apologise to the House in advance for leaving the debate early because my former vicar will be enthroned as Bishop of London this afternoon in St. Paul's cathedral. I therefore ask for the indulgence of the House to allow me to be with him on this special day.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) has made a powerful and compelling case and I congratulate her on her initiative in introducing the Bill. I know how much it means to the Lawrence family and the whole nation.

I was in teaching for 23 years and had the pleasure ultimately of becoming deputy headmaster of a comprehensive school in King's Cross attended by 1,100 boys. Thereafter, I was deputy head and sometimes acting head of a mixed comprehensive school of 2,200 pupils in Lewisham. Children who subsequently went to Oxford and Cambridge universities were educated alongside those who would not succeed in that way. Trouble sometimes erupted outside the school but rarely inside. Like Philip Lawrence, I stood outside my school every day and I am amazed to think of what I did in my time. Without a thought, I disarmed boys of knives, huge sticks and other weapons, and I sorted out youths who had come to cause trouble outside the school. Many schoolmasters and head and deputy head teachers do that every day, and have done so for a long time.

Sadly, there now seems to be much more premeditated evil behaviour from a small minority of young people and others outside schools and elsewhere in our community. Earlier this month, I had a meeting with Superintendent Smythe, who is in charge of policing in a substantial part of my constituency. We discussed burglary and the good work that the police are doing. Superintendent Smythe and his officers, with the co-operation of the community, have reduced many forms of crime, including burglary and some crimes of violence. Another aspect of crime that we discussed was the problem that sometimes arises when children come out of schools. In my experience, the children coming out of school rarely cause the problem; it arises when people come to interfere with them, and all teachers must watch that carefully. Someone from another school or some ne'er-do-well from another area may come to pick a quarrel with a boy, and serious trouble can erupt quickly.

The problem for the school is that it is not suitable to invite the police along as a routine. It is not fair on the police, and it does not help the school to have a policeman standing outside the premises, as that creates its own difficulties. Schools themselves must deal with those problems and, most of the time, it works well when senior staff ensure that pupils leave in an orderly manner, do not provoke bystanders and do not accept provocation from people who have come to cause trouble.

Now and then there can be deep trouble. The Friday after I met Superintendent Smythe, there was trouble outside a school, not in my constituency but not far away. Rival youths aged 15 had a most ghastly set-to—one drew a knife on the other, stabbed him and killed him. That was only a few days ago, and once again it brought home to me the appalling violence that some 15-year-old boys can cause one another. A suspect for that murder has been arrested and awaits trial, so I cannot say much more about it.

Although I give my hon. Friend my warmest support for the Bill that she has introduced with such zest, it is clear that society must tackle the root causes. We shall not achieve much by simply seeking to chop off the trouble. Schools should provide proper moral and religious education. I believe passionately that children must be taught the difference between right and wrong and know why it is wrong to violate their neighbours. They must be told, "Your neighbour is made in the image of God. He or she is sacred, just as you are, and to attack him or her with violence is to attack a child of God." They should be told that it is wrong, wicked and evil, and that it should not happen. Children need to understand that.

I could not understand the concern expressed a few days ago by inspectors and others concerned with schools who were worrying about how to produce a moral code that children could be taught and accept. I see no basic difficulty in that. The ten commandments say it all. If every child understood the ten commandments and the moral behind them, that would be a very good start. I would like every child in education to know the ten commandments.

My hon. Friend calls for a ban on the sale of knives to young people below the age of 18 and says how difficult that would be. She is so right. It would not be easy to stop children going to Sainsbury and other stores and buying a set of knives. It should be considered and perhaps it should be tried, but it would not be easy. Therefore, we have to seek to deal with the carrying of knives. The Bill does that, and my hon. Friend has produced some answers.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I thank my hon. Friend for his supportive remarks. He mentioned the difficulty of young people going into stores to purchase knives. If stores had a clear ruling that there should be no sale of knives to young people below whatever age we agree, it would not be a matter for debate. The position becomes difficult when the matter is fudged and there are too many alternatives. If it were clear that there would be no sale of knives to young people, if a young person took some kitchen knives to a checkout, the sales girl would have to say no.

**Mr. Greenway:** I could go along with that. One would have to define young people as those below the age of 18 and they would have to carry identity cards to prove their age, but my hon. Friend would have to achieve that measure by persuasion, and it would not be easy. Although the basic concept behind the Bill is sound and right, its implementation would not be so easy, desirable though it might be.

Clause 1 tackles the subject very well. It would make it an offence to carry a knife or an article with a blade or point, and people could be stopped without warrant, searched and dealt with on the spot. That would go a long way towards solving the problem.

There was ghastly period in my time in teaching when flick knives were carried and it was legal to carry them. It was even more dangerous than the present situation. Young people and others could, by simply pressing the knife handle, be capable of inflicting great harm from a long blade. Flick knives were successfully banned. If a person is caught carrying one, he faces an enormous penalty. However, if a parliamentary question were tabled on the last time someone was prosecuted and convicted for carrying a flick knife, I am sure that the answer would be that it was some time ago. We have enacted legislation against flick knives, and my hon. Friend's Bill will enhance and improve law and order.

I want to say a word about my great constituent Philip Lawrence, who was person of the year in 1995, with nearly 24,000 votes across the land. That was a huge response by the people of our country to his courage. My early-day motion 191 was well supported on both sides of the House. It commended Philip Lawrence's courage and extended sympathy to his family. Unfortunately, that early-day motion was suspended under the sub judice rule, because charges have been brought in relation to Philip's murder.

I want to put on record my tribute to Philip's widow, Frances, and to his four children for their great courage in the way that they have borne that terrible death. It is one thing for a husband and father to die, but to die by murder is something that hon. Members will probably only properly understand if they are unfortunate enough to encounter such a tragedy in others. Philip Lawrence's family have been wonderfully dignified and the country was hugely moved, not least by the memorial service for Philip at Westminster cathedral last Monday. I include Philip's remarkable mother, who is 87, in my tribute. I spent some time with the Lawrence family the day after his death and since, and I know how wonderfully staunch they have been from the first moment.

I conducted examinations at St. George's school in Westminster, where Philip was headmaster, over several years, so I know the community and everything that the school has sought to do over the years. If the Bill had already been on the statute book, that murder might not have happened—who knows? The effect of that murder was to send the community reeling and to disorientate it. That was the effect of the other murder that I mentioned. Murder by knife is such a sudden thing. It may be premeditated, but not always. The damage to those who commit such murders and who are the victims of it, and to the community, is lasting. It is therefore especially incumbent on the House to support my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam and find a way to tighten up the law in the way that the Lawrence family and all of us wish.

I had the honour, with the Abbot of Ealing, Laurence Soper of the Order of St. Benedict, to found the Philip Lawrence memorial fund, on the day after Philip Lawrence's murder. By last Monday, £104,000 had been donated to that fund, mostly in small donations of £5 or £10. From that evil, wicked act, great good has come. The abbot and I have had thousands of letters, as has Frances Lawrence. People have written to say that they could send only £2, £3 or £5, but they sent it with their love for the family, their love for our country and their hopes and determination that we will stand up to lawlessness in the brave way that Philip Lawrence did. That is so worth the saying, and if the Bill helps to achieve that it will achieve a great deal. It may do so.

*[Mr. Greenway]*

At the beginning of my speech, I mentioned the dedication of the teaching profession. I doubt if there is any good teacher who would not do today what Philip Lawrence did on the fatal day on 8 December 1995, and stand up to trouble outside his or her school in defence of a member of the school. However, those teachers would not expect to suffer murder as a result.

I wish to ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether the Home Office will consider my suggestion that people convicted of offences near a school should be doubly punished. That happens in other countries. For example, in New York, when a violent offence is committed within a reasonable radius of a school, the punishment is doubled. That has given substantial support to the teaching profession, heads of schools and those seeking to protect schools from invasion or the sort of violence that Philip Lawrence and others have suffered. I hope that that suggestion will be seriously considered.

I can do no better to conclude my remarks than quote a bidding prayer that 13-year-old Unity Lawrence—Philip and Frances's daughter—wrote and read at Philip's memorial service last Monday. Think of her situation—a small girl before a congregation of 2,500 under those circumstances. She said:

"Heavenly Father, bless those who dedicate their lives to teaching. Jesus, the greatest teacher of all, came to earth to teach us to love and respect each other. May his ideals inspire and his values endure."

1.2 pm

**Mr. Alun Michael** (Cardiff, South and Penarth): As I mentioned in my intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), the Bill has the support of the Labour party. The hon. Lady was right to refer to individual cases, especially the murder of Philip Lawrence, which have shocked and horrified the nation and stimulated widespread public demands for action.

However, the dangers have been around for a long time. Debates in Committee on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 revealed some of the dangers and the need for action. It is unfortunate that we so often seem to trail behind events. For that reason, I congratulate the hon. Lady on taking the initiative and ensuring that this issue is before the House in this Session and has not been left as a promise for the future. The Home Secretary should have acted himself, but at least he is supporting the Bill, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the shadow Home Secretary.

This is the second occasion in succession that I have spoken in the Chamber in a cross-party spirit. It might become a habit if we carry on like this. There can certainly be few topics that are more suitable for cross-party consensus—a clear and united message from the House.

The Bill rightly includes the offence of carrying an offensive weapon within the offences that entitle police officers to exercise the power of arrest. The absence of that power has been a curious anomaly, and provision for it is a welcome change in the law. Increases in penalties are important also because they give the courts additional power to sentence.

Increased penalties send a message of support to the police and to the public, who fear or are at risk of injury. They also send a clear warning, not only to those who perhaps go out intending to become involved in violence but to those who have got into the habit of carrying a knife. One of the greatest dangers is tolerance of carrying a knife and the idea that one does so for self-defence. The danger is always there that, if the item is carried, it will be used, and that the type of fatal incident that we have seen on too many occasions becomes almost inevitable. Violence may be inflicted not intentionally by those who carry knives—that lack of intent is bad enough—but almost by accident.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that important point. Does he agree with me that we are trying to tackle the macho knife culture in which young people carry knives so that they feel big, masculine and one of the boys? They are drawn into that culture by peer group pressure. We hope that, if we make knives difficult to get hold of and pass stiff penalties, they will drop that habit. There is a playground practice of keeping up with the lads.

**Mr. Michael:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. There is no simple way to tackle this type of problem—one cannot suddenly turn off the tap and say that people's behaviour must change. One must tackle it by every means possible. The hon. Lady is right that we need the legislation and that a message should be sent by the House of Commons. We also need, however, the day-to-day work of so many people, unsung and unrecognised, whether they are teachers, police officers, youth officers or members of a family and the community.

One of the more difficult things that we must do is to turn the tide, from a vicious circle that allows such things to happen and tolerates violent advertisements and behaviour, into one that encourages more positive behaviour.

That change cannot be accomplished by edict of the House. We can send our message, but it must be done with the support of the individuals throughout the country who contribute their little bit to giving their local community a more positive culture. I am pleased that the hon. Lady has made that point because it removes the idea that a piece of legislation can be a magic wand that produces results overnight. The scope of the Bill, which the hon. Lady, with becoming modesty, said is limited, is a start in the right direction. It recognises that the developments that we have seen during recent years are unacceptable. There is common ground between us on that.

I refer to the approach that has been taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn. He has clearly expressed to the Home Secretary the Opposition's wish to be constructive and supportive in passing measures in the House to toughen the law and to support the police in a crackdown on the carrying of knives. Last year, when he made the appeal to give the police the power of arrest, he also expressed concern—shared by the hon. Lady—about the number of convictions for certain offences, which is worryingly small. In 1994, there were 5,419 prosecutions for possession of an offensive weapon, but the conviction rate was only 61 per cent. of that number. There were 3,366 prosecutions for possession of an open blade, but the conviction rate was only 74 per cent.

We need to put across clearer messages. We hope that the number of convictions will be reduced because the carrying of weapons is reduced. That would be a good result, and that clear message must be sent.

Last month my hon. Friend and Councillor Angela Smith visited Wickford police station in Essex. The police told him that they were finding an increasing link between drugs and knives and they showed him a small arsenal of weapons that had been seized in a single raid on a drug dealer. The items included a machete and a number of large daggers, none of which had any day-to-day lawful use. Those sorts of weapons—to which the hon. Lady referred in her speech—must be removed from our streets.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there has been increase in the number of knifepoint robberies? Knives are being used to intimidate and to terrorise ordinary, law-abiding citizens. That is a new turn of events and it is another reason why we must tackle the legislation energetically.

**Mr. Michael:** The hon. Lady is correct: we must highlight not only violence but the fear of violence and the use of threats.

I turn now to the issue of mail-order advertisements—I am pleased that the hon. Lady recognised their importance. It is most disturbing that knives called "Rambo Sidearm" and "Rambo Shortsword" are readily available to people of any age by mail order. During the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill two years ago, the Opposition suggested that those sorts of advertisements should be regulated properly by the House of Commons. The Government responded that the Advertising Standards Authority has sufficient powers to ensure that the advertisements neither condone nor incite violent behaviour.

When we raised those important issues, I must admit that I was not entirely convinced by Ministers' responses on the subject. However, at least our debating point was recognised. The then Minister of State, Home Office commented:

"The British code of advertising practice includes special provisions on the advertising of weapons so that advertisements for weapons, such as knives, neither condone nor incite violent behaviour. Where advertisements are found to contravene the codes, the Advertising Standards Authority can take steps to rectify the situation as appropriate".

I have referred to one or two knives. The "SAS shoulder holster knife"—which was among the sample advertisements that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn sent to the Advertising Standards Authority—was depicted alongside Nazi memorabilia and a replica assault rifle called "Arnie's Uzi". My hon. Friend provided those items to the Advertising Standards Authority, and the hon. Lady referred to examples of the same sorts of advertisements.

In view of the debates about advertising which took place two years ago, it is somewhat worrying that the response to my hon. Friend's approach to the Advertising Standards Authority is less than inspiring. The council of the ASA debated the issues earlier this month and it appears to have taken no action since the debates in this place. Those debates do not appear to have stimulated the concern and activity that one might have expected. In his reply to my hon. Friend, the chairman of the Advertising Standards Authority says:

"There are two principal questions for the Advertising Standards Authority; first, can we ban such advertisements altogether; and, second, is there any provision in our Codes which enable us to regulate what they contain? As I explained in my previous letters, the answer to the first of these is 'No'."

Therefore, the authority does not have the power to implement the sort of ban that the hon. Lady and I would like to see. The chairman continues:

"Any ban must be a question for Parliament. The answer to the second question is 'Yes' but it is important to bear in mind that the very act of advertising such weapons, their appearance and any minimum description, might be seen by some people 'to condone or incite violent behaviour'. If, however, the ASA were to make that assumption, any ruling would be the equivalent to a ban."

Descriptions such as those to which the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam and I have referred, and the juxtaposition of items in the advertisements, suggest that precisely such action should be taken. It is clear from that letter that the Advertising Standards Authority does not possess the power and freedom to act that were implied in the Minister's reply two years ago.

**Mr. Fabricant:** I share the hon. Gentleman's views about the Advertising Standards Authority. Will he, however, pay tribute to the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority, which rigorously uphold the ban?

**Mr. Michael:** I am happy to do that. When authorities are using the powers available to them, that is welcome. My point about the Advertising Standards Authority is that if, on investigation, we find that it has not exactly been proactive on the issue, and has not the powers to act even if it wished to, that is—as the chairman of the authority suggested—a matter for Parliament. If we can proceed in the spirit of today's debate, it may be possible—as the hon. Lady suggested—to agree amendments to the Bill.

The Advertising Standards Authority points out that millions of advertisements are published each year in a huge range of publications. That is true, but the authority implies that complaints from the general public are the grounds on which it should take action. Clearly, the general public do not look for advertisements for knives and other weapons; every member of the public to whom I have spoken is horrified that such advertisements are allowed. Those who will see them are people who are fascinated by violence or weapons.

The question raised by the authority is whether the very act of advertising might be seen as condoning or inciting violent behaviour. If so, it says, that will be a matter for Parliament. It seems that the ball is in our court, and I hope that we as Members of Parliament, and the Minister as a representative of the Government, will accept the responsibility.

When we debated the matter two years ago, the Minister said:

"The advertisement of weapons by post is not the problem. The mischief lies with those who seek to obtain unauthorised weapons by whatever means."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 15 March 1994; c. 1356.]

That is true, but temptation can encourage undesirable behaviour. Let me give an example. When I took a group of youngsters to Germany on an exchange visit, I was horrified to find when we returned to our minibus that one of them was showing his friends a knife with an

*[Mr. Michael]*

extremely long blade. I said, "Where on earth did that come from?" He had walked straight into a shop and bought it, because it was advertised. No questions had been asked, but there is no doubt that that young lad had no legitimate reason for having the knife.

We went back to the shop, and after some discussion the knife was taken back and the youngster's money refunded. I suspect, however, that at home he would not have gone into a shop of that kind, because he would have known that someone would ask questions. I am worried about places that people can enter anonymously—certainly in a large city—without the fear that others will ask questions. It is even more horrifying to think that young people could reply to advertisements and be able, impersonally and without scrutiny, to obtain such weapons.

As the Minister said, we should be worried about those who seek such weapons, but it behoves us to try to prevent their being available. We should end the encouragement, or tolerance, of availability of weapons that appear to incite violence. We have suggested four possible measures. The first is a ban on the sale of knives to people under a specified age. Perhaps 16 is a safe age but there could be a feeling that the age should be rather higher than that, possibly 18. However, there are complications with such definitions. We need to explore those issues to reach an effective conclusion, simply because that would close some doors.

As the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who is not in his place, rightly suggested, one can do a great deal of violence with a bread knife. However, I do not think that an advertisement for a knife that is to be used for cutting bread encourages a macho image. It does not give rise to the same intolerance, the feeling that such weapons are around in society, that is engendered by advertisements for weapons that are clearly intended for violent purposes. That is an important matter.

The second element is the advertisement of knives, and the third is the proscription of military style knives and swords, martial arts weapons and deactivated and replica guns under section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. The other item was a warning label on all knives that are covered by section 139 of that Act. Should we not give an explicit warning that society does not expect such items to be carried and used?

In the context of the intervention by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, other measures need to be taken to help to break the knife culture which has affected parts of our society and which puts the police and public at risk. I agree that young people will use bread knives or screwdrivers, but so will adults who are inclined to violence. Some people will always be violent in any society, however perfect and stringent its laws. We must have the legislation and the action that are needed to tackle such people, and we must reduce the temptation or encouragement to others to be drawn into violent behaviour of any sort. We are obliged to do that, and we shall certainly seek to assist in the endeavour upon which the hon. Lady has launched us with her Bill.

We hope that good will on both sides will lead to some of those measures being included in the Bill. However, I make it absolutely clear that we do not wish to place obstacles in the way of the Bill or to push amendments, however desirable, if they would delay or endanger the legislation. If the Bill has to have additional elements, they must be introduced by agreement and consensus throughout the House, which will allow us to move more quickly than appeared possible a short time ago. If there are difficulties, they must not be allowed to delay the Bill in any way.

If some elements need further time the Home Secretary will have our assistance and encouragement in presenting measures at another time. The Bill provides a clear opportunity, and if it is possible to take it by agreement we should not allow the chance to pass. We must go as far as is possible. As I have said, we need to reduce the environment of violence in which the carrying of knives and their use can be tolerated.

I worked with young people for many years before entering the House. We neglect the positive side of young people and their potential for good at our peril. Just two years ago, the Prince's Trust published a report prepared by the accountancy firm of Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte. That report demonstrated that positive work with young people is cost-effective in preventing crime. It looked at crime in terms of its cost to society, but, of course, the wider cost to society cannot be measured so easily and it is an even greater threat to people's security and ability to enjoy their lives in the peace that they have a right to expect.

The message of that Prince's Trust report was very much that the devil makes work for idle hands and that prevention is better than cure. We need to remove temptations and reduce encouragement. We need to change the present situation, in which all too often "Lord of the Flies" is the parable for our times—except that instead of a desert island, our young people are abandoned on the streets of our inner cities and, sadly, in small towns and villages as well. We need to provide positive encouragement to bring out the good in young people, to discourage the bad and to create a positive environment. Those things need to be done to supplement and complement the legislative action that the hon. Lady asks us to take by introducing the Bill.

I therefore support the Bill. I hope that the Home Secretary will do three things—and that we will have a positive response on them from the Minister—first, support the Bill in a speedy passage through the House; secondly, join in the cross-party consensus to take the Bill further with some of the measures that I and the hon. Lady have referred to; and, thirdly, take the initiative to provide support and encouragement across all Government Departments to support people at the sharp end at a local level: the police, local authorities, youth workers, teachers, local residents and those who work in many of our public services. It is the combination and partnership of all of us in society—at central Government level in Parliament and in such roles at local level—that will succeed in changing the culture, which certainly needs to change.

1.25 pm

**Mr. Piers Merchant** (Beckenham): The Bill is timely, relevant and balanced. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on introducing it today, and on the excellent way in which she presented it.

It is timely because it comes soon after the tragic killing of Philip Lawrence, which has been mentioned, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) in a moving speech. The Bill also comes after a number of highly publicised knifing cases—sometimes bringing death, sometimes serious injury—including those of police officers. The whole nation's conscience has been jarred by those acts of crime, so the Bill also responds to a public demand for action. The Bill also comes at a time when the use of knives in crime has reached a high level, and when the sale of knives ensures that they still proliferate.

The Bill is relevant not just because it is a reaction to immediate popular concern, but because it comes in the wake of considerable examination of the problem of knife crime by the Home Office. I commend my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for their work in driving both study and action in the right direction to ensure that legislative steps are taken to deal with knife crime.

The Bill also responds to the concerns of the police force and chief police officers, who have been aware of this mounting problem, and who have rightly called for action. It is also relevant because statistics show that, in the past 10 years, knife crime has increased and is still a serious problem.

Taking murders in London, for example, about 74 of the 162 murders in the last year for which figures are available were caused by knives. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam has said, knives have played a part in about one third of total crimes of violence against the person, which shows the extent of the problem.

Another way of illustrating that point is to consider the national homicide figures. In 1994, the last year for which figures are available, 236 of the total number of homicides were stabbings. If we compare that with the other causes of death, we will find how much greater is the proportion caused by knives and pointed instruments. There were 111 deaths caused by being hit or kicked—the next category—106 stranglings, 63 shootings, 56 coshings and 23 poisonings. That shows the magnitude of the problem.

This is a balanced Bill. It is necessary to balance the need of society to protect the innocent against crime with the legitimate right of ordinary individuals to use instruments that, in other hands, could be deadly. The Bill is balanced in that respect. We would be wise to remember the complete lack of balance in the gun laws in the United States, where there is a direct correlation between the number of deaths and injuries caused by firearms and the availability of those weapons. Luckily, that has never happened in this country, because of our strict laws in that respect.

The Bill is balanced because it brings penalties and police powers more into line with what is needed. It does that in a sensitive way; it does not go over the top. It is important to keep the array of penalties and powers in line with those in other areas of the criminal law. To give the power of arrest to the police when they find people carrying weapons in public is relevant. To double the penalty for unlawfully carrying weapons is commendable.

The Bill is also balanced as a deterrent. Of course, deterrence is about balance. A person intent on crime has to balance the rewards from carrying out that crime with the penalties that might follow. The Bill will send out a strong message to those who are tempted to buy and carry knives that there is a severe penalty for doing so, because society rightly will not tolerate it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam was right to raise a legal question about the sale of knives to under-16s. I hope that we can include in the Bill a much stricter regulation to control that. Where knives exist and can be purchased, inevitably they will be carried; where they are carried, inevitably there will be crime and a risk to innocent people.

I want to give an example of the availability of knives and pointed instruments and the balance between holding them legitimately and using them illegitimately. This morning, I went around my house and made an inventory of my armoury. I did not realise I had one until I did this.

I found that I had in my possession three swords, a sharp grafting knife, another extremely sharp garden knife, two Stanley knives, a bread knife, about six other sharp kitchen knives, four surgical scalpels, five chisels and a number of other sharp and vicious instruments. I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have not brought any of them with me today. I never take them out of the house.

I keep and use those instruments for legitimate purposes, most of which are obvious. However, in case one is not obvious I should explain that I hold surgical scalpels because they are useful for cutting pieces out of newspapers. I like to keep a collection of reports on what I have said, so that in my more lonely hours I can stare at them.

**Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): What about the swords?

**Mr. Merchant:** Two of the three swords are Sikh scimitars, which were presented to me—one of them is engraved—for work with the Sikh community. A friend of mine, who happens to be an expert on knives, was fascinated by the swords and took one away because he wanted to know what metal they were made of and whether they could be sharpened. I allowed him to do it, and he came back and told me that not only was it blunt—as I knew—but that it could not be sharpened. The quality of the metal was so poor that the sword would snap if any attempt was made, and that reassured me. My third sword is an historical sword, which, I am glad to say, is also completely blunt and unusable.

I shall end by illustrating the difference between holding such weapons and using them. There would be cause for question if I were suddenly to be seen in the high street of Beckenham with my loins girded, waving in my hand one of my swords, or if I were to appear at the door of the prospective Labour candidate in my constituency, holding in my hand a scalpel. That shows the difference between the legitimate possession of weapons that could be and are dangerous, and their illegitimate carrying and use.

It is very important that the balance is maintained and—if I may make a pun—sharpened by the Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam on promoting it. It is slightly overdue, but I hope that it will form a part of the Government's very commendable tough stand against crime. I hope that the Bill will have a swift and successful passage through the House.

1.35 pm

**Mr. Don Touhig** (Islwyn): May I start by apologising to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the House for leaving the Chamber during this short debate? A number of villages in my constituency have had no electricity for the past four days, and they needed me to get involved to help them out.

It is important that we send the right message from the House on this issue. It is important that we make it clear to those who would carry weapons with the intention of harming or endangering anyone that we will enact laws that will make them pay a high price for doing so. The second most popular subjects of letters in my constituency post bag are matters related to crime and to law and order.

The Bill is very important, as it addresses some of the problems we face. The public need to be reassured that Parliament is going to take the issue very seriously. A number of hon. Members have referred to the tragic death of Philip Lawrence, and no one who witnessed the scenes on television or read in the newspapers of his terrible death could fail to be moved. The great trauma that these incidents cause to families and communities can be almost too great to measure.

My eldest daughter and son-in-law were mugged at knifepoint during a trip to Paris. My daughter, rather foolishly, chased after the mugger and demanded that the purse, which belonged to her mother, be returned to her, even if the mugger kept the money. The trauma and distress that that caused was immense for them and for the whole family.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) was asked about exemptions for people who lawfully carry knives—such as scouts—and said that provisions would be made for them. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) referred to the fact that he keeps scalpels in his house to enable him to take cuttings from newspapers.

I wonder whether it will be possible in Committee to highlight the fact that there are many safe and sharp cutting edges that cannot be used in an offensive manner. My second son, who is a student, has a part-time job at a cash-and-carry firm, and he carries a knife to open packages and so on. I am in possession of a very neat little plastic-covered instrument with a fine blade that can cut open all sorts of packages. I commend that instrument to the hon. Member for Beckenham as a much safer way to take cuttings from newspapers.

Perhaps that matter might be explored in Committee. We need an opportunity to show those companies and organisations which legitimately need staff to carry knives that they might find a safer method of doing so.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the real point is that there is a difference between people carrying something lawfully in the circumstances that he has described and people who have no good reason to be carrying a knife? For example, a person walking into a shopping centre with a knife in his jacket, which is open, clearly has no lawful reason or good excuse to be carrying that knife. That is quite different from someone who is going about their normal business or taking part in a hobby or some other activity. We are concerned about people carrying knives without a good excuse.

**Mr. Touhig:** Yes, I agree. We should provide for people who lawfully carry knives and weapons of that nature. I fully understand that. I was trying to point out that perhaps we should highlight the fact that there are safer ways to open packaging and so forth than with a sharp and dangerous blade, which could be used offensively. I hope that that will come out in Committee.

I warmly welcome the measure. If it is speedily enacted, it will be welcomed by the people I represent, and by people throughout the country.

1.39 pm

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid-Staffordshire): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) for bringing this Bill before the House. It is not the first time that she has brought legislation on law and order before us. She was successful with her Prisoners (Return to Custody) Act 1995.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) spoke movingly and compassionately about Philip Lawrence, and said how important it was for us to transmit the right moral code to children. That is a role for parents as well as for teachers. My hon. Friend also mentioned the 10 commandments, and asked how many people can recite them, which is a reasonable question. I suspect that it is not many.

The spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), mentioned the Advertising Standards Authority, and he was right to say that it has not played a proactive role in preventing irresponsible advertising. I have been particularly disturbed to see advertising for Rambo knives and so forth, which are available by mail order.

I am also concerned that, while such knives are not generally or easily available in shops here—clearly there are instances in which they are available—they can easily be obtained on the continent. A few months ago, when walking in Rouen and Dieppe—the latter is easily accessible from Newhaven and Rouen is a quick train journey from Dieppe—I noticed how easy it is to obtain knives and guns.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department can comment on the controls at border posts, particularly at ports, to ensure that knives—and, indeed, guns, although those do not come within the remit of this Bill—cannot easily be imported, perhaps unwittingly, by individuals attracted by some of the bright displays in the stores.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) mentioned his Stanley knives and swords. I am pleased to hear that those are blunt and would self-destruct if sharpened. In the wrong hands, knives can be a dangerous weapon, whereas in the right hands they are useful tools.

I seek reassurance that the Bill is broad enough to include screwdrivers. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North mentioned the case of a schoolboy who had been attacked with a screwdriver. Judging from reports in the press, that is a growing trend. It also shows that the police must use discretion, as they usually do, when determining whether a tool is a tool or will be used as a weapon.

We know that Commissioner Bill Taylor, the chairman of the Association of Chief Police Officers, welcomes the Bill. On the "Today" programme on Radio 4 on 13 December, he said:

"We think these measures, that is essentially giving us a very clear power of arrest and indeed looking again at the sentences, this will reflect the concern that people have and the gravity with which society regards these offences and these are sensible steps and we support them".

It is good that the measures appear before the House.

While this Bill has been brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam, it follows on from tough legislation from the Home Office introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister. We have benefited in Lichfield from a grant of just under £100,000 for closed circuit television. We have additional police officers on Britain's streets. The Criminal Justice Act means that Britain is leading the world in the use of DNA technology to supplement fingerprinting. We have stop-and-search laws to anticipate violence, as well as laws on aggravated trespass. That shows the Government's clear commitment to law and order.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth mentioned the Advertising Standards Authority. In an intervention, I said that the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority have been exercising effective control to stop the advertising of knives and associated weapons on television and radio.

The Opposition spokesman was right to say that, even if the Advertising Standards Authority wanted to impose a ban, it could not enforce one except through the voluntary assent of its members, because it would have no force in law. Such bans exist under the Broadcasting Act 1990 and will be continued under the Broadcasting Bill which is currently in another place. For the sake of consistency and common sense, if the sort of bans currently in place under the Broadcasting Act are not in this Bill, they could be introduced in Committee. That would create no new precedent, and would reflect, to judge from today's debate, the will of the House.

As I have said, I am concerned about the sale of such weapons in Europe. I have already asked the Minister whether there can be controls to ensure that knives are not imported from Europe. Is there any possibility of the Home Office making representations at the Council of Ministers? Will my hon. Friend the Minister speak to his counterparts in the European Union about whether similar bans could be put in place throughout Europe?

The problems in the United Kingdom with the use of knives exist, too, in other parts of Europe. If Britain is introducing ground-breaking legislation, and it is ground-breaking legislation for Europe, I would like similar laws to be introduced in the rest of Europe. Otherwise, such weapons will be imported.

The Labour party has called for greater restrictions on the sale of knives. I welcome that. It has already been pointed out that hon. Members will still need to use kitchen knives and axes in their homes and gardens. Farmers will need machetes to cut down trees and scrub. Discretion will always have to be used.

I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam was able to reassure me on the use of penknives. I promise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to bring out my penknife again, having received your strict admonition not to do so in the Chamber.

I am pleased, however, that the use of penknives will continue to be legal unless one uses them in a threatening manner. I understand that 3 inches is the maximum legal length for a blade. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will keep that measurement and not turn it into a complicated decimalised restriction of three times 2.54 cm. I do not know why the legal limit is 3 inches, because a 2-inch blade can do a lot of damage as well.

Three inches is also the legal limit in many states of the United States. If you will forgive my indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it strikes me as incredible that this country goes out of its way to metricate everything, whereas the United States, which is capable of sending satellites round the earth as well as unmanned missions to Mars, Venus and, most recently, Jupiter, operates happily with miles, feet and inches, pounds weight, and gallons, although the last are exactly seven eighths of an imperial gallon, for reasons that I shall not bore the House with now.

I therefore hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will keep the legal limit at 3 inches. The law should remain flexible enough so that a police officer can arrest someone for using a penknife blade shorter than 3 inches if it is used in a threatening manner.

The use of knives in homicides is a growing trend, but statistics show that the trend is not even. For example, in 1994, which is the most recent year for which figures for England and Wales are available, 677 murders were committed, of which 236 involved sharp instruments. I have before me a schedule from 1985 onwards, which shows that the number of murders in this country is not necessarily rising. It is an uneven but nevertheless consistently high rate. In 1994 in England and Wales, 35 per cent. of murders involved sharp instruments.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam pointed out, Scotland already has legislation in place. The reason may be that, last year, there was a huge increase, with 52 per cent. of all murders involving the use of knives. It thus becomes clear that this Bill must be introduced quickly.

I welcome the fact that both main parties in the House support the Bill. Despite occasions like Question Time, when television and radio focus on the adversarial nature of politics in this place, when it is in the nation's interest to introduce legislation or discuss important matters, there is often co-operation between the parties. I hope that that, too, will occasionally be transmitted to the viewing public. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.53 pm

**Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on her good fortune in the ballot and the fact that she chose to use it for such a good purpose. Like other hon. Members, I wholeheartedly support the Bill.

It is important to explain what the Bill seeks to achieve because, since its publication, one or two myths have attached themselves to it. It is said that the Bill seeks to go much further than my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam intends, and that it somehow attacks civil liberties. As my hon. Friend said, English Heritage has raised concerns that it could no longer organise tournaments or historic battle replicas without its officials being arrested. That is nonsense, and it was never the

*[Mr. Peter Atkinson]*

intention of the Bill. We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) that his black Swiss army knife, which is most unusual, might be made illegal. His only worry should be that it appears to have a heart on the back of the blade, which might show that it was a free gift from Guinness; I hope that he has declared it in the Register of Members' Interests, or he will be in trouble with the Privileges Committee.

There are some dubious matters that we need to address. Earlier today, I spoke to a world-famous explorer. He is concerned that the ceremonial parang that was given to him by a Malayan chieftain would be subject to confiscation. It is important to destroy those myths. If they were true, if our own Serjeant at Arms were to walk out with his sword he would get nicked by one of the police officers as soon as he left the precincts of the Palace. However, I am quite sure that he is safe to continue his ancient duty.

Some concerns about the Bill have appeared in the press. One example is an article that appeared in *Shooting Times and Country Magazine* last week. Its readership includes fishermen and those who shoot. They have a legitimate use for knives and are concerned that any decision by the House may affect their perfectly legitimate use of such weapons.

The shooting community is always somewhat alarmed about knee-jerk reactions from Governments in the wake of tragedies such as the death of the headmaster. As a consequence of the massacre at Hungerford, when a deranged man, who was armed with a kalashnikov and had been given a licence to possess a weapon, killed so many people, there are now onerous restrictions on how those in the shooting world store and look after their weapons.

Once again the article has got it wrong. It states:

"The police could use this new power to harass anyone".

That is clearly not the case. There is a case for concern that anyone stopped by a policeman and found to be in possession of a knife has to show good cause for having that knife. When that was put into law, which I suspect was in 1984, there was considerable concern that the onus of innocence would be on the accused and not on the prosecution.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** Is my hon. Friend aware that there are strict rules governing the circumstances in which the police may conduct a stop and search? They cannot stop people because they do not like the colour of their eyes, their long hair or the fact they may be wearing torn jeans. They may not stop somebody because he or she is known to have previous convictions. They must act only on receiving information that a certain individual is carrying a knife. There is no question of returning to the old and much disliked sus laws.

**Mr. Atkinson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that the police have strict codes, and I am certain that they will enforce them rigorously. However, certain cases have been mentioned, such as that of a farm worker who was arrested because he went into a pub after work with a knife in his bag. He was eventually acquitted on trial. There was also the case of the Scottish motorist who carried a knife in his car because there were many deer on the road in that part of Scotland and he was continually finding wounded deer that he needed to dispatch immediately. When he was stopped by a policeman, that explanation was not accepted. A certain amount of good sense by the police is required to ensure that the Bill does not attack personal liberty.

On the advertising and mail order of weapons, I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). However, I have a natural reluctance to start banning anything, and if we ban advertising we shall move slightly in the direction of attacking the freedom of the press.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Following that argument, would my hon. Friend reverse some of the rules in the Broadcasting Act 1990 and permit the advertising of knives on radio and television? Would he permit the advertising of cigarettes on radio and television, as that is currently banned?

**Mr. Atkinson:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. There are considerable restrictions on the broadcast media but not on the print media, which have a long history of freedom. I was making the point that a ban on advertising or on a particular form of mail order would be difficult and complicated to effect. There may be virtues in the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, but, if he tried to hitch it to the Bill, there would be a danger of causing undue delay to the Bill's progress.

**Mr. Michael:** I made it clear that it was not our intention to delay the Bill, but I welcome the hon. Lady's wish to have such a provision in it. The issue has been around a long time. Advertisements of the kind to which hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have referred are unacceptable. As voluntary regulation has not succeeded, surely we should extend a control on the broadcast media that is regarded as reasonable and sensible and make it a hardly intrusive control on the printed media.

**Mr. Atkinson:** That idea would lead the Bill into difficult and complicated territory. If the Bill becomes a vehicle to impose a new form of censorship on the press, I suspect that it will progress more slowly. The Bill is simple and good as it is. I hope that it will serve as a deterrent, particularly as it increases fines.

**Mr. Michael:** Will the hon. Gentleman describe the nature of the threat that he makes? Does he mean that a ban on unacceptable advertisements would lead him to undertaking wrecking action? What is he getting at?

**Mr. Atkinson:** I do not intend to engage in any wrecking action. I am trying to tell the hon. Gentleman that the idea of introducing a form of censorship into press advertising is new and would open up a large issue, which would have to be seriously debated. I share the hon. Gentleman's offence at such advertisements, and I hope that the Advertising Standards Authority and others will take the message from the House that those advertisements are desperately unpopular. I urge my hon. Friend not to permit such amendments in Committee. If the Bill is kept simple, I am sure that it will travel swiftly to a satisfactory conclusion.

2.2 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope):** I add my congratulations to those given to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on the way in which she has brought the Bill before the House. Discussions between my hon. Friend, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, our officials and me have been extremely positive and constructive. I am pleased that we have been able to reach this Second Reading as a result of the work done between us.

The carrying of knives is a real problem, recently highlighted by Philip Lawrence's death. I was moved by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who knows only too well the effect of that tragedy on his constituents and constituency, and particularly on people who were close to Philip Lawrence as members of his family or as beneficiaries of his considerate and excellent teaching over the years.

All of us—parents, politicians and the police—must play our part in tackling the problem. Parents must teach their children from a very early age the difference between right and wrong, as hon. Members have said today. Carrying knives for no good reason is plainly and definitely wrong. Politicians must ensure that the police and the courts have the powers that they need to catch and punish those who will not obey the law, and the police and the courts must ensure that they use those powers to the full, when necessary.

The Bill will strengthen the powers of both police and the courts. It will send a clear message to the thugs and the bullies who carry knives. It is a statement: "Your crimes will not pay. You will be caught, and you will be punished."

I am very pleased by the success of the recent knife amnesty, which has been assisted by the *Daily Mirror* and fully supported by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and by me. More than 38,000 articles were handed in. The amnesty has been especially successful when forces have worked closely with their local media.

The police are not simply measuring the success of the initiative by the number of knives handed in. They also believe that the amnesty has helped to change attitudes. They hear anecdotes about knife sellers being more careful to whom they sell their knives. In one case, a dealer has stopped selling knives altogether.

The police have been impressed by the range of knives handed in. The majority of articles were not knives of the kitchen variety. Machetes, flick knives, gravity knives and at least one Samurai sword have been handed in. In addition, a number of replica firearms and the magazine from an automatic weapon have been handed in. That is encouraging, but in terms of a carrot-and-stick approach, the amnesty is clearly a carrot.

Since taking office, the Government have taken firm action on a range of law and order issues. In our projected White Paper, we intend to put before the House even tougher policies on sentencing and bringing criminals to book. We took firm action on the problem of knife carrying in the Criminal Justice Act 1988, in which we banned 14 weapons, including sword sticks. We had already banned flick knives and gravity knives.

I have listened with interest to hon. Members who have suggested that we should have specific lists of weapons that should be banned. It was interesting to hear the story about a screwdriver from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). The definition of a knife under our law is a bladed or sharply pointed article. Therefore, in some circumstances, items that would not immediately be recognisable as knives could come under our penalties and our legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire also referred to border posts. Our Customs and Excise officers are always vigilant and, although we cannot ban the importation of items that are legal in this country, we can and do prevent the arrival on our shores—as far as we are able—of those items that are banned here.

The Government have also made it clear that we would consider adding further items to the banned list of weapons. I share hon. Members' abhorrence of Rambo survival knives, commando daggers and the like. Those items have no place in a civilised society. I am sure, however, that the House will understand that it is genuinely difficult to compile a fully definitive list of items to ban. In many cases, it is very difficult to come up with a legal definition of them that would not also encompass ordinary kitchen knives. However, I can assure the House that we are continuing to examine that possibility.

I have noted what my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam said about the sale of knives to children. We are seriously considering proposals that would ban the sale of knives to youngsters. If the proposals are workable, they could perhaps be included in Committee. That would be a major change and would require careful consideration; but, frankly, young children do not need razor-sharp kitchen knives or commando-style daggers, and it is very hard to justify why they should be able to buy them.

Some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), have spoken about the issue of advertisements. I urge anyone with a complaint about knife advertisements to take them up with the Advertising Standards Authority. I am glad to note that the ASA took exception to the use of the words "ready for action" in an advertisement, and had them withdrawn. Advertising regulation is, of course, done on a self-regulatory basis, but if it can be effective in cases such as the one I have cited, I have some confidence that it will be in other cases that, quite reasonably, cause concern.

I suspect that insufficient use is made of the ASA in relation to knife advertisements. I note with interest that the ASA investigates advertising without having received a complaint so that it can ensure that the British code of advertising is observed. It will do so if there is public concern about a certain issue, and considerable public concern has been expressed about knives.

One advertisement has been brought to my attention which causes me some concern. The ASA is aware of it, and I hope that it will take action. The wording of the advertisement includes the following:

> "A well balanced weapon with a wicked double-edged 7" blade, made with one thing in mind."

That is the nature of the wording of the advertisement. If anything, that wording is more objectionable than the words "ready for action". I should be extremely concerned if the ASA were unable to take action in such a case.

**Mr. Michael:** I am grateful to the Minister for the thoughtful way in which he has responded to this part of the debate. My concern is the ASA's clear statement that it does not have the power to act in the way that he, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and I wish that it would. Does that statement not make it absolutely clear that it cannot act authoritatively, which we wish it to do, until legislation gives it that power?

**Mr. Kirkhope:** That is a matter for further discussion and debate. That power is not specifically related to the Bill, and it may not be appropriate that it should be. However, I am expressing my concern to the hon. Gentleman about one element of the issue in relation to the ASA.

There are many knives and other sharp instruments that have a legitimate, everyday use, such as machetes, carving knives and butcher's hooks. It would clearly be difficult to ban the sale of those, but we must ensure that people who use or carry them illegally are punished. Ultimately, it is not the knife that wreaks havoc but the hand that wields it. The police tell us that the majority of the knives that are carried and used in stabbings are domestic knives. Apparently, Stanley knives are much favoured by young thugs, and carving knives are used in a depressingly high number of stabbings.

It is an offence under section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 to carry an offensive weapon in public. Offensive weapons include knives, but the prosecution must prove that the accused intended to use the knife to cause injury. Of course, that may not always be possible. That is why the Government introduced a lesser offence under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 of carrying a knife in public without good cause. In those cases, the prosecution does not have to prove intent.

The penalties for the two offences reflect their differing gravity. Where intent can be proved, the maximum penalty is two years in prison or a fine. Where intent cannot be proved, the maximum penalty is only a £1,000 fine.

By coincidence, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary wrote to the Association of Chief Police Officers a few days before the tragic death of Philip Lawrence, asking if it believed that the penalty should be increased. In light of events that weekend, the association replied very speedily, agreeing that the time had come to increase the penalties. Illicit knife carrying—even when there is no evidence that the carrier intended to use his knife to cause injury—is a very serious offence. Knife-carrying yobs must be sent the clear message that they may end up in prison.

My hon. Friend's Bill will increase the maximum penalty for that offence to two years' imprisonment or an unlimited fine, or both. Carrying an offensive weapon in public with intent to cause harm remains the more serious of the two offences and I agree with my hon. Friend that the maximum penalty in that case should be increased to reflect that fact. That is why the Bill raises the penalty to four years in prison or a fine, or both.

As I said earlier, many people carry knives for perfectly legitimate reasons. Carpenters may need to carry Stanley knives and saws, farmers may carry machetes, and ordinary men and women who have bought kitchen knives need to get them home. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said, those who are engaged in legitimate sporting activities—such as fisherman—may also have good reason to carry knives. I am sure that the legislation introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam is not designed to affect them.

Knives are also worn for religious reasons—such as the kirpans worn by Sikhs—or as part of a national costume. For example, the Scotsman carries his skean dhu in his kilt stocking—as we have seen quite a lot in the past few days. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham need have no fears about the wonderful tournaments that are held in his constituency and elsewhere by English Heritage.

Those people's position will not change. The innocent have nothing to fear from the legislation, but the guilty will have plenty to worry about. Anyone who is charged with carrying a knife in public will still have the defence that he had good reason or lawful authority for having the knife on his person. There are specific defences in relation to work, religion and national costume, as I mentioned. However, the onus is on the knife-carrier to prove his defence. It is right that, when there is any doubt, the courts should have the final say.

I congratulate the police service on the work it does catching criminals. The police have also made it clear that they would welcome the specific power of arrest without warrant in the case of offences of carrying an offensive weapon or knife in public. At present, the police must obtain a warrant, which is simply not practical in most cases. They may be lucky and find that the particular circumstances of the case allow them to use other powers of arrest that do not apply specifically to those offences, but that is too unpredictable. The police need clear powers of arrest.

The Bill will provide a clear power of arrest for those offences, which means that, rather than being sent on his way with a summons, the knife-carrier is likely to be taken to the police station. Importantly, it will also enable the police to investigate in a formal setting whether other more serious offences have been committed. In practice, the police will be more able to establish whether a knife-carrier intended to use his knife to cause injury and whether, as a result, a prosecution under the more serious of the two offences dealing with that activity would be appropriate.

Hon. Members have referred to the ACPO crime committee chairman, Commissioner Bill Taylor, and his remarks on the "Today" programme. It is perfectly clear that the police support such measures and it is clear that the people of this country support them also. I have, I hope, made it clear that the Government support and will assist the legislation, and I am very pleased that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth has expressed his support.

The wholehearted backing of the Bill will send a clear message out into the community: people who illegally carry knives deserve to be caught and punished—and they will be. I commend the Bill to the House.

2.19 pm

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): I travelled through the snow that afflicted Kent this morning in order to support the Bill. I am one of its sponsors, because I believe that the carrying of offensive weapons is a continuing problem that must be tackled. Some of us, indeed, would argue that it is getting worse. I welcome

provisions to strengthen the powers that the police need to arrest without a warrant those suspected of carrying knives, and the introduction of heavier penalties.

The Kent county constabulary has gone to the lengths of purchasing stab-proof vests for officers, some of whom have gone further and obtained their own private equipment. In north-west Kent alone during the past year, the police have had to process 26 offenders, and there must have been cases of the use or carrying of other offensive weapons.

Just before Christmas, the police encountered a man attacking another with a machete at Dartford railway station, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), who is also a sponsor of the Bill. It turned out to be simply a case of the criminal fraternity sorting out their own problems. It may be thought that they deserved it, but any members of the public who were in the area would have been at considerable risk as well. The carrying of such dangerous weapons seems to be increasing.

I had some anxieties about the Bill. What about law-abiding people? For instance, there is a religious requirement for devout Sikhs to carry the kirpan, a short sword. The Bill does not deal with that, however, because devout Sikhs are law-abiding. Similarly, it has long been traditional for scouts who engage in woodcraft to carry and use sheath knives, and other similar knives. The scouts, however, are a responsible organisation, and have not worn the sheath knives in public for many years. The holding of them is subject to secure conditions: the knives are taken to camp, for example, where they are used in accordance with the strict regulations for which the scouts have always been well known. In this Bill we are talking not about law-abiding people, but about hot-headed youngsters who think it clever to carry and, indeed, use offensive weapons.

I strongly support the idea of banning sales of offensive weapons to those under 18, and I was encouraged by what my hon. Friend the Minister said about that. We are making progress, not least with the amnesty in regard to the return of weapons. In my constituency, a rather heavy container was taken from Gravesend police station to the Kent county constabulary headquarters in Maidstone; it was full of offensive weapons.

I look forward to the Bill's progress and hope that the House will be able to deal firmly with the upsurge in the carrying of offensive weapons.

2.24 pm

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): I apologise to the House for arriving late: my attendance at surgery went on for some time. I support the Bill because it deals with a problem that concerns a large number of people. It has been brought to the fore by the tragic death of Mr. Lawrence, but it deals with part of a problem that has been around for a long time. I used to live in Glasgow, and I remember standing at a bus stop in Sauchiehall street on a Saturday night and being able to guarantee that not one knife but two, three or four would be seen by 10 o'clock. There is a great problem and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on her success in the ballot and on her wisdom in presenting such a Bill.

2.25 pm

**Lady Olga Maitland:** I am grateful to all those hon. Members who have spoken in support of the Bill. What I have heard leaves me in no doubt about its great importance. I thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), for expressing his interest and his determination seriously to consider proposals banning the sale of knives to youngsters. As he knows, I have privately been pressing him to do that. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) shares my wish to ban such sales.

Knifings have been growing, and a knife culture has been developing in the playground. Children from the age of 12 to 15 are buying knives because they find them attractive in the shops. They are more fun than a kitchen knife and some shopkeepers have no scruples about making money. Those facts lead to widespread tragedies. I hope that dealing with those issues will be an important part of the Bill.

Powers of arrest are crucial. It is frustrating to the police to stop a young person whom they have reason to suspect is carrying a knife for no good reason only to find that they are impotent to deal with that serious matter. The legislation must incorporate heavy penalties that will convey the clear message to all the thugs and hooligans that if they carry a knife without a good reason they will face gaol. That is a serious penalty, but society wants to see justice and it is important to have sentences that reflect society's concern.

We need to ensure that a young person who carries a knife without a good reason will no longer get away with it. He will face a sentence of up to two years, but if he is carrying a knife and it can be shown that he intends to use it, he could face four years in gaol. Such powers are crucial and will change the culture of our society. I hope that we shall concentrate on the background of such young people and try to give them greater stability in their lives. They need secure homes, caring parents and schools.

Teachers, people in the world outside and political parties are all working towards one end—to create a society in which law abiding people can walk on the streets without fearing for their lives, and without the fear of suffering injury or intimidation or of being robbed at knife point. All that must stop, and I am grateful to hon. Members for helping to bring that about.

I look forward to the opportunity of discussing the Bill in Committee where we can explore the ideas that we have been debating. I hope that the resulting legislation will benefit this country as a whole.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).*

## British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,*

That the Bill be read a Second time.

*Question again proposed.*

2.29 pm

**Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): We had a long debate on the Bill last Friday, but I was not able to take part. In the remaining seconds, I wish to register my opposition to the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). I oppose it because of the way in which it will affect my constituents, especially people who work outdoors: those involved in farming and forestry.

I have literally only a few seconds to register that point, which I was not able to do at the last debate. The Bill will cause tremendous hardship to people who work outdoors. It is not, as was suggested in the last debate, simply a question of—
Order.

*It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.*

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 2 February.*

### STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

*Ordered,*

That the Minutes of the Evidence taken before the Committee of Privileges on 1st November in the last session of Parliament and not reported to the House and the related Memorandum be laid upon the Table and referred to the Committee on Standards and Privileges for examination by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 31st January, the Speaker shall not later than Ten o'clock put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Gummer relating to Local Government Finance.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

## Scottish Newcastle and Courage

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

2.30 pm

**Mr. John Heppell** (Nottingham, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue in the House.

My reason for asking for this debate is not just the effect that the matter has had locally, with all brewing, all bottling and all distribution to stop at the Home Brewery site; it is not just the fact that the decision brings to an end a tradition of brewing in the Nottingham conurbation that goes back hundreds of years; it is not just the loss of the Robin Hood logo, which clearly identified the beer as a Nottingham product, in a secret deal of which I have no details; it is not just the loss of consumer choice and pub closures; it is not even the loss of more than 200 jobs, especially those in my constituency, which has the highest unemployment rate in the east midlands—higher than anywhere in Scotland or Wales.

Nor is my reason just to attack Scottish Newcastle for the effect that its policies are having nationally, with nine breweries reduced to seven, with 41 distribution points reduced to 28, with more than 200 jobs lost in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), with the loss of consumer choice, with the effect on beer prices, and with the loss of more than 1,600 jobs nationally. If this matter concerned only Scottish Newcastle's actions, it would be a debate of little significance—we should know by now where Scottish Newcastle is coming from and where it is going.

What makes the debate so important is the fact that Scottish Newcastle has an accomplice in this affair, who aided and abetted it in obtaining a bigger share of the market, not by competition, but by acquisition. That accomplice must share responsibility for everything that has happened as a result of the merger; an accomplice who effectively drove a dray horse through the Government's policy of encouraging competition.

I am sorry to say that that accomplice is the Government, in the person of the Under-Secretary for Corporate and Consumer Affairs. He sealed the fate of Home Brewery, my local brewery and Nottingham's local brewery, when, on 14 August last year, he decided not to refer the merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** Will the hon. Gentleman be good enough to concede that my predecessor in this office acted merely on the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, who is an independent agent?

**Mr. Heppell:** I was coming to that point, and I am glad that the Minister has raised it.

The Department of Trade and Industry press release said that the decision was in accordance with the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, and listed undertakings from Scottish Newcastle and Courage breweries. What the press release did not mention was that that was not the director general's original advice. That was clearly set out in a DTI press release on 21 July 1995. I shall quote it for the sake of the Minister:

"The Director General of Fair Trading has recommended that the proposed acquisition should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission because it would give rise to a significant concentration in the brewing industry with no compensating reduction in vertical links."

That seemed clear enough to me, but the then Minister rejected that advice. He took a political decision to reject the advice of the director general—advice that should have come as no surprise to him, as it came as no surprise to me.

Back in 1989 there was a similar attempted merger, which was referred to the MMC. I want to quote from the report on that. Paragraph 1.6 states:

"We consider that the loss of the independence of one of the major suppliers to the market would reduce consumer choice and competition and thus be detrimental to the public interest."

Paragraph 1.8 states:

"The creation of a second large group . . . would result in increased difficulty of supply for other brewers and distributors."

Even more significant and relevant are the comments in paragraph 5.10:

"The effect of the takeover would be not simply a reduction by one in the number of separate companies operating in the UK beer market but would constitute a major alteration in the structure of the market, reducing competitiveness in all sectors."

That was part of Scottish Newcastle's own evidence.

In paragraph 5.13, the report said:

"Scottish and Newcastle believed that it was against the public interest that such entry"

to the market

"should be achieved by acquisition instead of competition."

I could continue quoting. The report is littered with arguments by Scottish Newcastle against the merger. It is clear that it changed its position to suit its own convenience.

As I said, Scottish Newcastle's actions should come as no surprise. Just this week my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) told me about the sense of betrayal still felt in their constituencies following the takeover of Matthew Brown by Scottish Newcastle six years ago. Before the takeover, Scottish Newcastle wrote to all the employees in Matthew Brown guaranteeing that brewing would continue at the brewery in Blackburn. Within six months, the brewery was closed. If that can happen despite the guarantee, I have little doubt of the consequences of the merger for Home Brewery, my local brewery.

Scottish Newcastle's actions were predictable; indeed, I predicted them last July. What was not predictable was the action of the then Minister. He chose 21 July as the day to announce that he was considering accepting undertakings from the breweries, rather than referring the merger to the MMC. He allowed just seven days for interested parties to submit their views—hardly what anyone would call meaningful consultation. By the end of that seven days, the House was in recess and there was no opportunity for me or any other hon. Member to raise the matter.

Even with that tight time scale, I and several other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) and members of the Nottinghamshire city council, wrote to the director general saying that there was still a case for referral. I received a reply on 15 August. I was told that the Minister decided to ask for representations on the text of the conditions for the undertakings on 4 August. On 14 August, he decided that he would allow the merger to go ahead. Effectively, I had no real opportunity to argue against that. The decision was taken despite the fact that 33 representations were made, and the overwhelming view was that the most appropriate action would be referral.

I have no doubt—and events bear me out—that the whole consultation exercise was a sham, and that Scottish and Newcastle had already received a nod and a wink from the Government that there would be no referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. There will be no referral for a merger that will put 30 per cent. of total beer sales in the hands of Scottish Courage, and will mean that two brewers will have more than 50 per cent. of the sales in this country.

The three conditions set down were designed to have a minimal effect. The first related to the new retail estates and Scottish Courage's 7,500 pubs. The total is actually more than that, as a reply from the Minister informed me. The company has been asked to get rid of 115 pubs, but that merely gives it an opportunity to get rid of its less profitable pubs. When a firm is supplying 7,500 different pubs, 115 is not a great number to have to get rid of.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman is right, but only half right. To that extent, he is half wrong. It is true that Scottish Courage will be required to reduce its tied estate by 115 pubs, but—and this is the important second limb of the undertaking—a limit was set at 2,624 on the maximum number of tied pubs that it could own.

**Mr. Heppell:** I do not dispute what the Minister has said, and nothing that I have said contradicts that. In answer to a parliamentary question from me, the Minister replied:

"At the time of giving his advice to me on the Scottish and Newcastle/Courage merger, the Director General of Fair Trading estimated that the parties would between them have owned or supplied about 7,500 pubs, which included some 4,350 pubs owned by Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. and supplied by Courage. This figure is not complete as it does not include all supply agreements entered into by the parties as part of their normal commercial activities."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1995; Vol. 265, c. 559.]

I recognise that the tied estate is only 2,624 pubs, but in reality, the figure is 7,500. The Minister is clear on that as well; otherwise, something is wrong with his answer. It is still correct to say that 115 pubs is not a great number at which to set the ceiling, but even then there was a get-out. Scottish and Newcastle could apply for a review if it thought that the circumstances had changed, and there was a further get-out in that there would definitely be a review after three years. So that undertaking was not going to bite hard on Scottish and Newcastle.

The third condition—the release of thousands of IEL tied pubs—was not a new undertaking, as the company had already decided to carry that out in March 1998. An existing undertaken was merely to be brought forward, so that, instead of releasing 500 pubs in each of two years, the company would be releasing the pubs in one year. Even after that, I expect that the vast majority of pubs will still end up being supplied by Scottish Courage. The condition did nothing in terms of vertical competition, and it was supposed to offset the horizontal competition.

*[Mr. Heppell]*

I will quickly move on, as I recognise that I am running out of time. It seems to me that the Minister had no intention of referring the merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. If, in 1989, a similar takeover was referred to the MMC, why, in 1995, was this merger not referred? One of the significant reasons is the fact that, between 1989 and 1995, Scottish and Newcastle paid £320,000 to the Conservative party. Given the way that things have panned out, I have to think that that was a significant factor in the decision not to refer.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman dare not say that outside the protection of this Chamber.

**Mr. Heppell:** I have already said it outside the protection of this Chamber.

There has been much speculation locally about the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), because 10 per cent. of that donation went to his constituency. I do not think that that contribution made any difference to what has happened to Home Brewery. I said that to the hon. Member and I do not mind repeating it. The decision to close Home Brewery was not made locally, nor was the decision not to refer the merger to the MMC—it was made nationally and by the Minister. No pun is intended when I say that the fact that the merger was not referred leaves a bitter taste in my mouth.

The hon. Member for Gedling has been lobbying to try to save jobs at Home Brewery. The problem is that he did not start his lobbying until very late on. In some respects, it was too late. My only criticism is that he gave people the false hope that the brewery would not close. According to an article in the *Nottingham Evening Post* of Tuesday 5 September 1995, the hon. Gentleman

"has made 'vigorous representations' to Scottish and Newcastle about the future of the Daybrook site. The brewer's response appears to have encouraged him because he told the Post last month: 'There is no commercial logic in shutting the site down. My responsibility is to look after my constituents who work at Daybrook and there is no reason to think that the future is not a good one.'"

My only criticism is that that made people think, "He is a Minister and part of the Government. He knows what is happening. The brewery is going to be safe." I know now that he is doing everything he can to ensure that, when those people are made redundant, they will have a chance to get back into training and employment as quickly as possible through the training and enterprise council.

But the decision that caused the closure of Home Brewery was the decision not to refer the merger to the MMC, and I am convinced that the Minister did not allow referral because it is a certainty that it would have turned it down. That is the evidence from the Director General of Fair Trading. In his report to the Minister, he gives enough reasons why it should have been referred.

I realise that I am not giving the Minister much time to respond, but I must quickly pay tribute to Gedling council, the local trade unionists and the work force for their efforts in trying to get something positive out of all this and to work towards the future, either to save the brewery or ensure that the site is used in a way that will ensure some employment is brought back into the area.

Finally, the Minister believes that his policy on competition is working. He has told me a great deal about how vertical competition has been stopped, but the policy has not stopped horizontal competition. In 1989, the six largest breweries controlled 77 per cent. of the market. By 1992, the five largest breweries—not six, but five—controlled 82 per cent. of the market. Today, the four largest—not the five or six largest—control 84 per cent. of the market. That is not dealing with competition and monopoly effectively.

2.49 pm

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** I would have liked to congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on securing this debate and to have had the opportunity to deal with him on terms and in good time. However, his bitterness, to which he referred, has soured the debate somewhat, and makes it necessary for me to defend, although he does not need it, my predecessor in this office, which I do 100 per cent. and wholeheartedly, notwithstanding the innuendoes of the hon. Gentleman.

I defend also the outstanding role of my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell). It is clear from even a cursory reading of the local press that he has played a leading role in trying to persuade Scottish Courage to stay on site, invest and expand—not only in recent months but in the years since the Home brewery was sold to Scottish and Newcastle by the Farr family. Everyone knows that he did everything he could as the local MP to fight for his constituents who work at the brewery. He has a well-earned reputation in the House for fighting for the interests of his constituents.

I am afraid that the hon. Member for Nottingham, East leaves me with no option. Instead of turning to the arguments, I must deal with his outrageous suggestions about donations.

Donations to the Conservative party are received each year from thousands of companies up and down the country. However, unlike in the Labour party, they do not buy any favours. Everyone knows full well that Labour is owned lock, stock and barrel by the unions, who provide 50 per cent. of the party's funds and sponsor two thirds of their Members of Parliament, including every elected member of the shadow Cabinet. In return, they get 50 per cent. of the vote at party conference, 50 per cent. of the seats on the party's national executive, and considerable influence in the election of the party's leader and deputy leader and the selection of parliamentary candidates.

**Mr. Heppell:** I agree with the Minister. There are clearly financial incentives. Does the Minister agree that all those things should be open to scrutiny? Will he go against the Prime Minister and say that all donations to political parties should be referred to Nolan or some other committee?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. We ought to come back to the subject of the debate.

**Mr. Taylor:** In that spirit, I recognise hon. Members' concerns about the loss of jobs that will result from the recent reorganisation of Scottish Courage. Such losses are regrettable, but it is important to recognise that industry has to operate in a very competitive environment.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, East counterweighed his more unfortunate remarks with a candour for which I give him credit. I am not squealing, but as he has left me little time, I shall move to my conclusion. I shall have more to say, not least about the ministerial decision that was based on the recommendation of the Director General of Fair Trading. In a spirit of candour I shall describe my position; to use a fashionable phrase, read my lips:

"I can't start interfering with the particular management decisions that have been taken . . . No politician, if he's honest, will sit here and say they can prevent someone losing their job."

**Mr. Heppell:** I agree.

**Mr. Taylor:** That is as well, because I am quoting the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who said precisely that in the *Nottingham Evening Post* last week.

**Mr. Heppell:** Will the Minister go further and say that no one should interfere with the decisions of the Director General of Fair Trading?

**Mr. Taylor:** I will not be unduly drawn on the matter, but I think that the ultimate responsibility rests with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. If I am mistaken, I shall rapidly return to the matter with a letter to the hon. Gentleman, and I shall put a copy in the Library.

We must now try to be constructive. I understand that Scottish Courage will take steps to redeploy staff wherever possible, and will work with local agencies to help staff who lose their jobs to find other work. The Government are well aware of the difficulties faced by those who may lose their jobs, and are fully committed to working with local partners to help ease the effects of the closures. Representatives from the local training and enterprise councils have already met local politicians, trade unions and other representatives to discuss how best to help those affected.

The decision taken by my predecessor not to refer the Scottish and Newcastle and Courage merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has been criticised. It may help if I explain how that decision was reached.

Last August, my predecessor announced that he had accepted undertakings from Scottish and Newcastle and Courage and that he would therefore not refer the merger to the MMC. The undertakings addressed competition concerns, which the Director General of Fair Trading had identified. They weaken the link between Scottish Courage and its retail estate by requiring Scottish Courage to reduce its tied estate and by setting a limit on the maximum number of tied pubs that the company can own.

I immediately acknowledge that the director general's original advice was that the merger should be referred to the MMC, because it would give rise to a significant concentration in the brewing industry, with no compensating reduction in vertical links. But my predecessor asked him to consider whether those concerns could be remedied by enforceable undertakings as an alternative to reference. The final decision taken by my predecessor was in accordance with the independent advice of the director general, and followed two periods of consultation about the form that the undertakings should take. In addition, the final undertakings were published, together with the director general's advice.

The whole process by which the undertakings were secured was highly transparent. If hon. Members read the director general's advice, they will see that he carefully considered third parties' views. He took those very much into account before he advised that they addressed the competition concerns arising from the merger, and that they should be accepted instead of the merger being referred to the MMC. The House will recognise that the undertakings given by the companies are aimed at addressing competition concerns arising from the merger.

Since 1984, the Government's policy has been that decisions on whether mergers are referred to the MMC are taken primarily on competition grounds. That will continue to be the case. It is important to consider the decision taken on the Scottish Courage case in the context of more recent regulatory intervention in the brewing industry.

In 1989, the MMC completed a monopoly report on the supply of beer. That led to the Beer Orders, which sought to encourage competition in the market, primarily by reducing the extent to which licensed premises were tied to the national brewers. There have been three major mergers since that report: between Allied and Carlsberg; Courage and Grand Metropolitan; and Scottish and Newcastle and Courage. The first two of those mergers were referred to the MMC.

I recognise that it was expected that the third would also be referred, so the Government's decision to allow the merger to proceed without a reference seems to have shocked some people. Some seem to think that a merger should be automatically referred whenever the market share rises above 25 per cent. Let me explain that the 25 per cent. threshold only establishes jurisdiction under the Fair Trading Act 1973, but is no more that a jurisdictional test. Moreover, new legislation enabled enforceable undertakings to be attained in the Scottish Courage case, which meant that competition concerns could be addressed without a reference to the MMC, as Parliament had always intended.

It does not mean that future brewing mergers will never be referred to the MMC, or that vertical links will be the only aspect of a brewing merger that the Government seek to address. In considering the action to be taken, each merger case is considered on its merits. The competition authorities assess the effect of the merger on the market, and take views of third parties. That is true of all mergers. Nor should there be a general presumption that the Government would always intervene in markets.

Perhaps I can end, as earlier stated, with a quotation. It is the only time ever that I have claimed the Leader of the Opposition in aid of my argument, and it may never happen again. It has been an interesting week. He said:

"obviously I can't start interfering with particular management decisions that have been taken . . . No politician, if he's honest, will sit here and say they can prevent someone losing their job. I can't.".

Nor can I.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Monday 29 January 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Deregulation

1. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what analysis his office has made of the number of regulations approved by the Government since 1979 which affect businesses; and how many of these regulations he has removed. [9978]

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman):** In 1994, there were 1,467 statutory instruments, excluding road closures and local transitional and commencement orders, of which two thirds either were specifically intended to help business or had no impact on business. I do not have comparable figures for earlier years. We are now monitoring all statutory instruments on a monthly basis to ensure that they are necessary and that the benefits exceed the cost.

**Mr. O'Brien:** I do not know who the Minister thinks he is kidding if he thinks that the Government have a record for deregulation, because he is certainly not kidding business men in my constituency. Is it not the case that this Government have created more regulations than any Government in British history and that they are in the process of creating an administrative bungle, on the scale of that in the Child Support Agency, with their introduction of self-assessment for the self-employed and for businesses, which will create an enormous burden on business in my constituency and across the country because it is being rushed in?

**Mr. Freeman:** I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman about self-assessment, which is due to be introduced in the next financial year. It will be a success and its introduction is being carefully monitored. Labour opposed the 1994 Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill on Second Reading and at all other stages. That is an example, once again, of Labour saying one thing but doing another.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** How many of those statutory instruments and other regulations affecting business have been brought on us through EU directives? Is my right hon. Friend confident that he has the powers to deregulate those regulators or the mechanisms and proposals to put before the intergovernmental conference later this year? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Freeman:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to an important subject, which the deputy Leader of the Opposition seems to find funny. The number of directives likely to be passed by the Council of Ministers in the coming year is likely to be substantially down on the past few years. Yes, we have the mechanism to deregulate existing European law, where it is sensible so to do.

### Cabinet Committees

2. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how often each Cabinet Committee which he chairs meets. [9979]

**The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine):** When Government business demands it.

**Mr. Griffiths:** We can hardly call that an illuminating reply. Let us see if the Deputy Prime Minister can have a stab at this question: as the Minister responsible for the presentation of Government business—he chairs the Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy—what would the Prime Minister—

**Mr. MacShane:** Not yet.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I was a couple of months ahead of myself. What would the Deputy Prime Minister have to say to a group of politicians who promised to cut taxes year on year and then raised them by the largest amount in peacetime history?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I would tell them that we had protected those least able to protect themselves in the aftermath of one of the worst recessions since the war and that, as we had done that and created one of the most successful economies in western Europe, we are now back on a tax-cutting agenda. If they wanted to watch taxes go up, they should just put a Labour Government in power.

**Mr. Yeo:** When my right hon. Friend next chairs the relevant Cabinet Committee, will he say whether he agrees that a political party that opposed the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the Public Order Act 1986, successive Criminal Justice Acts, the Prison Security Act 1992 and even the modest measure that banned joy-riding is soft on crime and the causes of crime, and merely sheds its crocodile tears for the victims of crime to conceal its real sympathy for the criminals?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary pointed out most eloquently this morning, people who are now in prison for crimes that they committed would not be in prison had the Labour party had its way in resisting our changes.

**Mr. Prescott:** Can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that he is responsible for the presentation of Government policies on crime and that, since 1979, burglary has increased by 160 per cent., theft from vehicles by nearly 200 per cent. and violent crime by 400 per cent? That is the real Tory record. Is that not why he resorted to abuse, innuendo and slurs over the weekend, to hide the real truth about crime? Will he now take this opportunity to apologise to the Opposition for the untruths that he told yesterday, and to the British public for his Government's record on crime?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman is fully aware that spending on law and order has more than doubled in real terms since 1978-79, police manpower has increased by 32,000, or 22 per cent., and recorded crime has shown the largest fall over a two-year period. That is in contrast with what the Labour party voted against: raising the maximum sentences for serious crime, giving the Attorney-General the right of appeal against lenient sentences, strengthening police powers to stop and search criminals, giving the police more powers to deal with disorder on the streets and making parents more responsible for their children's actions. It is another classic example of Labour saying one thing and doing another. It is a classic example of hypocrisy in this critical field.

## Deregulation

3. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is taking to accelerate progress on the deregulation initiative. [9981]

**Mr. Freeman:** By the end of 1995, we had already dealt with more than 500 of the 1,000 or so regulations identified by Government for repeal or amendment and we shall tackle the remainder over the coming months. The first deregulation orders under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 have now passed into law and there is a steady flow of new orders. We shall continue to seek support from the European Commission and member states for our deregulation initiatives.

**Mr. Evans:** Small businesses are important economically to this country, especially small rural businesses, which breathe economic life into areas that might not experience it, if not for their existence. Will my right hon. Friend therefore encourage his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry and other Departments to look at fresh and imaginative ways to lift bureaucracy and regulations from the shoulders of those small rural businesses?

**Mr. Freeman:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is extremely important to monitor properly the impact of regulations, whether they come from Brussels or Whitehall, on small and medium-sized enterprises. That is why I have written recently to all Ministers reminding them of the need carefully to monitor the impact of any proposed regulations, particularly from Europe, on small and medium-sized enterprises.

**Mr. Foulkes:** If a group of politicians had promised to abolish 1,000 regulations and instead brought in 200 extra regulations, would the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster call them hypocrites or liars?

**Mr. Freeman:** I would call them extremely successful.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his determination to rescind, if necessary, directives emanating from the European Union that have an adverse effect on British business. Will he put the electro-magnetic compatibility directive at No. 1 in that category? It is particularly harmful to small businesses, whose owners may be penalised to the extent of three months' imprisonment or a £5,000 fine if they do not comply with the directive. That is quite excessive and it bears heavily on small businesses.

**Mr. Freeman:** I agree with my hon. Friend that a number of directives, including the one to which he refers, need either amendment or repeal, and I have tabled eight suggestions for the Commission to examine. I note that last week some of his hon. Friends published a pamphlet entitled "Dire Directives". I think that the pamphlet's thrust is correct and I have invited the members of that group, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), to attend an early meeting.

## Government Policy

4. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new proposals he is making to enhance the co-ordination of the presentation of Government policy; and if he will make a statement. [9982]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. David Willetts):** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his interest and can assure him we are constantly seeking to enhance the co-ordination of the presentation of Government policy. We seek every opportunity to explain how only this Government's policies can ensure economic success combined with constitutional stability.

**Mr. MacShane:** I am grateful to the intellectual wing of the Department for that reply. Can the Minister explain why, in presenting Government policy at the weekend, the Deputy Prime Minister launched an election campaign—that is, he launched his campaign to succeed the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) by proving that he is as big a right-wing villain as anyone else in the Cabinet? How do the Minister and his colleagues justify the immense expenditure of taxpayers' money on what is now nothing more than a Tory party Ministry of lies? Would they not be better off returning to Tory central office where their gutter politics will be more appreciated?

**Mr. Willetts:** I think that we are getting our message across rather well, as the events of the past 10 days have shown.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** Will my hon. Friend take an early opportunity to publish a paper about the Government's approach to hypocrisy in public life so that Labour Members may benefit from an accelerated learning curve?

**Mr. Willetts:** It would certainly be a long paper as it would cover Opposition policies on crime, education, the economy and housing. I look forward to such a publication.

**Mr. Beith:** Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that a number of Conservative policies on law and order that were presented at Conservative party conferences have been quietly dropped? I refer, for example, to compulsory identity cards or the Home Secretary's very expensive plan to ensure that all prisoners serve their entire sentences without remission. Does that not illustrate that

many of these law and order policies are political gimmicks with no practical crime-cutting benefit? Has he become the villain's friend?

**Mr. Willetts:** The Government have published a consultation document on the identity card scheme and responses to it are being considered now. As to the remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary at the party conference, he has a fine record of implementing the measures that he announces at party conferences.

### EC Regulations (Competition)

5. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what priority he gives to representations from United Kingdom industries in assessing EC regulations which affect competition policy. [9983]

**Mr. Freeman:** Business views are central to our assessment of the impact that proposed Economic Community regulations have on United Kingdom competitiveness.

**Sir Roger Moate:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that, under competition policy, the European Community is due to review the block exemption for the tied house arrangement between British brewers and public houses? More than 27,000 tenanted and leased houses are covered by that tie. Is my right hon. Friend further aware that any threat to the tied arrangement—which, in theory, could end in 1997—could undermine the existence of many thousands of British pubs? Is it not time to say that Brussels has no business interfering in British public house arrangements? We should say that now robustly, before we get involved in consultations which threaten those arrangements, and we must confirm that Britain has no intention of ending those arrangements in 1997 or at any other time.

**Mr. Freeman:** The President of the Board of Trade has responsibility in that area and I am sure that he will look after the interests of the brewing industry as well as those of the entire United Kingdom industry.

I am glad that the Commission has adopted new guidelines for issuing new directives, which include proper consultation with the industry and with businesses affected before the directives are introduced.

### Water Companies (Charter Marks)

7. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many water companies have received charter marks; and if he will make a statement. [9985]

**Mr. Willetts:** Five water companies have won charter marks: Anglian Water, Severn Trent Water and Wessex Water in 1992 and Welsh Water and South Staffordshire Water in 1993.

**Mr. O'Brien:** In view of the appalling record of water companies in providing services to their customers and the fact that people in Yorkshire have suffered more than many others, will the Minister assure me that Yorkshire Water will not qualify for a charter mark and that others, such as Severn Trent Water, should have their charter marks withdrawn because of the appalling service to their customers?

**Mr. Willetts:** Water companies will have the opportunity to apply for charter marks in 1996, but, in order to win one, they will have to show that they have maintained the highest quality of service to customers. If they have not managed to achieve that, they certainly will not receive a charter mark.

**Mr. Congdon:** Does my hon. Friend agree that after years of neglect in the public sector, water companies have taken the opportunity of massive capital investment to improve infrastructure and water quality? Will he give particular credit to Thames Water, which has invested £2 billion in the past five years to improve water for Londoners?

**Mr. Willetts:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. It is revealing to compare the conspicuously dry summer of 1995, when there were 53 drought orders, with the previous hot summer of 1976, when there were 136 drought orders. That is a testament to the improvement in the quality of service after privatisation.

### Ministerial Responsibilities

8. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent representations he has received about his responsibilities. [9986]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** None, other than from Opposition Members.

**Mr. Grocott:** In view of the Deputy Prime Minister's welcome initiative in raising the subject of law and order at the weekend, will he confirm that in 1979, under the last Labour Government, the number of offences was 2,540,000 and that in 1994, after 15 years of Tory government, the figure was 5,040,000? In the Deputy Prime Minister's own language, clearly villains love Tory Governments. As Britain was unarguably a much safer place in the 1970s, will he devote his energy and attention to answering a simple question to which we all need an answer: why has crime rocketed under the Tories?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman should be fully aware that recorded crime shows the largest ever fall in a two-year period. That is in no small measure the result of legislation introduced by the Government in the teeth of Labour opposition.

**Mr. Jenkin:** May I make representations to my right hon. Friend about his responsibilities and suggest that his job will be far easier if he continues making the Opposition angry by pointing out how they have obstructed the Government's law and order policies at every twist and turn?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. That is precisely what I did and the result is to send the Opposition into mayhem. They thought that they would get away with repeated one-off

opposition until someone added their comments together, to show that they have consistently resisted the Government's policies to deal with rising crime.

**Mr. Winnick:** Are not some of my colleagues being rather naive when they criticise the Deputy Prime Minister for his remarks yesterday? Is it not quite clear there is no lie, no innuendo and no smear that the Government will not use to get re-elected? Does not the Deputy Prime Minister see the difference between the Cabinet Minister who resigned on principle over Westland and walked out of a Cabinet meeting and the same Cabinet Minister who today is quite happy in the political sewers using every possible political smear against any proposal?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so upset, but the truth is often inconvenient.

**Dr. Spink:** In advising the Government on their future policies, will my right hon. Friend encourage them to avoid Labour's greatest hypocrisy—the adoption of the social chapter and the minimum wage, which would destroy jobs and businesses?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If I remember correctly, the deputy leader of the Labour party said that any fool knows that a minimum wage will cost jobs. Coming out of the mouth of the deputy leader, that seems a pretty accurate description of the position.

**Mr. Mandelson:** Following the Deputy Prime Minister's descent into the campaign gutter yesterday and the recent reining-in of the Secretary of State for Scotland after his misuse of civil servants and public funds in his campaigning against Labour in Scotland, will the Deputy Prime Minister give an undertaking this afternoon that those abuses will not be allowed to continue as the Tories' lies and smears against Labour mount as the election approaches—as inevitably they will?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I know that the leader of the Labour party talks only to the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), but I did not realise that the right hon. Gentleman would send the hon. Member for Hartlepool here to eclipse his own deputy leader—a most extraordinary situation. I must say to the hon. Gentleman, whose electioneering techniques have been the subject of great interest on both sides of the House, that nobody has brought more professional skill to the debasement of British public life than the hon. Member for Hartlepool.

**Mr. Lidington:** May I ask my right hon. Friend to arrange an early and thorough presentation of Government education policy, to make it clear that, although this Government have always supported the principle of setting and streaming in schools, that is in marked contrast to the policy adopted by Labour Members, who have often denigrated and condemned that approach?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter because I understand that it is to be the subject of a major speech by the leader of the Labour party tonight, in which he will advocate something called accelerated learning—which, in any other language, is streaming. The leader of the Labour party gave his views, or at least what were his views, in June last year. He said—

**Hon. Members:** Order. Reading.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I will decide whether the Minister is in order.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** It is not just what the Minister has to say, Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. As far as I am concerned, it is what the Minister has to say at the Dispatch Box today.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** This is what the leader of the Labour party had to say—

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. There can be no points of order during questions and the hon. Gentleman is aware of that.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The House must know that the views of the leader of the Labour party on streaming are of major interest to the House. He said— *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The Minister was asked a question and he is attempting to answer. [HON. MEMBERS: "It was out of order."] It is for me to determine whether the question was in or out of order, and it was in order. The Minister will answer it.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker. The leader of the Labour party said on 23 June 1995:

> "Streaming, with its rigid distribution of children into bright, average and backward camps, is a waste of talent."

Yet tonight, that is to be the major theme of a major speech. That is not so much a case of accelerated learning as one of accelerated hypocrisy.

## Civil Service Morale

9. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on morale in the civil service. [9987]

**Mr. Willetts:** Morale in the civil service is best maintained by allowing staff to perform to the best of their abilities in the career that they have chosen. This Government's civil service reforms enable staff to focus their attention on delivering high-quality public services. That is the best way of satisfying them and the users of their services.

**Mr. Martlew:** Surely the Minister is being complacent. Does he not realise that civil servants' morale has been sapped because of Government changes? The Government have created a climate of insecurity. Does

not the Minister agree with Sir Robin Butler, head of the civil service, who wrote that in an article in *The Observer* recently?

**Mr. Willetts:** The Government have a fine record of reforming the civil service. Inevitably, nobody nowadays can be offered a job for life but, as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister explained in a speech last week, we have a fine record and we are pursuing our reform agenda.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Will my hon. Friend tell the House what has happened to the numbers in the civil service? Sometimes people outside suspect that one party in the House is more interested in jobs for the boys than in getting value for money for the taxpayer.

**Mr. Willetts:** There were 735,000 civil servants in 1979 and there are now 506,000 civil servants. The number will go below 500,000 this year, and that shows that the Government are serious about cutting overhead costs.

**Mr. Derek Foster:** What is the Minister's response to Sir Robin Butler's charge that low morale and the climate of insecurity are caused by perpetual reorganisation imposed by Tory Government? Has not morale plummeted further because of the Deputy Prime Minister's scorched earth policy in pursuing privatisation to ludicrous lengths, for example with Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency, which has been so roundly condemned by Lords Bancroft and Hunt?

**Mr. Willetts:** We published a White Paper in 1994 on the civil service called "The Civil Service—Continuity and Change", which made it clear that the Government are committed to a high-quality civil service that will also be smaller and more committed to numeracy and technical skills. Many civil servants welcome the reform agenda that the Government are pursuing.

We expect improvement and reduction in overhead costs in the private sector and there is no reason why the Government should not ensure that their house matches the quality of service in the private sector. That is what we are doing.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** What would happen to the morale of a civil service team if the deputy leader of that team was left out of all considerations and discussions because he was thought not to be intellectually up to it?

**Mr. Willetts:** I dread to think what would happen to the civil service in the event of a Labour Government, and especially what would happen if the personal press officer of the Leader of the Opposition were put in charge of the Government's information service.

### Government Policy

10. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of his time spent on ministerial duties is devoted to promoting Government policies. [9988]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Whatever time I judge necessary.

**Mr. Ainger:** Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that since he took up his position in July last year and devoted so much time to promoting Government policy, the Gallup 9000 public opinion poll has been registering a constant lead of more than 25 per cent. for the Labour party? Is the reason for the Deputy Prime Minister's dismal failure to promote the Government because the policies he is promoting are no good, or is it that he is no good at promoting the policies, or is it a combination of the two?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** If the failure to promote Government policies had been acute as the hon. Member suggests, the Labour party would not have been thrown into the abject pandemonium that we have seen in the past four days.

**Mr. Viggers:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that he has an easy job because our policies are clear and understood? Does my right hon. Friend, who is a kindly man, feel some sense of compassion for Opposition Members who will have to cluster around the tape machine this evening to try to discover what their policy is on testing, selection and streaming in schools?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I do feel compassion for them, and that is why I spend so much of my time explaining Labour party policy for them.

The accelerated learning proposals of the leader of the Labour party give us a new version of Labour's stakeholder society. I read in *The Times* today that our best teachers would be sent to the worst schools. Britain's best teachers would have to take a stake in Labour's worst schools, while the children of Labour leaders would get a stake in the Tories' best schools. That is another example of accelerated hypocrisy.

**Mr. Radice:** I wonder whether the Deputy Prime Minister can tell the House when the Scott inquiry report will be published.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I do not have a date to give the House today, but I believe that the House realises that Sir Richard Scott's report is likely to reach the Government in the not too distant future.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Will my right hon. Friend monitor the teaching of moral education at St. Olave's and the London Oratory schools? Does he think that the teachers at those schools will teach their pupils "to do as I say" or "to do as I do"?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I would not wish to interfere in the excellent teaching standards that those schools enjoy. The parents concerned have exercised exactly the choice that I think that the vast majority of parents would exercise in their position. It is difficult to understand, however, how the Labour party would deny parents the chance to exercise such choice, which self-evidently is the sort of choice that its leaders want to adopt.

### Foreign Companies

11. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to issue further regulation in respect of the activities of foreign companies operating in the United Kingdom. [9989]

**Mr. Willetts:** The Government have no plans for further regulation of foreign companies operating in the United Kingdom because we do not wish to jeopardise our record of attracting substantial overseas investment.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** The Minister will know of the appalling and entirely unregulated activities of Campbell Soups of America, including those in my constituency, where it shut down a perfectly profitable factory. The Minister will know also of the national boycott of Campbell Soups and Fray Bentos products. Will he join me in expressing the view that Safeway, Sainsbury and Tesco have a solution to the affair? If they say in the marketplace, to Campbell Soups, that enough is enough, it will be forced to reverse its decision.

**Mr. Willetts:** The hon. Gentleman's clarity and consistency on this matter is in striking contrast to the behaviour of Labour Members on most policy issues. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, however, there was not a qualifying merger under fair trading legislation. There is, therefore, no basis on which the Government have any powers to intervene in what was a straightforward commercial decision.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

### Aid Budget

26. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the size of the overseas aid budget in 1996-97. [10007]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley):** We always receive a large number of representations from hon. Members and the general public, and this year is no exception.

**Mr. Evans:** I have received many letters from my constituents in Ribble Valley about the overseas aid budget, which I have passed on to my right hon. Friend. Does he believe that the interest shown by my constituents and those of other hon. Members reflects the interest that the British people wish to see the Government demonstrating in maintaining a high level of spending within the overseas aid programme while ensuring that every pound of that money is spent effectively so that we can be proud of our overseas aid programme?

**Mr. Hanley:** My hon. Friend is right. Britain's aid programme is the fifth largest in the world. It is one of the most effective of all the official programmes. The Government are committed to maintaining a large and effective aid programme with the aim of reducing poverty and creating a more prosperous and stable world. I believe that the United Kingdom people join us in that.

**Mr. Foulkes:** The fundamental expenditure review does not square with the Minister's description. "Narrow focus" is a smokescreen for cuts. It is no good repeating parrot fashion that we are fifth in the list of donors when we have fallen to 13th place in the real terms of gross national product.

What response does the Minister expect from countries in central and southern America, in the Caribbean and in the Pacific, and especially Commonwealth countries, which will receive no aid from Britain under the fundamental expenditure review? The review is a betrayal of those countries. The Prime Minister said that we would maintain an aid programme of which we could be proud. We must be ashamed of the present policy.

**Mr. Hanley:** As usual, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The fundamental expenditure review contained the recommendation of concentration of effort in priority countries, continuing a process of focus already under way. There will be no radical change and we shall not neglect traditional partners. In 1994-95, 70 per cent. of our bilateral programme concentrated on the 20 largest recipients. We currently give aid to 160 countries.

There is no doubt that the bilateral programme will face reductions during the survey period—we have admitted that—as we switch to multilateral aid. The FER is not in the slightest the slashing of budgets that the hon. Gentleman says that it is. If he wants to know about the slashing of budgets, let me tell him that Italy's expenditure on aid fell by 36 per cent. last year, Canada reduced its aid by 20.5 per cent., and the United States provides only 0.15 per cent. of its gross national product as aid. Perhaps those are the sort of programmes that the hon. Gentleman is talking about. We are proud of our aid. We are, and will remain, the fifth biggest donor.

**Mr. Key:** I warmly welcome the fundamental expenditure review, as we shall have to make difficult choices in the coming years. I am in no doubt that the quality of our aid programme is the finest in the world, but will my right hon. Friend explain how we shall fit into a new relationship with the European Union's aid programme, which is of inferior quality and dilutes our traditional aid effort into parts of the world with which we have precious little in common?

**Mr. Hanley:** I understand what my hon. Friend says. The FER's conclusions are only recommendations, and we are considering how policies should be changed to respond to them. The FER has confirmed the basic rationale and thrust of the aid programme, the continuing need for concessional aid, and the desirability of the Overseas Development Administration to continue to have responsibility for all aid in the ODA. I am very proud indeed that more of our officials from the ODA are helping out in the European Commission to ensure that the multilateral aid that is given by Europe is given effectively and efficiently, as our bilateral programme is.

### Rwanda

27. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department is currently giving to the Government of Rwanda. [10008]

**Mr. Hanley:** Since January 1995, Britain has committed £11 million bilaterally and £8.5 million as our share of multilateral aid in support of the Rwandan Government's programme of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

**Mr. Ainger:** Is the Minister aware that more than 55,000 people—some of them children—are in prison in

Rwanda awaiting trial on charges of genocide? Is he aware that aid agencies and the United Nations now consider the primary priority to be to get the judiciary functioning in Rwanda so that we can reconstruct and rehabilitate the whole of its society? Is he further aware that the Minister of Justice in Rwanda requested, more than three months ago, that the international community provide some 678 judicial personnel—303 judges, 300 prosecutors and 75 police officers—so that they can begin to process the 55,000-plus prisoners? How have the Government responded to that request?

**Mr. Hanley:** The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there is a tremendous job to be done in Rwanda. We have seen, in the weekend newspapers, further stories of atrocities, and the war crimes tribunal has been set up to try to deal with the matter. We understand that it now has sufficient funding for start-up costs, pending approval of a budget by the UN General Assembly. The United Kingdom has seconded three police officers to work for the prosecutor's office, and we have pledged £200,000 towards that and other costs. Trials are expected shortly. The judicial procedure will inevitably take some time if the trials are to be fair and thorough. The prosecutor will decide whom to try. It is likely that the tribunal will prosecute the ringleaders, while the Government of Rwanda will deal with the remaining suspects.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating those who have worked so hard in Rwanda and other parts of central and eastern Africa on water aid? Is he aware that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said that our aid is the most effective of its kind in Europe? Is it not a case of, "It's not the size of it that counts; it's what you do with it"?

**Mr. Hanley:** Indeed. I agree with my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right about the need for good water; it is essential. The House might be interested to know that we recently sent our first-ever British ambassador to Rwanda. She took up her duties in Kigali in December and is also accredited to Burundi. I believe that that is a sign of our support for the Rwandan Government's efforts to promote reconciliation and rehabilitation, and to remain closely engaged in the problems of the Great Lakes region.

### Central America

28. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what examination he has made of the effects of structural adjustment programmes on the economies of central America and the role of the British aid programme. [10009]

**Mr. Hanley:** We regularly examine the effects of structural adjustment programmes in different regions, both in consultation with the World bank and independently. In central America and elsewhere, they are laying the basis for sustainable economic growth, a prerequisite for poverty alleviation.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Is the Minister aware that the fundamental expenditure review undertaken by his Department seems to give automatic support to structural adjustment programmes advanced by the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, and that structural adjustment programmes throughout central America, in the wake of the end of the civil wars, are unbelievably destructive of human life? They are reducing life expectancy, increasing poverty and malnutrition and leading to considerable social discord and unrest. Is it not time to abandon the nonsense of such programmes, and to plan for the social needs of people in those countries rather than imposing market economics on them?

Two thirds of the population of Nicaragua, for instance, are now living in serious poverty, and unemployment has more than doubled in the past three years. Does the Minister think that structural adjustment programmes have something to answer for in relation to those terrible figures?

**Mr. Hanley:** Sound economic policies are a key prerequisite for sustainable growth and poverty reduction, and adjustment programmes are designed to help developing countries to implement policy reforms in order to restore growth and strengthen institutions. The evidence from successive reviews shows that effective reform programmes are associated with reduced poverty, and inadequate programmes with worsening poverty. The ODA recognises the need to consider the social impact of adjustment programmes on the poor—indeed, we do consider it—and the World bank is working to improve the collection of information, and to improve policies for reducing poverty. The ODA has supported that work by seconding two consecutive social development advisers to the World bank since 1990. Let me repeat that sound economic policies are the key prerequisite for sustainable growth and poverty reduction.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Are not the structural adjustment programmes allowing the countries concerned to return to proper economies? Combined with the overseas aid programmes involving investment in projects, would that not allow people to earn a living and self-respect, rather than having to rely on the begging bowl that seems to be the only alternative proposed by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)?

**Mr. Hanley:** My hon. Friend is, perhaps, the most knowledgeable of hon. Members in regard to the region that we are discussing, and he is absolutely right.

### Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda

29. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much British international aid was provided in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda in (a) 1994-95 and (b) 1995-96. [10010]

**Mr. Hanley:** In 1994-95, we provided the three countries combined with well over £100 million under our bilateral aid programme. In addition to that is our share of multilateral aid, which in 1993—the last year for which figures are available—was £48 million. The figures for 1995-96, for which the hon. Gentleman asked, are likely to be similar, but we do not have them at present.

**Mr. Griffiths:** In the light of developments in Uganda and Tanzania in particular, is the Minister prepared to increase the amount of aid? Both countries are making efforts to transform their economies. Will the Minister

also put pressure on the Kenyan Government to reintroduce human rights, so that we can continue to help people in that country as well?

**Mr. Hanley:** The hon. Gentleman speaks for many hon. Members. Of course, we shall spend what money we can afford. My noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is in Tanzania today for discussions with the new Government, and will shortly report on what she finds there. We welcome the Tanzanian Government's intentions to enter a new phase of economic reform and to deal with corruption, but it is important for those good intentions to be instituted into action to restore donor and investor confidence.

I entirely agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about Kenya. Our project assistance focuses strongly on support for economic and financial reform, and programme aid will also be available if that reform proceeds. There has also been an energetic economic reform programme for Uganda, which has achieved significant economic growth as a result—over 5 per cent. per annum since 1987, and an estimated 10 per cent. last year.

**Sir John Stanley:** Will good government considerations form part of the Government's view as to the appropriate overseas aid level for the three countries concerned?

**Mr. Hanley:** Yes, I can confirm that they will.

## China

30. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department has given to China to improve provision for orphanages. [10011]

**Mr. Hanley:** We have provided support to the Save the Children Fund for a project in Anhui aimed at extending and refurbishing a kindergarten for both able and mentally and physically disabled children, and to Health Unlimited for a training programme for mother and child health workers. Total funds committed are around £250,000. We also contribute to UNICEF—the United Nations Children's Fund—which has just announced a programme to assist the orphanages that are most at risk.

**Mr. O'Brien:** I welcome the contributions, such as they are, but they are just not enough, are they? Does the Minister recall the television images of the children tied to stools—some of them left to die—in Chinese orphanages? Does he agree with my constituents and me that those merit the strongest representations to the Chinese Government, that those conditions are intolerable in any society—any civilised one at least—and that the British Government will expect the Chinese Government to prevent such images from ever appearing on our television screens or in any orphanage in China again, and will continue to monitor the position?

**Mr. Hanley:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I saw the television programme and was disturbed by it. The "Human Rights Watch" report of ill-treatment of abandoned children in China contained serious allegations. The Channel 4 programme also presented a profoundly disturbing picture. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary was in Peking earlier this month, he strongly urged the Chinese authorities to investigate those allegations fully and quickly. The Chinese Foreign Minister told him that those reports were untrue and the Foreign Secretary encouraged the Chinese Government to do everything possible to demonstrate that, including providing full access to the public. That has begun to happen.

Even at Chongming, which was previously not open to the public, European Union diplomats have had access within the past few days. I also welcome the willingness of the Chinese authorities to allow further visits to any of the institutions in Shanghai, and their offer to provide further data. Obviously, however, it was difficult to form a complete picture during the short pre-arranged visit. The EU diplomats reported no evidence of systematic ill-treatment or abuse at that institution but we will, of course, continue to urge full access by Chinese and foreigners alike to those institutions. It is the only way to ensure that those terrible scenes do not continue.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** I welcome the assistance of my right hon. Friend's Department to the charitable endeavours in Chinese orphanages, but will he use the good offices of his Department to persuade the People's Republic of China not to waste money on naval expansion programmes, a nuclear missile armoury and, above all, repression in Tibet, and to concentrate on putting its own house in order, in particular by offering a reasonable standard of living, especially for orphaned children?

**Mr. Hanley:** My hon. Friend is right. At least 100 million people still live in abject poverty in China. It is right that it should recognise that the world is watching. If it wishes to play a full part in the modern world in the years to come, it must demonstrate that it can look after its own people properly. The issues to which my hon. Friend referred affect us all. After all, we are deeply concerned about reports of abuses of human rights in Tibet. There is destruction of historic buildings, the immigration of the Han Chinese, arbitrary security measures and environmental damage. We raise those issues with the Chinese authorities: the last time the Chinese Foreign Minister came to England, I was part of the delegation that raised them with him, as I do with the ambassador regularly and as the Foreign Secretary did with the Chinese Foreign Minister on 9 January.

## Sri Lanka

31. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements currently exist for the delivery of aid to the northern regions of Sri Lanka. [10012]

**Mr. Hanley:** Aid is being provided through the Sri Lankan Government, international organisations and non-governmental organisations. Over and above our regular support for rehabilitation in the north, we have recently provided an additional £350,000 for programmes run by the International Committee of the Red Cross and by Christian Action, Research and Education; and an additional £690,000 for Oxfam. We also contributed £350,000 through the European Union.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I am sure that the Minister acknowledges that there is enormous need in the north,

following the fighting towards the end of last year when several hundred thousand people were driven from their homes. Do the Government of Sri Lanka still insist that all aid to the north is delivered through them and their agencies, or are they now allowing agencies such as the UN to deliver directly to the north? Plainly, many people in the north will be extremely suspicious of the practice of all aid having to go through the Government.

**Mr. Hanley:** Yes, I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. I can confirm that, for instance, the ICRC is taking provisions, both medical aid and food aid, by ship to the north. I was at Vavuniya, which is not far from Jaffna, just a few months ago and I saw the main road along which aid is taken. I understand that the Government of Sri Lanka now believe that sufficient aid and medical supplies are getting through to the north. I took this opportunity to plead with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to meet the Sri Lankan Government to discuss their plan for autonomy within Sri Lanka. Only by discussion can permanent peace be brought to that otherwise beautiful island, which has been so scarred in recent years.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

### Investments

36. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what new proposals the commissioners have to improve the ethical content of their investment. [10017]

**Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners):** The commissioners' investments, as I told the hon. Gentleman when he last raised the subject a few weeks ago, have always been subject to ethical criteria and are continuously reviewed. The ethical working group set up in October 1994 plays an important part in keeping under review the ethical investment policy of the Church Commissioners and of the Church's two other main investing bodies, the Central Board of Finance and the Church of England pensions board.

**Mr. Flynn:** The commissioners deserve the congratulations of the House on the decision that they were reported to have taken in November when they sold 2 million shares in BSkyB because of its investment in a pornographic television channel. When will the commissioners deal with their investment in another, more dangerous, obscenity—the international arms trade? It was reported recently that they had nearly 3 million shares in GEC. A quarter of that firm's production is for the arms trade and it has been reported that the commissioners have discussed with it its exports to Indonesia and Nigeria. Did such a meeting take place and, if so, what was the outcome?

**Mr. Alison:** The hon. Gentleman's question covers a wide spectrum. We are investors in GEC, whose armaments portfolio is held to be less than 30 per cent., which is just about the cut-off point for our ethical application. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the five permanent members of the Security Council have reaffirmed, and continue to reaffirm, the inherent right to individual or collective self-defence that is recognised in article 51 of the United Nations charter, which implies that states have the right to acquire the means for legitimate self-defence. Nevertheless, the Church of England does not invest in companies whose main business is armaments. It has to be less than 30 per cent.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** Does the Church intend to increase its investment in inner cities? Is its view that the Government should do the same?

**Mr. Alison:** The Church urban fund, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, is a very important but, nevertheless, by statute a subordinate part of the claims on the income of the Church of England. Although we shall do everything possible to sustain our cash flow into the Church urban fund, pensions and stipends of clergy and their dependants must remain statutorily the overriding priority. Incidentally, I am glad to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that the capital value of our total assets has risen to £2.6 billion from £2.1 billion or less 10 years ago.

### Cyclists

37. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is his policy in respect of charging cyclists for the use of Church Commission land. [10018]

**Mr. Alison:** The Church Commissioners make no charge for cyclists using legal rights of way across their land.

**Mr. Steen:** Is the reason why the Church Commissioners are refusing to allow the completion of the Totnes to Buckfastleigh cycle route that they can get more revenue from fishermen fishing in the River Dart than they could possibly get from cyclists going across Church Commissioners' land? If that is the case, would not one of the best ways to reduce the £800 million loss that resulted from the property collapse, and the property speculation, in the 1990s be to charge cyclists a toll as they cycle across Church Commissioners' land?

**Mr. Alison:** My hon. Friend is quite right to pinpoint the importance of fishing rights as a source of income to this essential charitable fund, whose beneficiaries, I remind him, are clergy and their dependants. In relation to that particular stretch of territory in his constituency, I doubt whether the toll that we could levy on cyclists passing that delectable spot would be payable by them or that they would agree to pay it if it were set at a level that would raise the same amount of money that we receive from letting the fishing rights. I am afraid that cyclists might bash through and we would have very little power or control to prevent them from doing so in trying to levy a toll.

## Points of Order

3.30 pm

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for not having given you the usual notice of this point of order, but frankly it is one of the problems of the peripatetic Scottish Grand Committee, which was in Stirling this morning.

It may be within your recollection that, at column 483 in business questions on Thursday, the Leader of the House said that the President of France was laying it open for experts to monitor French nuclear testing. Has there been any statement, or request for a statement, from any Minister, given particularly the urgent responsibilities that we have in this House towards the Pitcairn islanders, the nearest community to Mururoa where the testing is taking place? Do not the widely reported leaks of iodine 131, strontium 90 and caesium 137 show that France's statements that the rocks would in no way leak are false? In those circumstances, should not a Minister make a statement?

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Is it on the same point?

**Mr. Skinner:** Yes, it is. It is very disturbing that there have now been six French nuclear tests. If you recall, Madam Speaker, I asked you on a point of order on the occasion of the first test whether it was possible to have a debate or a statement on the issue. You very kindly allowed myself and others to take part in an Adjournment debate the following week.

Despite the fact that there have been six tests, the Government have never made a statement on the matter. This must be one of the very few Parliaments in the world that has not heard a proper statement from the Government on the matter. I wonder whether, through any office whatever, we can be assured that at some stage the Government will be accountable for their very strong support of Chirac.

**Madam Speaker:** I know that both hon. Gentlemen are aware that I cannot give any guarantee that a statement on this issue will be made by the Government. Of course I understand the concern about the matter, which, as was rightly said, has been previously raised with me. Indeed, we have had a Adjournment debate on it. It seems that hon. Members have raised a matter of concern to them, not so much a point of order for the Chair. As the House knows, I deal with procedure. There is no doubt that Members sitting on the Treasury Bench will have heard what has been said and the concern expressed, and will report back to the appropriate authorities.

**Ms Liz Lynne** (Rochdale): I tabled a question to the Deputy Prime Minister, which was accepted on to the Order Paper. I was then told that the question was to be transferred, even though it dealt with Government policy and the sharing of information between Departments. I should be grateful for some guidance on which questions the Deputy Prime Minister answers.

**Madam Speaker:** I am sure that the hon. Lady knows that the transfer of questions is entirely a matter for Ministers, not for the Clerks in the Table Office or for me. Ministers determine whether questions remain with them or are transferred to another Department.

# Orders of the Day

## Housing Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Speaker:** Before I call the Secretary of State, I must announce that speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm will have to be limited to 10 minutes.

3.35 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

When we published our housing White Paper last summer, we made clear our continuing commitment to a decent home for every family. We said that we remained committed to meeting that objective in the face of the social and economic changes and the environmental concerns that place new and increasing demands on government.

The Housing Bill extends opportunity. It will mean that more housing association tenants will have the opportunity to buy their own homes, that leaseholders will have stronger and more accessible protection, and that council tenants will have the opportunity to vote for new types of social landlords, who can bring in private money to improve their estates.

Conservative Members have shown that housing issues can be approached with imagination. We have not simply fallen back on the tired old policies of building municipal estates: "Never mind the quality; measure the quantity; count the cost". The Conservative party brought in the right to buy—1.3 million households in England wanted that right, and took the opportunity that was given to them. Each day, 200 households go on wanting that right. The Labour party voted against that opportunity.

We are also the party that brought in private finance alongside public money to improve our council estates. We brought in competition to provide housing, with housing associations competing to provide it at the best price. That means better housing at a cheaper price, and more of it than would otherwise have been the case. We brought in new rights for tenants, and gave them a greater say in how their estates are run.

The Labour party says that it wants those things, but it voted solidly against every one of them. It says one thing and does another.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford): I agree with absolutely everything that my right hon. Friend said about our housing policy, but I should like to press him on one point, which I may have missed. In the housing White Paper, we proposed to legislate to allow profit-making companies and other bodies to compete for the grants available to those in social housing. Will my right hon. Friend explain whether that is in the Bill, or whether we are planning to introduce it later?

**Mr. Gummer:** We have said that the needs of leaseholders are more important in the immediate term, and we have to deal with them. We are therefore producing a separate Bill that covers that issue, which I hope will soon be introduced. There is no question of dropping it. However, decisions on leasehold problems, particularly in London and the south coast resorts, are so serious that they should be taken immediately. That is therefore covered in the Bill.

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall come back to the hon. Gentleman, because I have one or two things to say to him in particular.

We published our White Paper last summer and have now introduced the Bill. The Opposition, of course, did not publish their own policy document, despite the many promises that they would do so, and that it would be bigger, better and certainly more expensive than ours. They leaked ours in order to pretend that they had one. When they were pressed about it at the Housing Corporation conference in February 1995—I stress that date—the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) said:

"A new approach is called for and over the next few months Frank Dobson and I will be working up detailed housing policy proposals which the Labour party will be publishing later this"—

that is, last—

"year."

We are less than three weeks away from the anniversary of that statement. When will we get Labour's housing policy? Why has it taken so long? Has the hon. Member for Greenwich been unable to get the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) to understand it? Has the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras—having taken some time to understand the policy—not been able to get his Treasury team to agree to it?

Or is it merely that Labour does not have a clue as to what it would do if anybody was ever silly enough to ask it to take charge? Does Labour want to stick with saying and never doing? The hon. Member for Greenwich said that he was going to produce a policy in a few months. That was good enough to allow him to get away with it in front of an audience, but it is not good enough for the people of Britain who want to know what Labour would do.

I have taken some time to look at the one piece of Labour policy that I have discovered so far—that, somehow or other, Labour would release the accumulated receipts so that they could be spent. That is the one thing that Labour has said, but it has not explained until recently what that would mean. It would mean not that a Labour Government would allow councils to spend their receipts, but that some councils would be allowed to spend other councils' receipts.

We have now discovered that, carefully hidden in Labour's policy, is a proposal that the arrangement of phasing would mean that the Labour council in the Wyre, for example, would be asked to spend its receipts in, let us say, Gateshead. So when a council leader says, "We will release the receipts," he thinks that the receipts will be released for the people of the Wyre, Bracknell Forest, Dacorum or any of the other places that are temporarily in Labour control. That is what the councils think, but Labour would actually give permission for those receipts to be spent somewhere else.

Labour's policy has been rumbled. *Inside Housing*, a newspaper not entirely in favour of the Conservative cause, asked what would happen to the interest that is now

*[Mr. Gummer]*

going to the local authority that has the receipts when those receipts are spent. The newspaper said that, if there were a Labour Government, councils could refuse to use billions of pounds of capital receipts unless they got an extra subsidy from the Labour Government to pay for the interest they were losing.

Hidden in the only bit of Labour policy that works in the minds of the public is the fact that it would, in absolute truth, hold back receipts from councils to make sure that it could subsidise the spendthrift by nationalising the receipts of those councils which have done their job properly.

**Mr. Frank Dobson** (Holborn and St. Pancras): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept—as he must, since he has no evidence to the contrary—that everything he has said in the past five minutes is absolutely untrue, and that he has made it all up?

**Mr. Gummer:** No. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that Labour would not allow the leafy suburbs to spend the money, because that would be the only way in which it would be able to provide the extra money for the councils to which it wants to give money. That is precisely what Labour intends to do. The housing press has revealed precisely what Labour did not want to be admitted or publicised. It is no wonder that the hon. Gentleman was so quick on to his feet—he knows that he has been rumbled.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I hope that we can get on to the Second Reading of this Bill.

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): My question was exactly that, Madam Speaker. Can the Secretary of State answer three simple questions? Will the Bill mean any significant increase in the number of houses for rent; will it mean any significant reduction in the rents of people in housing association properties, as those associations are losing their grant by a greater amount every year; and will it mean any relief for those who have bought their properties from local authorities, particularly in council tower blocks, and who face maintenance, service and capital charges of up to £28,000, which some of them cannot afford?

**Mr. Gummer:** The first question is dealt with in the Finance Bill, as the hon. Gentleman knows. The second is not part of this Bill, because it is part of others, and the third is one of the issues that we have already taken into account and on which we have taken action.

One of the key arguments about the Bill is that an alternative way exists, which is related centrally to capital receipts. That is why it is crucial for us to deal with that issue at the beginning, and it is why I gave way to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I wanted to have the opportunity to tell the House what his party said about his policy. He has said:

"Liberal Democrats have no ideological attachment to public or private housing."

That means, according to the party's Whips Office, that the Liberal Democrats' weaknesses are as follows, first,

"we haven't got a particularly strong or new line on housing."

Secondly, it states:

"our intention to phase out MIRAS will cripple mortgage payers and exacerbate negative equity"—

the very point that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey had the cheek to question me on a moment ago. So the Liberal Democrats admit that their policy would make the present situation worse.

Lastly, the Liberal Whips state:

"our policy on helping home owners suffering from negative equity"—

which is what the hon. Gentleman asked about—

"is expensive and ill-thought out".

That is what the Liberal party says about its policy, and I must thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the chance to mention it, in case he did not have the opportunity to do so.

**Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** In one moment.

The Government are facing up to the real issues. We are asking the hard questions, and giving the tough answers that need to be given. We are facing the challenge to set up fair systems that help those who need it most, concentrating our resources effectively, and helping those who can house themselves to do so affordably. We are giving them rights and responsibilities.

To ensure that that will continue, we are introducing a second Bill, which will include measures to improve construction contracts and reform renovation grants. That Bill will be widely welcomed.

**Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock) *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** Before I give way, I want to explain what I want to do in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. We need to ensure that we have a fair way of allocating the housing we have for social purposes. We want not several queues but one waiting list, with people judged according to their need. That is what the system is meant to do.

Some people have temporary needs, and others long-term needs. The allocation of long-term social housing should depend on long-term needs, and not merely on people's short-term needs. People on the waiting lists for council and housing association housing need to know that they are being treated fairly.

At the moment there is a problem. Some people who need housing are in the right category, and others are not but are in greater need. All the Bill does is to ensure that people are judged according to their needs. To each according to his need—or is that another philosophy that the Labour party has thrown out? That is what the Bill is intended to do, as any sane person would recognise.

**Ms Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate) *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I will give way first to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), as he rose first.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** When the Secretary of State has finished his swashbuckling fun of knocking the Labour

and Liberal parties, will he address the criticism made by the Roman Catholic bishops of England and Wales, who have referred to the Bill as "ill-timed", and drawn hon. Members' attention to our Christian obligation to have regard for families and the disadvantaged? The bishops regard the Bill, especially part VII, as repugnant. What does he have to say to those caring people with a pastoral role, who have no political axe to grind, who consider the Bill to be unacceptable and uncaring?

**Mr. Gummer:** I would point to the guidance notes that were produced last Thursday. They said that the categories to which the Roman Catholic bishops drew attention are the very categories that will be at the top of the list for the measurements of need. We have met every single criticism that the bishops put forward. The only thing that was ill-timed was the fact that they did not wait for the guidance notes so that they could see that what they had feared was untrue. Those who misled the bishops had better explain to them why they did so.

We particularly included a provision that concern should be taken for married couples who have waited to have children because the conditions in which they lived were unsuitable for having them. I am sure that His Eminence and the Roman Catholic archbishops and bishops will be pleased at that attitude which, for the first time, is expressed in our documentation.

The Bill provides for a single waiting list route into social housing, but with the first priority for the most vulnerable.

**Mrs. Diana Maddock** (Christchurch): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I ought to get on a little further, but I shall come back to the hon. Lady because I am always willing to hear from the Liberal party, given what it has said about its own housing policy.

At the same time that we bring up to date the criteria for the allocation of long-term social housing, we are keeping an effective safety net for homeless households. Families and vulnerable people who are unintentionally homeless would be given a minimum of one year's accommodation, with further help where needed. In many areas, one year will be more than enough for a household with real needs to get permanent accommodation allocated through the waiting list, but it is much more sensible to give people immediate help—the help that is available—and then try to assess what the best help is in the circumstances of those people. Any sane person would accept that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall give way to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), because she rose first.

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** How can the Bill, which will create a longer waiting list, deal with the basic need, which is the gross lack of decent, affordable housing? Will the Minister define what an "unreal need" is for a family without a home?

**Mr. Gummer:** A family without a home gets a greater advantage if its homelessness is statutory and categorisable than does a family with appalling accommodation, which is in a much worse position. The second family would not get a home. The first family gets a home first simply because it is in the right category. I am merely saying that we should judge cases by need.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate says that we have a longer waiting list; that is not true. We have a waiting list based upon the principle of need instead of one based upon those who are lucky enough, if that is the right word, to be in the right category. Such families always beat others, who may be in worse conditions, on local authority housing waiting lists. If she would leave her doctrine aside and look at the facts of need, she would find that what we say is right. She will never oppose the system once it is in operation, because she will see that it works properly.

**Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe): At present, a family with priority need, which will often be a family with children, is entitled to rehousing as a homeless family. Such families still have the great trauma of having to move home, and, especially, of their children having to change schools, but will the Secretary of State confirm that, under the new legislation, they would have to move once to temporary accommodation, and, with no choice at all, have to move home for a second time within 12 months? Will he confirm that that will not only cause housing disruption but education, social and every other sort of disruption?

**Mr. Gummer:** That is not true. If a family was in the circumstances described by the hon. Gentleman, it could be moved directly into permanent accommodation. The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. As always, he has been reading his own propaganda, not the statements of the Government.

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Southend, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that all local authorities should be obliged to provide the temporary accommodation required within their own area? Will he bear in mind problems experienced in places like Southend-on-Sea, where for many years other authorities have had the habit of putting their homeless families into temporary accommodation, making Southend's problems worse?

**Mr. Gummer:** Under the Bill, local authorities will be able to refer people to their local authority of origin, which is one of the issues that my hon. Friend is concerned about. I hope that he agrees that, if we are to deal with need, we must ensure that people get the accommodation they need.

While some people find that decision difficult to make right at the beginning, others have acute immediate needs that may not continue for long. Still others have an immediate need for permanent accommodation, which is clear to their local authority. As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) would wish, such people can be accorded that permanent accommodation. We must be concerned for homeless people, not for some theory of homelessness put forward by the Opposition.

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) asked me to give way, and I promised

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that she would be next. I wish to proceed with a couple more paragraphs of my speech, after which the hon. Gentleman will have plenty of time to intervene.

Our consultation paper on allocations, published last Thursday, shows our intention to have a fair system that encourages local authorities to stand back and ask who really needs long-term housing, who really needs short-term help, and how they can use existing housing to the best advantage. They can therefore meet the requirement of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate. A better use of housing enables more people to be decently housed, which is an important part of what we seek to do.

**Mr. Dobson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall give way to the hon. Member for Christchurch in a moment, and then come back to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Dobson:** The Secretary of State misled the House.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Did the hon. Gentleman say that the Secretary of State had misled the House? No Minister or Back Bencher misleads the House. Will he withdraw that remark, so that we may proceed with the debate?

**Mr. Dobson:** I withdraw the remark, Madam Speaker, but it would appear that what the Secretary of State said is at variance with the Bill.

**Madam Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that, at some stage, the Secretary of State will allow him to intervene. Am I to understand that the Secretary of State is allowing the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) to intervene?

**Mr. Gummer:** Yes.

**Mrs. Maddock:** Will the Secretary of State explain his thinking on regulations? Like me, many hon. Members object to Ministers having the power to put measures into practice through regulations. We saw what happened in the case of the Child Support Agency. I do not expect an overnight change, but should not the Bill at least show the criteria that the Secretary of State will use?

Why is the consultation paper going out when we are about to discuss the Bill in Committee? We will not have responses on some of the matters that we are supposed to discuss in Committee.

**Mr. Gummer:** I am concerned that everything should be properly discussed. If the hon. Lady wants better and further particulars on anything, I should be pleased to provide them. That is why I published before Second Reading the proposed criteria in the form of guidance, which we are discussing with local authorities. There is therefore no difference between us on wishing to obtain as much information as possible.

May I say to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras that I enjoy having a rough and tough discussion, but I do not wish to mislead the House. Let me therefore go through precisely what I was asked. If a local authority has a homeless family, with no roof over its head and in real difficulty, it can move it into any accommodation available. There is no question of children having to change schools, because it will be perfectly possible for the local authority to find the right accommodation and move the family into it permanently in the shortest possible time.

**Mr. Dobson:** I do not suggest for a moment that the right hon. Gentleman is trying to mislead the House, but what he has just said appears to be at variance with clause 161, which says:

"A local housing authority shall not perform any such duty . . . by providing accommodation"—

for homeless people—

"other than—

(a) accommodation in a hostel . . . or

(b) accommodation leased to the authority"—

again, that would be temporary accommodation—

"for more than two years".

**Mr. Gummer:** The fact is that we are talking about a particular example of someone who is in desperate need. The hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras tried to suggest that people in desperate need of housing would not receive permanent accommodation, but would be stuck in temporary accommodation.

I say quite clearly that, as soon as that need is discovered, the local authority will provide permanent accommodation if it is available. That is precisely what is occurring. The hon. Gentleman does not understand the situation, and he has not read the legislation properly. *[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) may laugh, but the Labour party has no policy with which to respond. Although the hon. Lady is new to the Opposition Front Bench, she must know that the issue is clear: accommodation will be available immediately for people with no roof over their heads, if they are suitable applicants for permanent accommodation and they reach the top of the waiting list in that sense. They will receive accommodation because their need is greater than that of someone else.

The House now sees what Labour's policy would mean: if a family was on top of the waiting list but it was less needy than another family on that list, it would be housed before the family in greater need. We now see what Labour Members believe in: if people are in the correct category, they will receive housing, and people in need will not receive housing.

We believe that families in need should be moved into permanent accommodation as rapidly as possible. That is surely the right way to go. The Labour party is wrong, because it wants to allocate housing according to category and not according to people's needs. It does not care about people's needs; it simply wants people to be in the correct category. The Labour party is not prepared to provide even temporary accommodation to those who are in immediate need, because it wants to stick to categories. That is why the Labour party is wrong.

**Mr. Roy Thomason** (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I must proceed, but I shall return to my hon. Friend in a moment.

The hon. Member for North-West Durham has got it wrong; she wants to stick to categories—no doubt that is another example of the "stakeholder" concept. The Bill allows us to house people according to their need, which must be the right way to go.

I now turn to the question whether council tenants should have the same landlord, regardless of whether that is what they want. We believe that the Bill should allow council tenants to choose new landlords who can unlock the capital that is tied up in council houses and inject private investment, along with public money, in order to improve housing. The new landlords, such as local housing companies, will be not-for-profit bodies regulated by the Housing Corporation. They will be backed by an estates renewal challenge fund worth some £314 million over the next three years. That money will be used to improve many bad estates, if the council tenants choose to have a new landlord. They will make that choice; it will not be imposed upon them.

I want to know whether the Labour party will support that measure. It seems a very good way of unlocking capital, which would otherwise not be available, in order to improve those estates.

**Mr. Pike:** Does that not contradict what the Secretary of State said a few moments ago, as it does not necessarily mean that those houses most in need of improvement will receive the money for that work?

**Mr. Gummer:** That has nothing to do with the allocations. I am talking about bad, rundown council estates which will be able to raise their standards of housing. Is the hon. Member saying that we should not raise the standards of the worst council estates—which are so bad largely because they have been controlled by Labour authorities which have allowed them to run down, year in, year out, for party political purposes in many cases? There is also the question of extending the measure.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No: I shall continue my remarks so that the hon. Gentleman may listen and learn about the additional opportunities that the Bill will provide for the public.

The Bill provides a further opportunity to offer people a real choice between renting and ownership. It will give purchase grants to those who live in housing association accommodation, so that they will have the right to buy. It will be a valuable extension of opportunity and people's right to own.

I shall be looking very carefully to see whether the Opposition are in favour of extending the right to buy in that way, or whether they refuse it. That will tell us whether they really believe in the right to buy, or whether they merely accept it as convenient for electoral purposes. So far, they have voted against every extension of the right to buy. They do not want people to own; they want them to be governed by the tenancy clauses of local authority housing.

The only area in which we consider it better for people not to have the right to buy is the small village, where alternative accommodation is difficult to find. People have often given the land and been granted special planning permission. As we want land to be offered, we feel that that is the right course of action.

**Mrs. Maddock:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No, I have already given way to the hon. Lady.

Some freeholders use their powers in a wholly unacceptable way and abuse their responsibilities. Many Members have material that shows that to be categorical.

I have here a document that I shall certainly place in the Library of the House. It was produced by a management company seeking to frighten leaseholders out of their rights. That is wholly unacceptable, and I do not believe that we should allow it to continue. That is why I have found room in the Bill to address such behaviour, although it meant displacing a matter that my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I look forward to bringing before the House.

**Mr. David Ashby** (North-West Leicestershire): Has my right hon. Friend considered also the scam used by freeholders who charge long leaseholders exorbitant insurance premiums and take the commission on those insurances? Will he accept any changes to the Bill to prevent that being taken into account when the value of the freehold is assessed?

**Mr. Gummer:** It is important that we look carefully at any suggestions on that complicated matter. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the arrangements in the Bill will cover the issue he raises, but if he thinks that we can do better, I am certainly prepared to listen to him.

**Mr. Matthew Carrington** (Fulham): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. The amendments to the Bill that he has promised will be extremely welcome to leaseholders in London, particularly those who are suffering badly from the depredations of rogue landlords. One of their greatest problems is the exorbitant cost of enforcing their rights against their freeholders. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that any amendments to the Bill are easily and cheaply enforceable, and that the present rights of leaseholders under the leasehold reform legislation are also cheaper to uphold?

**Mr. Gummer:** I thank my hon. Friend for that. I have suggested that we discuss and consult on our proposal that those matters could be taken out of the hands of the courts and brought before the tribunal. It would be cheaper and easier, and would enable the chairman of the tribunal, who is often a professionally qualified valuer, to use his professional ability—which a judge cannot do. That would help considerably, and I hope that consultation will show it to be the generally accepted view.

Most freeholders behave in a perfectly honourable manner. I am concerned about freeholders such as Bebington and Associates, who write threatening letters. I would also mention the solicitors who support them, and the professional people who claim that their behaviour should be allowed. I hope that we shall have an united view at least on this matter. Those people should not be allowed either to damage the leaseholders or to write

*[Mr. Gummer]*

down the qualities of good freeholders, many of whom do their job as it ought to be done, and who are as angry as anybody else about how certain operators have acted.

**Mr. William O'Brien** (Normanton): I have been listening carefully to the right hon. Gentleman—particularly to his remarks about need. How will he decide the categories? What advice will he give housing allocation officers in respect of people who are living in overcrowded or sub-standard conditions, or who have been on the waiting list a long time? We and the public want the answer.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman will be pleased that, last Thursday, we published the proposed guidelines, a copy of which is in the Library. They bring together all the categories in the legislation, so that the needs of each family can be considered at the same time and on the same basis. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will like that arrangement, and will have no difficulty with it. It is not for me to say which category comes before another. It is for me to say the matters that a local authority must take into account. I believe that the hon. Gentleman will find that the guidance is acceptable, and he will not need to worry about that.

One matter that divides us, and I am sorry that it does, is that Labour still wants two categories of allocation for need instead of one. Labour will not, even for the shortest possible moment, allow a homeless family to wait while the best way to provide for its need is decided. Instead of saying that that is reasonable, as most people would say, Labour always makes the sort of argument used by the hon. Member for Attercliffe—that a family of two parents and two children would have to stay in temporary accommodation, change schools and then change again. That is not so, as I told the House.

**Mr. Betts:** Why not?

**Mr. Gummer:** Because the time spent in temporary accommodation in circumstances of the extreme kind that the hon. Gentleman cited is bound to be short. If such a family comes to the top of the needs list, it will be accommodated. The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the family should be rehoused in advance of people who have more need.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** No—I want to continue.

I wish to talk about something else in which the hon. Member for Christchurch is very interested—houses in multiple occupation. We are most concerned that standards in some parts of the private rented sector need to be improved. Some of the worst conditions are found in houses in multiple occupancy—the so-called HMOs. They are typically bedsitters or bed-and-breakfast hostels. Local authorities already have powers to require safety and amenity standards to be met, but the Bill goes further. It strengthens local authority powers to register HMOs and to control conditions. If buildings are unsatisfactory, local authorities can close them down.

There are particular concerns in many seaside areas. Former hotels and guest houses have become what are sometimes called benefit hostels. Where they are badly managed or there are too many of them, that can have a serious effect. Considerable nuisance is often caused, and sometimes real danger. Such wholesale changes can alter the character of an area, and damage, for example, the tourist industry on which the area specifically depends.

I propose to bring forward amendments to strengthen the Bill's powers further. I propose to allow local authorities to close down HMOs without compensation if they are being run in a way that causes nuisance or annoyance to the neighbourhood. I propose also to allow authorities to prevent new HMOs from opening if to allow additional HMOs would be detrimental to the area. That means that we will cover the whole range of public concerns about buildings that were not meant for the purpose to which they are now being put.

**Mr. Roger Gale** (North Thanet): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and to the Prime Minister for the way in which they have listened to representations from those of us who represent seaside resorts. What my right hon. Friend has just announced will go a long way to meeting the requirements.

Will my right hon. Friend clarify one point? Until now, local authorities have sometimes found serving notice on anybody difficult, because the "anybody" is not clearly defined. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that it is clearly possible to identify, and if necessary disbar, the manager of such a property, so that it can be closed down and that person can be prevented from running one again?

**Mr. Gummer:** It will certainly be possible under the proposals to close down properties immediately without compensation. I hope that, in the discussion of how registration might work, we can cover the other aspects that my hon. Friend suggests. We need a simple and straightforward system, not one that is too complex and bureaucratic, and one that delivers the goods on safety and the other concerns that I have outlined.

**Dr. Keith Hampson** (Leeds, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that students form the single category that would be most affected by the proposals? There are huge numbers of students in big cities, and Leeds now has more than 10,000. I welcome my right hon. Friend's appreciation of the fact that, for years, many students have lived in unsafe and poorly maintained accommodation—although, of course, some landlords are fine.

There is legitimate concern that landlords might have to re-register only every five years. Can my right hon. Friend use his discretion and require more frequent registration? To cover the cost, a fee could be charged for it, as it is for an MOT licence.

**Mr. Gummer:** I am happy to consider my hon. Friend's suggestion. I am trying to achieve a balance between too complex a system which would be too unwieldy to operate, and one which is not sufficiently strong. I hope that we have got the right balance, but if my hon. Friend thinks that there are ways in which we can improve it, I shall certainly consider them.

**Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Blackpool, South): My right hon. Friend will know how welcome the proposals he has just announced will be in Blackpool and other seaside towns.

Will he instruct his officials to monitor carefully the operation of those new powers, not only in the Bill but in the further amendments?

There is concern that, in seaside resorts with Labour or Liberal Democrat or Lib-Lab authorities, councillors are reluctant to operate the powers that are already in existence. There are especial concerns, which have been expressed to me by residents' and hoteliers' associations, about the strong links between Labour councillors and some of the unscrupulous landlords. Will my right hon. Friend ask his officials to investigate?

**Mr. Gummer:** The Bill will give local authorities the powers to operate sensibly. The reason we have made the changes in the Bill on giving homes according to need is that we want local authorities to make those decisions themselves. It will be the local authority's fault if people in the categories that have been so far trumpeted abroad find themselves in temporary accommodation for a long time. It will be local authorities that will be in a position to carry out that part of the Bill.

We will monitor the situation carefully, but local authorities should be in the driving seat, and local authorities should not be deprived of the powers they now have over their receipts, as the Labour party wishes. I shall be interested to see how the Labour party will explain that.

**Mr. Clive Soley** (Hammersmith) *rose—*

**Mr. Raynsford:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No, I will give way to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), and then I will come back.

**Mr. Soley:** The Secretary of State may recall that, during the passage of the Housing Act 1988, the issues he is raising now were raised then as serious matters for concern—not least the activities of Mr. Hoogstraten. The Secretary of State will also recall that we raised the same concerns that he has mentioned today about freeholders and leaseholders. Why has it taken the Government eight years even to begin to think about acting on those matters, when they rejected our amendments at the time of the passage of the 1988 Act?

**Mr. Gummer:** The amendments were not as the hon. Gentleman put them forward. The Government are meeting present needs clearly and directly. I am pleased that there is agreement on those matters on both sides of the House. I hope that the Opposition parties will help us to get the Bill through fast, so that, first, we will be able to ensure that families in real need get their homes. Secondly, we will be able to ensure that houses in multiple occupation are covered by better legislation than at the moment. Thirdly, we shall be able to ensure that leaseholders have protection, which they do not have now. All these things can be achieved if the Labour party drops its dogmatic opposition to the Bill and supports us in what we are doing. We shall watch the Opposition and press them. We look forward to hearing what the Labour party's policy is in a few moments.

**Mr. David Atkinson** (Bournemouth, East): May I welcome the changes that my right hon. Friend has mentioned? They will be generally welcomed in Bournemouth.

How do the changes, together with the proposals in the original measure, respond to the problems being experienced by local authorities because of a lack of definition of what is a hotel, a hostel or a house in multiple occupation? Lack of definition effectively prevents local authorities from applying the controls that they already have. In responding to problems concerning HMOs, will there be a clear definition in a schedule to enable local authorities better to respond to the changes that my right hon. Friend has announced?

**Mr. Gummer:** There will be a clear definition in the Bill. It will probably appear in a schedule. It will make the position as clear as can be. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that it is not an easy area in which to introduce provisions and definitions. I have no doubt that there will be discussion in Committee.

**Dr. Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No. I must get on.

The conduct of tenants who are already in place is a matter of considerable concern. We felt that a natural approach would be, first, to ensure that local authorities that so desired would be able to grant a probationary or introductory tenancy of a year to see how the tenant settled down and how others considered that he or she had settled down. It is not an unreasonable idea.

I am sorry that the Labour-controlled Association of District Councils is opposed to that. It is a great mistake. The Labour party is supposed to be in favour of taking action. Unfortunately, is opposes the simple mechanism that we propose. It is opposed by Labour authority after authority. It will be helpful if individuals have the opportunity to see how they settle down in a new tenancy. It will be for local authorities to decide whether that is what they wish to do. I would recommend them to adopt that approach, but the decision is entirely for local authorities. I want to give them the opportunity to make a decision.

Neighbour nuisance damages many people's lives. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are aware of that from surgery experience. We are giving landlords effective powers against a minority who do not accept responsibility. We need especially to protect social tenants, who may have little choice when it comes to their neighbours. It is a real issue, especially for our older constituents.

Our proposals have been developed in consultation with local authorities. We have taken account especially of recommendations contained in the ADC's report. We have also taken on board recommendations from elsewhere. We have tried to arrive at as common a view as possible. I am sorry that a measure which I think would be important has not gained the support of the ADC.

**Mr. David Nicholson** (Taunton): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, even in an area such as Taunton, there are noise problems affecting tenants and owner-occupiers. Those problems are greatly increased in many inner cities. Those suffering from noise abuse are often afraid to complain. I know of instances in which there have been reprisals against those who have complained. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that measures are taken to

*[Mr. David Nicholson]*

preserve the secrecy or confidentiality of those who complain, so that the proposed measures may be successfully implemented?

**Mr. Gummer:** That will be, I am sure, the concern of local authorities that wish to implement the proposals. I shall give them every encouragement to take the matter on board. If my hon. Friend has any ideas on how we might extend the proposals, I should very much like to be informed of them.

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth** (Coventry, North-East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No. I must bring my remarks to an end.

The Bill is designed to extend opportunity. It is designed also to ensure that the resources available to help those in need are applied to those most in need. I say again to the Labour party that, if we are to accept—this has been the position under all Governments—that there are never enough resources to meet every need, we must decide which comes first. That has been the most contentious issue.

We have at the moment a system in which some people get to the top of the list by category, thereby overtaking those who by need should be at the top of the list. The way to overcome that is to ensure the most rapid transition for those in real need from not having a home to having a permanent home, and not to have a system whose automaticity means that one shoves down the list those who most deserve and need accommodation.

The Labour party should answer a simple question. Is it prepared to continue to allow people in lesser need to get permanent accommodation, and thereby push those in real need further down the list? That is what the Labour party proposes. That situation is wholly contrary to any proper assessment of the use of resources and to compassion for those who really need our help.

When the Labour party looks at the arrangements in the Bill and sees the powers of local authorities in association with them, it will discover that the fears that it has raised are unfounded, and that this is a sensible way forward. It is also a question of ensuring that people who can buy their homes are allowed to do so, particularly in future housing association building.

The Bill gives people the opportunity to protect themselves against a freeholder who abuses the system. We want to protect people in houses in multiple occupation much more effectively than we have until now, and we want to ensure that HMOs can no longer be concentrated in a way that does damage to everyone concerned. Lastly, we are concerned to see that the opportunities, which until now have been much more restricted, are expanded.

This is a proper policy, based on a White Paper that has had a great deal of discussion, argument and consultation. It is noticeable that neither the Labour party nor the Liberal Democrats have a policy with which to counter the Bill. It is for the House to demand that, in their criticisms, they sketch out the policy for which we have waited month after month, since the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras promised that we would have it. Today, we are waiting to hear what it is.

4.26 pm

**Mr. Frank Dobson** (Holborn and St. Pancras): The people of this country are racked with insecurity: people feel insecure in their jobs; people who need a hospital bed or an ambulance are no longer secure in the knowledge that they will get the attention that they need when they need it; old people feel insecure about their pensions; and millions of people of all ages feel insecure on the streets where they live.

The Government are doing nothing to combat the insecurity that they have inflicted on the people. Instead, they revel in it. Cabinet Ministers clearly welcome it. The Government preach insecurity. They are not hypocritical; they practise it. *[Laughter.]* Nowhere is their policy of making people insecure more obvious than when it comes to people's homes. Insecurity affects every part of the country, including the constituencies of the giggling oafs on Conservative Benches. It affects all sorts of families—owner-occupiers, leaseholders, council tenants, housing association tenants, private tenants. Above all, it affects the homeless, the families who have no place of their own.

Measured against the huge crisis of housing insecurity, the Bill is not just useless, but worse than useless. The proposals in it will make matters worse for many families. It ignores the problems of owner-occupiers. It only tinkers with the problems of leaseholders and of people who live in houses in multiple occupation.

The Government are not just complacent; they are nasty and mean-spirited as well. The Bill weakens the position of private tenants and attacks homeless families. It contributes nothing to the building of more houses for the thousands of families with nowhere decent to live. It is no good the Secretary of State trying to blame other people for all that. He cannot shift the blame for the present housing crisis. It is no use him trying to blame Labour councils for everything. The Government have been in power for 16 years. It is time that they accepted responsibility for what they have done. It is their record at which the public are looking. Labour councils, for instance, are not to blame for the plight of owner-occupiers; nor is it the fault of that other old Tory scapegoat, the previous Labour Government.

**Mr. John Sykes** (Scarborough): Why should this Minister, this Government or this party take any lectures from the push-me-pull-you Labour party, which says one thing and does another? Hackney council has 2,000 empty houses even as we speak.

**Mr. Dobson:** I shall not defend Hackney council's indefensible housing record. Apparently, however, Conservative Members will defend the indefensible record of Departments whose housing "empties" grotesquely exceed that number. The number of empty Department of Transport houses, for instance, has increased by 16 per cent., and the figures for the Ministry of Defence and the Welsh Office have increased by 15 per cent. and 44 per cent. respectively. Meanwhile, as the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration himself said in a press statement, the number of empty council houses has fallen.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** I shall return to that issue. Now, however, I want to talk about the Government's record on

owner-occupation, and compare it with that of the previous Labour Government. Under the previous Labour Government, housing repossessions were running at 3,000 a year, and falling; under the present Government, 50,000 families a year are losing their homes. There are now 17 repossessions for every one that took place under Labour; the Tory record on repossessions is 17 times worse than Labour's.

Under the previous Labour Government, fewer than 10,000 families were in serious mortgage arrears. Today, the figure is 250,000. There are 25 families in serious arrears for every one under the Labour Government; the Tory record on mortgage arrears is 25 times worse than Labour's.

On top of that, the present Government have inflicted negative equity on the nation. More than 1,100,000 families now live in homes that are worth less than their mortgages. Negative equity is most common in the south-east, where it affects 434,000 families. It affects 185,000 families in London, and 159,000 in the south-west. However, it also affects 27,000 families in Yorkshire, 51,000 in the north-west, 63,000 in the west midlands and 99,000 in the east midlands.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** Not yet.

I cannot give a comparable figure for negative equity under Labour, because it did not exist under Labour. It did not exist as a fact, and it did not even exist as a phrase.

**Mr. Gummer:** Does the hon. Gentleman not admit that it would be pretty difficult to bring about negative equity with inflation at 28 per cent.? He is merely saying that, under Labour, inflation was so high that there was never any possibility of such circumstances.

**Mr. Dobson:** Apparently, the Secretary of State is now claiming credit for negative equity. I never thought that we would get him to do that.

In fact, the Government have had to invent the phrase "negative equity" to describe the circumstances into which they have dragged innumerable families. It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. It was necessary to invent the phrase, so the Government invented it. The Tories engineered a property boom in order to win a general election, and when they turned the boom into bust, they left the victims in the lurch. There is nothing in the Bill to help owner-occupiers: they are still left in the lurch.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** The hon. Gentleman has talked a good deal about what he calls negative equity. Will he now clearly give his party's position? How much more money would a Labour Government spend to resolve the problem that the hon. Gentleman describes as negative equity?

**Mr. Dobson:** The main thing that is necessary—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] At the beginning of my speech, I spoke of the insecurity that racks everyone in the country. It is mainly job insecurity. The Government's economic incompetence has caused negative equity, and all the other problems suffered by owner-occupiers.

The Tory party claims to be the party of owner-occupiers, but it is not: it is the party of repossessions, of mortgage arrears and of negative equity. But it is worse than that because, on housing, as on tax, it is the party of election lies and broken election promises. During the 1992 election, the Prime Minister said:

"We are going to make life easier for people buying their own home."

That added his personal touch to the Tory election manifesto—and Conservative Members were all elected on it—which stated:

"We will maintain mortgage tax relief."

Since then, all these Tories, led by the Prime Minister, have cut mortgage tax relief twice, cut mortgage help to people who lose their jobs in six different ways on four separate occasions—

**Mr. Thomason:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I shall not.

The Tories have also cut mandatory home renovation grants for owner-occupiers. No wonder Mrs. Thatcher said—so it must be true:

"You can imagine my horror when the Government that succeeded me cut mortgage tax relief. It is not fair on all the young people who bought"—

their house—

"in the knowledge it was there".

We could not ask for a clearer statement of the breach of an election promise.

**Mr. Thomason** *rose*—

**Mr. Dobson:** The pre-election campaign contained another of the Prime Minister's flights of fancy. On "Desert Island Discs" in January 1992, presumably dreaming of a Thatcher-free zone, he fantasised:

"We've stopped, if you recall, the repossessions just before Christmas".

Since the Prime Minister said that, more than 200,000 families have had their homes repossessed. The rate is running at 50,000 a year.

**Mr. Thomason** *rose*—

**Mr. Dobson:** One in 10 homeless families are the victims of repossession. I say to Conservative Members: no wonder the boss of the house-building company Persimmon Homes said:

"Home ownership is no longer the cornerstone of the Conservative Party. They are kicking us in the teeth".

I point out to Conservative Members that that was from the boss of a company which, up to now, has donated money to the Tory party.

**Mr. Thomason:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for eventually giving way. Is it his party's intention to restore mortgage tax relief to previous levels?

**Mr. Dobson:** Until we hear from the Government what their intention is, we will not say. I understood that the hon. Gentleman had some experience of the problems of the housing market. Probably, we will not want lectures from him.

*[Mr. Dobson]*

The Conservative Government cannot claim to be the party of tenants. It has been the party of enormous rent rises, which have placed a massive burden on the taxpayer. Under the Government, average council rents are six times as high as they were under Labour. In the past five years, they have risen by three times the rate of inflation.

**Mr. Sykes:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** Certainly not.

Over the same five years, when the retail prices index rose by 27 per cent., housing association rents rose by 85 per cent. Rent rises in the private sector have been steeper still and, as a result, the cost to the taxpayer of housing benefits has gone up from £4 billion to £10 billion.

So the Tories have done nothing for owner-occupiers and they have driven up rents for tenants. When it comes to homelessness, however, they are even worse—the Tories really are the party of homelessness. Under them, the number of homeless families has doubled.

**Mr. Sykes** *rose—*

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** *rose—*

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I shall not give way to either of the hon. Gentlemen.

Hundreds of thousands of other families have been left in overcrowded and unsatisfactory homes. The Tories claim to be the party of the family—you agree with that, do you? Thank you.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of the conventions in the House.

**Mr. Dobson:** I am sure that you believe in the family, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Under this Government, homeless parents have been forced to try to bring up their families in circumstances that would be unacceptable to every hon. Member, and all that comes after 16 years of the Tory Government and 16 years of Tory housing policy. Last year, more than 120,000 families were officially accepted as homeless. To meet their needs, plus the needs of all the other families who are on council housing waiting lists, to which the Secretary of State referred, last year the Government committed councils to building just 404 council homes. That is one new home for every 301 homeless families. In the last year of the previous Labour Government, councils started to build 54,000 new homes. That means that under Labour they were building 135 new homes for every one that is being built today and that the Tory record on house building for people in need is 135 times worse than that of Labour.

Like repossessions, negative equity and mortgage arrears, homelessness and the lack of new homes are found all over the country. In London, Labour was building 415 new homes for every one that is being built today. We were building 9,128 new homes, while last year the Tories managed 22 in London. That number in a whole year would not provide enough space for the people who will sleep in cardboard boxes in the Strand this very night.

Homeless families are not the only people who are looking for homes. To put the Tories' building record into perspective, against the 22 houses that they built, 28,000 families were accepted as homeless in London last year.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South-East): My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about the needs of inner-city families, especially those on housing estates. Does he agree that the Secretary of State is in danger of being labelled as the King Canute of housing, because he will be overwhelmed by the rising tide of crime in such estates, and problem families? He and his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary have done nothing about that, but Labour has produced a policy on those problems, which we have had in Coventry.

**Mr. Dobson:** I fear that my hon. Friend may be giving the Secretary of State more credit than he deserves. As I understand the story, King Canute attempted to demonstrate to creepy courtiers that he could not turn back the tide. I rather suspect that the Secretary of State thinks that he can.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): We have exceeded our manifesto commitment to build 150,000 houses since being elected. Will the hon. Gentleman say precisely whether he would build more or fewer than that, and by how much he would subsidise public housing?

**Mr. Dobson:** The Government have not built them. *[Interruption.]* Under the Government, the combined construction of houses by councils and housing associations—which I think some Conservative Members believe has entirely made up for the cut in council house building—is half what it was in 1979. The Government have halved building and doubled homelessness, and some of us think that there is a connection between the two.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman has been asked whether he would spend more or less on house building, whether he would provide more or less money to aid those with negative equity and whether he would spend more or less on tax relief for mortgage payments. He has failed to answer any of those questions. If he wishes to criticise the Government, he must tell us whether he would spend more in each of those areas. If he will not, then he must shut up.

**Mr. Dobson:** When we put our manifesto to the people before the general election, those matters will be spelt out. We do not like making promises that would be broken—unlike Conservative Members who made promises about tax and housing and then threw them away, pretending that they had not been made. I shall give the right hon. Gentleman more detailed figures. In the last five years of the previous Labour Government, the building of what some people call social housing averaged 134,000 houses a year. Under this Government, the total built by housing associations, local authorities and new towns is 34,000. That means that, on average, there are 100,000 a year fewer over a five-year period.

**Mr. Ashby:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. I have told him that, so he might as well sit down.

**Mr. Ashby** *rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The House is well aware of the convention on giving way.

**Mr. Dobson:** I have told the hon. Gentleman that I will not give way at the moment. If he behaves himself and is civil, I might give way to him later.

In Yorkshire, under a Labour Government 6,300 new council homes were being built. The latest figure is just 24—not 24,000, just 24 houses. More than 11,000 people are homeless in Yorkshire. In the north-west, Labour was building 8,600 homes, but under the Tories the total is just three houses for the whole of Yorkshire to meet the needs of the massive total of 18,000 homeless people.

**Mr. Ashby:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No. I have explained to the hon. Gentleman that if he behaves in a civil manner, he might get a look in.

**Mr. Ashby** *rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman knows the rules and he must abide by them.

**Mr. Dobson:** In the south-east outside London, 11,000 homes were being built under Labour. Last year, the Tories managed just 47. There are 18,000 homeless families in the south-east.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) asked about subsidies for social rented housing. Housing revenue accounts are ring-fenced, and by and large the only subsidy for council housing is housing benefit. The average council rent is £36 a week and the total housing benefit bill for tenants, who make up 30 per cent. of the population, is £5.3 billion. By contrast, the Government are spending £3.6 billion, paying an average of £69 a week to the private rented sector—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. The hon. Lady will not catch my eye if she refuses to accept that when I stand, she must sit down. Her conduct is not good enough.

**Dr. Jones:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Dobson:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. As I have said, under this regime, shall we say, over a five-year period, the cost to the taxpayer of housing benefit has gone up from £4 billion to £10 billion. That is the wrong way to go about it. Faced with record numbers of homeless families and other families who want to rent somewhere decent to live, a Government with any common sense would build some houses for them. That would be good for people who would be able to move in and good for building workers and the people who supply the building industry. For instance, it would be good for people who make bricks in Bedfordshire, and for those who make carpets in Kidderminster, central heating boilers in Belper and electrical fittings in Basildon. But we cannot really expect common sense from the Government and instead there is in the Bill Tory mean-mindedness and a lurch to the right.

Instead of helping the victims of their policies, the Government are blaming them. Faced with enormous queues for council and housing association homes, the Government are not trying to shorten the queues by building more homes. Instead they propose just to rearrange the queues and hope that, by that process, the people who are affected will start blaming one another and that attention might also be distracted from the Tory record.

**Mr. Ashby:** The hon. Gentleman keeps on quoting the new houses built under Labour in 1979. I was one of the chairmen of housing on the Greater London council. May I give the hon. Gentleman an example of the new housing that he is talking about? There were 300 perfectly good houses knocked down and 303 houses built—an extra three houses, not 303 houses. His figures are completely and utterly wrong. We saw social manipulation, not extra houses.

**Mr. Dobson:** If that was the quality of thought brought to the Tory side of housing on the GLC, no wonder the Tories were slung out.

Instead of finding families somewhere decent to live, the Government propose to force them to live in perpetual insecurity; to live for ever in sub-standard temporary homes, badgered and bullied by bureaucrats and landlords. That is what the so-called party of the family intends for thousands of families. What will that do for the health of families, for the job prospects of the parents, for the relationships between the parents and between the parents and their children, and for the education prospects of the children?

Ministers claim that their housing policies have worked and that their benefit policies have worked, but it is not true; it is not like that. If one wants to find something that epitomises all that is worst about the Government, one need go no further than Westminster. I should make it clear that the Tories must take the blame for whatever happens in Westminster. Like the rest of the country, Westminster has a Tory Government, with Tory housing policies and Tory benefit policies, but unlike almost all of the rest of the country, it has a Tory council, with a Tory housing policy and a Tory environmental health policy.

What do we find in that demi-paradise? We find the Clarendon Court hotel, which used to be a luxury hotel. Now it is rotten, rundown, insanitary, and a bed-and-breakfast hotel for homeless families. It is occupied by 158 households, and they are living in squalor. The landlords will not be living in squalor. They are being paid £750,000—£14,000 of taxpayers' money a week—in Tory Government housing benefit by Tory Westminster council. The company that owns the hotel cannot be traced. It is believed to be a foreign company, so for all I know, it might be one of those foreign companies that make secret donations to the Tory party.

Living in that insecure and insanitary dump are 158 households. They each live in a bedsitting room and share kitchen facilities. A professional report says that a

*[Mr. Dobson]*

typical bedsitter in the place is infested with cockroaches and the windows are dangerous. The occupants have to use an electric plug at floor level for the kettle. They share the use of a communal kitchen 40 yd away from their bedsitter, and they share it with the occupants of 47 other bedsitters. The 48 have access to just three electric cookers, with a total of 12 electric rings. Only six of the rings are working—six rings for cooking, for the residents of 48 rooms. The kitchen, like the bedsitter, is infested with cockroaches. The surfaces are worn, damaged, chipped and insanitary.

That is the place—what about the people? I shall briefly describe just one family who have been forced by the Tory Government and the Tory council to live in such squalor. The family consists of a father, a mother, a son aged four and a daughter aged three. Those of us who have children should remember the circumstances in which we were living when our children were toddlers of four and three years old. The father has had a serious operation on his head—*[Laughter.]* What a funny chap he is to some Conservative Members. Doctors say that the father needs a clean atmosphere, free from dust and dirt. He will never get that at the Clarendon Court hotel.

It is not hard for Labour Members—even some Conservative Members—to imagine the effects of such squalor on the people who live in that hotel. In case some people find it difficult to understand, however—it is clear that one or two hon. Members do—I shall read from two medical reports that describe what it is like to live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The first report says:

"Even if hotel accommodation is in good order"—

clearly, the Clarendon Court hotel is not—

"it is rarely appropriate for the needs of young children. It is difficult to maintain hygiene while washing, eating and sleeping in one overcrowded room. High levels of gastroenteritis, skin disorders and chest infections have been reported. Kitchen facilities are often absent or inadequate, so people are forced to rely on food from cafés and take-aways which is expensive and may be nutritionally unsatisfactory. The stress of hotel life undermines parents' relationships with each other and their children. Normal child development is impaired through lack of space for safe play and exploration. High rates of accidents to children have been reported, probably due to a combination of lack of space and hazards such as kettles at floor level."

A further medical report spelled out the consequences of such squalor. It said:

"Risk to health in bed and breakfast . . . is well above that of the domiciled population. These risks stem from shared, or lack of, amenities, overcrowding and unsafe properties. Infection, accidents, malnutrition, sleep disturbances, low birth weight babies, eating problems, behavioural problems, depression and even death can result".

Those reports refer to circumstances about two and a half miles away from the House. It is shameful.

Faced with the likely consequences of the squalor of the Clarendon Court hotel, Westminster council has done next to nothing to help—except hand over housing benefit to the tune of £14,000 a week. It is not the fault of the Labour party, the trade unions or anybody else; it is the responsibility of a Tory Government, a Tory council, and in all probability a Tory landlord.

The Housing Bill does not propose to do anything to improve the living conditions of those families. Nor does it propose anything to help them get somewhere better to live—quite the reverse. The Bill is likely to force them to stay there longer. That is because the Government are lurching to the right.

**Mr. Sykes** *rose—*

**Mr. Dobson:** One of the lurchers is standing up now.

It is no good Ministers trying to deny what is happening. The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, which the Government want to update, was a private Member's Bill supported by both the then Labour Government and Mr. Peter Walker, a former Environment Secretary and subsequently a Cabinet Minister under Mrs. Thatcher. The Bill was opposed only by right-wing Tories, who have lobbied against it ever since.

As a result of that lobbying, the law was reviewed in the early 1980s by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), now the Deputy Prime Minister. It was reviewed again in the late 1980s by the late Nicholas Ridley, while Mrs. Thatcher was still Prime Minister. On each occasion, it was decided to leave the law alone. That is not for this Government—they want to toughen up a law for the homeless that even Mrs. Thatcher thought was harsh enough.

The Tory lurch to the right is also the reason why the Government are changing the law to put private tenants at a disadvantage—both when they are looking for somewhere to live and if they get into arrears with their rent. From now on, the law will assume that every tenancy is a shorthold tenancy, and landlords will be able to evict tenants who get just two months behind with the rent. There is not much hope of extra security there.

Then there is the case of leaseholders. The Government claimed when they introduced the previous housing Bill that they had protected leaseholders, but they had not. Dishonest, unscrupulous landowners, managing agents, lawyers and a whole host of shark-like, so-called professionals have continued to exploit leaseholders. Now the Government are proposing further changes. As usual, they are a bit too late and certainly too little. They do not go far enough; they do not give leaseholders the right to manage, which is what is really needed and what the leaseholders are looking for.

We have further evidence of the Government's wish to centralise all power into their own hands. They propose to decide on the housing allocation policies of all local authorities. So housing allocation priorities in Wakefield, Wigan and Warrington will be laid down by the Secretary of State, who represents Suffolk, Coastal, instead of by local councillors who know their area and have to answer to the electors for their decisions.

The Government have decided that they know best, so the next question is: what housing allocation policies will they pursue? Will they be those pursued by Tory Westminster city council, whose Tory councillors allocate homeless families to asbestos-ridden blocks, and who, according to the district auditor—not me—have unlawfully squandered £29 million of public money allocating houses for party political advantage? Is that what the Secretary of State has in mind for when he takes his new powers? To the best of my knowledge, he has never criticised Westminster council's allocation or priorities. We can therefore reasonably assume that they are the sort of priorities that he wants to introduce in every other part of the country.

The Government claim to be the party of law and order. They are nothing of the sort. All over the country, Labour councils have been taking action, and trying to take action, to combat and reduce anti-social behaviour, not only on council estates but everywhere, but have received precious little help from the Government.

When the Labour party introduced proposals, some of which are incorporated in the Bill, the Prime Minister said:

"we have taken action on that problem. Nothing in the proposals from the Labour party adds to that action; they are merely window dressing on Labour's part."

On the same day, the Home Secretary said to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw):

"the hon. Gentleman knows full well that the proposals that he announced this week add nothing to those measures which are already part of our law and those which we have announced already. If we take the two together, all that we have is a bit of pretence of precisely the kind that we have come to expect from the Labour party on this and on other matters."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. 469-72.]

The Secretary of State says that he is now introducing in the Bill some of the very measures that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn was proposing and which the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister denounced in their usual knee-jerk manner.

The Government have given precious little help to councils that have been pushing to improve matters and to combat anti-social behaviour. The Labour party has been pressing for changes in the law, and the Bill includes some of those changes. However, it is typical of the Government that they are not introducing all the necessary changes. None of the changes relates to witness protection, rules of evidence or court delays, and the Government are not prepared to extend the scope of injunctions to cover visitors to council estates as well as the tenants.

Of course, the Government have a long history of making exaggerated claims for all sorts of housing schemes that turn out not to work. No one has mentioned it, and it has not been in any press releases, but the Government have quietly dropped an idea thought up by the late Nicholas Ridley and the current Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

I must say that I always had doubts about a scheme affecting council tenants that had been devised by the son of Viscount Ridley and the son of Earl Waldegrave—how right I was. It was the tenants choice scheme, which was designed to bring about the wholesale privatisation of council housing. Tenants were to be asked to vote on whether to get a private landlord. The voting system was rigged, so that those who did not vote and empty flats counted as a yes vote.

Despite those strange electoral arrangements, eight years later, fewer than 1,000 tenants have opted for a private landlord, and more than 900 of them were tenants of Westminster city council who were desperate to escape its clutches. In the whole of the rest of the country, fewer than 100 tenants availed themselves of the Ridley-Waldegrave choice. That scheme has, however, been costing between £500,000 and £1 million a year to advertise and administer—for the sake of argument, let us say £6 million over the past eight years. It is a further Tory waste of taxpayers' money.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) and other colleagues will be dealing with other aspects of the Housing Bill. They will work hard to improve it in Committee, but they will have a hard task, because the Bill ignores the realities that face tens of thousands of British families. Above all, instead of reducing insecurity, the Bill adds to it. That is why we shall vote against it tonight.

Our approach to housing is based on the belief that every family should have somewhere decent to live and should be able to afford to live there. A decent, secure home is vital to family life. Without it, a family's health suffers; without it, grown-ups find it hard to hold down a job; without it, children find it hard to do well at school; without it, family relationships are soured and family breakdown becomes more likely.

Everyone recognises that it will take a long time and a lot of hard work to ensure that everyone in Britain has somewhere decent to live. The people know that this Government will not do what is necessary. They also know that they need a Labour Government, even to make a start.

5.3 pm

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (City of London and Westminster, South): The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and I share, pleasurably, parliamentary responsibility for Covent Garden, which spans our constituency boundaries. In the past, we have shared the different experience, although not simultaneously, of being councillors for the London borough of Camden where, indeed, in its previous Hampstead embodiment, my noble mother—to coin a phrase—was for many years the chairman of housing.

The fact that Camden and Westminster have different housing policies may explain why I did not agree wholly and precisely with everything that the hon. Gentleman said in what I would describe as a characteristically provocative speech. There are moments when I am relieved that there are china shops left standing in his constituency.

The hon. Gentleman's attack on Westminster council contained a long passage about Clarendon Court hotel. What he said would have caused any hon. Member to make inquiries, within the proper constituency conventions, even if, as in my case, the matter had not previously been brought to my attention, for reasons which I am sure he will understand. He did his case less good and made it less convincing with his charge that councillors in Westminster had been putting homeless people in asbestos-ridden property when he knows that the words he used would be potentially actionable outside the House.

**Mr. Dobson:** I would repeat them outside the House.

**Mr. Brooke:** That is something to which Westminster councillors will no doubt look forward.

Six days ago, Madam Deputy Speaker, you were very kind to call me as one of the few Back Benchers to speak on the benefit regulations for asylum seekers. Given that I was called such a short time ago, I am particularly conscious that I must not trample on the time of other hon. Members in this debate, not least because of the rationing that will occur later.

My interest is a constituency one. I have not sought to verify whether each and every clause in the Bill—a description of which, incidentally, would owe more to a

*[Mr. Brooke]*

pantechnicon than to a portmanteau—relates to my constituency precisely, but it would not surprise me. I shall, however, concentrate on a limited number of issues.

First, although I have absorbed a great deal of briefing from interested parties hostile to the amendments to existing homelessness provisions, I am not convinced that, in an environment such as Westminster's, amendment was inappropriate. The number of homeless people who have been permanently rehoused in Westminster has steadily climbed from just under 900 in 1990-91 to nearly 1,250 in 1994-95, with one blip in the middle when it went up to nearly 1,300.

During the same period, the number of category A cases that required rehousing and were rehoused fell from just under 200 in 1990-91 to 119 at its lowest, although I acknowledge that, last year, the number went back up to 138. With those trends, in terms of absolute numbers and their respective directions, it is not surprising that, in the most recent month of relevant statistics, the average wait for a category A rehousing case in Westminster was more than three times that of the homeless wait for permanent housing. The Westminster figures afford a poor climate for the case for the homeless to be accepted by those with much deeper roots in the community.

Briefing that I received from various lobbies implied that one quarter to one third of accommodation was going to homeless families. In Westminster, in the five years that I was citing, the figure has always been in excess of 50 per cent. and, in two years, it was more than 60 per cent. Incidentally, some of those homeless, whose handling will be changed by the Bill, will appear on the waiting list—a waiting list on which the prospects have been improved.

The second matter to which I should like to allude is the major role that has been played in Westminster by the Peabody Trust and similar bodies. A great city requires a significant amount of low-income housing near its centre in order to provide homes for those who will run many of its city services on comparatively low incomes.

I have historically been critical of the Peabody Trust in private for changing its priorities to the disadvantage of those reared on Peabody estates and who, in my view, conferred genuine and helpful stability in an inner-city community. However, I can now pay public tribute to at least a partial change in emphasis on its part. I am genuinely concerned that the Government should listen in Committee to the practical problems of those who manage social estates in central London, including those which have been admirably created in the past quarter of a century by organisations such as the Soho Housing Association.

Everyone thinks that, in my constituency, it is the City of London that has businesses but no residents, yet in the W1 postal district alone, the number of businesses equals the number of households. That confers special problems on medium-sized organisations with dispersed properties that have a critical role to play in inner-city housing provision. I am particularly concerned that the extra legal and administrative costs associated with leaseholders should not adversely affect rents for tenants.

The very nature of Westminster brings me back to the homeless. Clause 155 offers real potential for assistance, provided the word "district" in line 9—which is noticeably spelt with a lowercase "d"—genuinely offers some flexibility and does not limit an authority to its own boundaries. Westminster in particular is an authority whose nature of housing would make that specifically unhelpful, but I recognise that the matter will be examined again in Committee. Likewise, while introductory tenancies may not be welcomed everywhere, they would be helpful in Westminster as an extra weapon in the armoury.

On a different subject, I am glad, in the interests of effective legislation, that the Government have revisited the issue of leasehold reform. I too have had constituency cases like those that have animated my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington).

I am conscious that the majority role that owner-occupiers now play in the housing market—which I welcome—potentially reduces the attention that is paid to the rest of the community. This can have untoward effects, and I do not blame the lobbies for trying to redress the balance—or for the vehemence with which they argue the case. Whether that is the best way in which to achieve their several objectives is for them.

While I support the main thrust of the Bill, I hope that the House and the Government will listen carefully to the case that is put for the homeless, who are also my constituents, as we study its detail and small print. The Bill will warrant close study in Committee, and it would be a particular service to those affected by it if sensible and strategic approaches to the relevance and importance of different parts of the Bill were to take precedence over more familiar tactical enthusiasms.

5.11 pm

**Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** (Denton and Reddish): I want to do two things that have not been done so far in the debate. First, I want to make it clear that we can solve housing problems only by spending more money. We can alter systems and arrangements between tenancies and owner-occupation, but unless we are prepared to spend more money we will not solve the problems.

**Mr. Sykes:** How much more?

**Mr. Bennett:** I hear the hon. Gentleman's comment—all I would say at this stage is that it needs to be a substantial amount. It is no good shouting across the Chamber. The question that should be exercising the House is, "How can we find that money and persuade people to spend it on housing?" Unless that is done, there will be difficulties.

Secondly, I want to praise the Government. I was delighted that, nine months ago, they published figures showing how many houses they believe are needed. Such figures were last published in 1977. It is regrettable that Ministers refused to update them for a long time. I believe that, if we are to persuade people to spend more money, we must have a clear estimate of housing need.

I warmly welcome the fact that the Government have published the figures. Some hon. Members will be aware that the Environment Committee is now examining them. There can be many arguments about such figures. As the Committee has not published a report, I shall say simply that the majority of the evidence suggests that the Government have underestimated the need, but whether we accept the Government's figures or other—slightly higher—ones, the real challenge is how to achieve the totals

in the next few years. Finding 1.7 million new homes in the next 10 years and—on the Government's own estimate—an average of 60,000 new social houses a year will be a substantial challenge. I praise the Government for publicising the figures, but we must think carefully about how we will find the money to meet the targets.

We must ensure that we look after the existing housing stock, and do not allow any existing houses to deteriorate. When I look around my constituency, I see clear examples of what first a Labour Government, and then a Conservative Government, did to turn houses that were built at the turn of the century and in the early part of this century into little palaces in which people could live. Reddish has benefited from being a housing action area. It now has first-class accommodation, and people are proud to live in their houses.

What worries me is that all that has been done in that part of Reddish could have been repeated in three or four other areas of my constituency; unless we are prepared to put more money into urban renewal, we will run the risk of allowing many areas of attractive old housing to continue to deteriorate. The country cannot afford that, and I deeply regret that the Bill does not propose to improve urban renewal.

**Mr. David Nicholson:** The hon. Gentleman has made much of resources, and he could refer, as did the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), to the vast number of houses that were built in the 1960s and 1970s but, over 15 to 20 years, did not many of those houses become unsuitable and unfit to live in? Did not they require vast repairs at vast expense?

**Mr. Bennett:** Of course, but I am trying to illustrate that the lessons were learnt—certainly in my constituency—not just by a Conservative Government, but by a Labour Government. They appreciated that good urban renewal meant that, instead of continuing a clearance programme, it was possible to rehabilitate houses. That has been done successfully during the past 20 years, and it has been a real success story in a pocket of my constituency. My complaint is that it has not happened in many other areas.

I want now to mention what are, allegedly, unpopular estates. In my view, many estates are unpopular because there is a lack of resources for good housing management, not because they are inherently bad. The failure to accept that money has to be spent on the management and on the maintenance of communal areas has often led to deterioration.

I want also to refer to problem tenants. I welcome the fact that the Government are suggesting that there might be ways of dealing with the issue, but the House must consider the matter carefully. Evicting a tenant—or not renewing a short lease—is one thing, but we must ask what happens to those tenants, particularly if they have children. One solution that was adopted recently was slowly to push the problem tenant around until he ended up on what was called a sink estate.

If we are trying—rightly—to get rid of sink estates, we must ask where such tenants are to go. Furthermore, what will happen to their children? There are measures to remove next door neighbours who are causing a nuisance, but unless we decide what should happen to them, we shall simply create problems. We might not even be able to allow the evictions to take place.

The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) said that certain properties that were built in the 1960s are now unsuitable. The ones that particularly concern me are bedsits. There was an assumption that elderly people would be happy with a bedsit. Many of them were in the 1960s, but that is no longer the case. Unless we have a positive policy for converting bedsits, a problem that has developed in parts of my constituency will become widespread.

If there is a vacancy in a bedsit and no elderly person wants to take it, as the Government rightly put pressure on the local authority to ensure that vacancies are filled, the authority puts someone in—very often someone who has come out of a long-stay hospital or who has psychiatric or alcohol problems. We would find it difficult enough to have such a person living next door and we might attempt vigorously to stop them making life hell, but it would be intolerable for an elderly person. We must spend money on dealing with some of those bedsits.

Another problem that I find alarming, and which came to the attention of the Select Committee on the Environment during its inquiry, concerns tenants who have bought council properties. I understand why the Government pushed the right to buy and encouraged many tenants to buy their properties. What I find unacceptable is the fact that building societies, which were originally keen to lend such tenants money to buy their properties and, in some cases, were happy to lend to a second buyer when the tenant sold the property on, are making it difficult for the prospective third owner to get a mortgage.

Building societies cannot afford to red-line former council estates and say that mortgages are not available. I would not mind if they had been honest and said that they never wanted that type of business, but having rushed in and encouraged people to become owner-occupiers in such areas, it is unacceptable for them to say no now. We need some quick action from the building societies, which ought to spend more time looking to their original principles and encouraging people to buy homes, rather than turning themselves into banks.

Finally—to keep my remarks brief—the Government are promising to deal with the problem of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. They say that local authorities will have the right to close down such establishments quickly. Authorities often have powers now, but they have to pick up the cost of using them. If an establishment is closed, and 20 families are immediately put out on the street, the authority has to find them somewhere else to go. When the medical officers had strong powers in local authorities, they could say, "Get on and do it", and pick up the consequences. Now, no one is strong enough to tell local authorities, "You've got to do this. It's your statutory duty." As a result, councils will waver and worry whether they can afford to do something.

To my Front-Bench spokesmen I simply say that it is all right to complain about some of the measures in the Bill, but I want to know—soon—how we will persuade people that we have to spend more money on housing. It will be one of the crucial issues at the next election. It is no good merely listing the problems. We have to be clear that we are going to find the money and we must not raise people's expectations and then leave them disillusioned.

5.22 pm

**Mr. Roy Thomason** (Bromsgrove): I welcome the Bill. It makes a substantial contribution to housing welfare and the sooner it is implemented, the better.

In the spirit of Nolan, I must declare two interests before I go any further. I am a consultant to a building society and to a firm of solicitors and parliamentary agents. My remarks do not relate to matters that, so far as I am aware, impinge on the activities of either of those organisations. I have not been asked by the clients of that firm or by either of those organisations to make any representations during the passage of the Bill.

In building confidence in the lettings sector and in generating new partnerships, the Bill creates opportunities in housing on which we can build in the spirit that we have been building for the past 15 years. I want to focus my remarks on parts V, VI and VII. We have all had many people come to our surgeries to tell us about their difficulties with neighbours. Life being what it is, neighbours often find it difficult to get on with each other. Sometimes, however, people who live on council estates are asked to bear wholly unreasonable and untenable difficulties. Part V allows local authorities to deal with such difficulties and we should welcome and support it.

The Bill goes beyond that and helps people who have suffered domestic violence inflicted by a spouse, who has remained in occupation of the former matrimonial home while the family has been driven out. It seems wholly unreasonable that the accommodation should be left under-occupied and used by the perpetrator of such violence while the family is homeless. The Bill will allow the new ground to be used to remove the perpetrator of domestic violence from the accommodation that the family formerly occupied.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** While I associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the welcome provisions in the Bill, is he not concerned that owner-occupiers and the tenants of private landlords living in sold council houses are increasingly causing problems on some of our estates? Would not the Bill be improved if such people were included, and should not the local authority take action to deal with the behaviour of such a category of person?

**Mr. Thomason:** Owner-occupation is a totally different question. Turning people out of the house that they own on the basis that they are perpetrating a nuisance must be a different area of law. It is a tortious liability and must be treated in the courts as such, rather than as a contractual breach of obligation between landlord and tenant, which can properly be dealt with in a housing Bill. The hon. Lady is widening the Bill outside the scope of its long title. Technically, that issue is not before us today, and it could not be dealt with in the manner that she suggested.

Increasingly, on many council estates and former council estates and in many housing association areas, one part or sometimes the whole estate gains a bad reputation for tenants who are frequently a nuisance. They drive out the better tenants. Sometimes, credit is not advanced because of the address, and yet the majority of the estates' tenants are respectable, reasonable and proper people who are afforded difficulties because of a few neighbours, who gradually concentrate in an area as the better tenants move elsewhere. The Bill will give us an opportunity to avoid that sink estate or bad road labelling, which so often affects parts of our towns and cities.

We also ought to welcome the introduction of a probationary tenancy, which will give people an opportunity to take on, responsibly, the obligation of tenancy with their local authority or social housing association landlord. Tenants will understand that a tenancy contains obligations and is not given for them to despoil, but contains rights and responsibilities and must be treated as such.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked what would happen to the people who were removed from accommodation because of the grounds of possession given in part V. Clearly, if such people fall within the appropriate needs groups, they must be given alternative temporary accommodation. It will probably be very different from the property that they occupied. Some Opposition Members suggest that they will be treated in the same way as homeless people, a matter with which parts VI and VII deal. The housing stock is inevitably finite, whether one takes the view of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish that 1,700,000 houses or social units should be built in the next 10 years or accepts a figure of perhaps a quarter of that, which might be regarded as the other end of the spectrum.

**Mr. Bennett:** I talked about 1.7 million extra homes, not social housing units. I accept that the figure for social housing units should be between 60,000 and 100,000 per year, which is nothing like the figure that the hon. Gentleman gave.

**Mr. Thomason:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification of his position, but it makes no difference to my point. Whatever one accepts as being the parameters of the argument about the need for the development of social housing, whether it be 40,000 or 100,000 units a year, the fact is that the stock is finite. There will always be considerable demand on it and no Government will ever be able to ensure the construction of enough units to meet all the demand.

**Mr. Sykes:** I greatly enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). Does my hon. Friend agree with the hon. Gentleman's concluding remarks that the Labour party Front-Bench spokesmen have no policy on the subject?

**Mr. Thomason:** That was clear from the inability of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who is no longer in his place, to answer any of the key interventions from Conservative Members. It is clear that the Labour party mouths arguments and criticisms against policies but rarely advances constructive comments. Finding a policy in the modern Labour party is like looking for a needle in the proverbial haystack: there is a lot of straw, but few constructive points to help us to know where it stands.

As the housing stock is finite, it is essential that it should be put to its best use. That is the aim of the Bill, in conjunction with the guidelines on assisting local authorities in allocating accommodation issued last Thursday. I had the deepest suspicion, when I heard his remarks, that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras had not read those guidelines.

I remind the House of the arguments that were circulating at the time of the introduction of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. I was involved in local government then and I remember the deep resentment that was felt about Parliament telling local government how it should go about its business in allocating housing accommodation.

We were very angry. We thought, "We know the needs of our areas and the criteria that should apply to those who approach us for housing. We will allocate our housing stock according to the needs, as we perceive them, of our communities. We do not expect people from Westminster, by legislation or order, to tell us how we are to allocate our accommodation. If homeless people arrive in our area and we consider that they have appropriate claims on our resources, we will allocate accommodation as we think it best to do so." Local authorities everywhere devised skilful and carefully thought-out allocation policies.

**Mrs. Maddock:** Does the hon. Gentleman favour the Minister telling local authorities how they should allocate their properties to homeless families? That will be the result of the Bill. Is he aware that today, whatever happened in 1977, nearly every local authority in the country does not support what the Government propose in the Bill?

**Mr. Thomason:** We are constantly told that almost all local authorities are under the control of the Labour or Liberal parties. It is interesting that hon. Members who led the criticism of the changes in 1977 and their successors today are suddenly changing their position and opposing the terms of the Bill. It is amazing that they have altered their position from that which they occupied, perfectly correctly, 18 years ago. I remind the hon. Lady that the draft guidance on allocation lays out the skeleton of direction to local government about the way in which accommodation should be allocated. The great advantage of the new regime is that it will allow local authorities, taking those points, to allocate housing according to the needs of the people who apply to them. Clearly, more flexibility is being introduced into allocation policies than has been possible under the 1977 Act.

**Mr. Betts:** Under the Bill, local authorities will not be able to give permanent and secure accommodation to homeless families. They will be able to give accommodation for no more than two out of three years before a family has to move on. That requirement on local authorities is exactly opposite to what the hon. Gentleman said about local authorities having freedom to operate. Will he confirm that when he had a responsible position in the Association of District Councils, on no occasion when he served on delegations to Housing Ministers did he argue for changes of the sort contained in the Bill?

**Mr. Thomason:** Although I was not on the council of the ADC in 1977, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I made representations in the early 1980s, when I was on the council of the association, for changes that I thought would be appropriate. I spoke to Ministers about that and these proposals substantially reflect that.

It is clear that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) has not properly read the allocation document. I accept that it is a consultation document and not yet set in concrete, but it gives the very flexibility to which I have been referring. Homeless families who, under the current definition, are entitled to be housed, could still be housed by a local authority if it considered that the family met the other criteria set out in the paper. As I understand the Bill, there is no automatic referral. No doubt, my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to confirm that.

Successive Opposition speakers are making a great mistake. The Bill does not state that a homeless person must automatically go into temporary accommodation. It says that the local authority must try to ensure that that happens, but it can still allocate that family into permanent accommodation if it wishes to, considers it appropriate and has the stock available. Let me draw hon. Members' attention to paragraph 32 of the draft guidance, which says that where continuity of schooling or care is important

"it will be desirable to give higher priority to providing settled accommodation for households in such tenancies containing young children or a vulnerable adult."

The document itself proposes that, in those circumstances, accommodation should be made available.

**Mr. Sykes:** Will my hon. Friend ignore the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), who foisted the world student games on the ratepayers of Sheffield and whose authority has one of the worst records in the country on empty council houses?

**Mr. Thomason:** I am obliged for that helpful intervention.

I have heard cries from Opposition Members that the young and the old do not receive appropriately favourable attention from housing authorities when they have particular problems that should be acknowledged. The allocation policy gives a list of potential items which should be considered in rehousing, which will apply to the young and the old as well as to families. We have that flexibility. I repeat that point because it seems to have escaped many Opposition Members who do not want to take note of it. We have the flexibility to deal with those problems where the local authority considers it appropriate to do so. The council will decide whether family X, which is homeless, should be accommodated or whether someone else should be accommodated using its inevitably limited resources.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Thomason:** I shall give way once more—and only once more.

**Dr. Jones:** Local authorities are at present free to house homeless families in temporary accommodation—as they often do, especially outside London—when they need to make further inquiries about the circumstances of the family concerned. However, at present, local authorities have the discretion to take into account homelessness as a factor in their housing policies. That discretion will be tempered by the proposals. If so, why do we need these provisions? Should we not leave local authorities to decide their housing allocation policies? We need more homes—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. This is the second time that the hon. Lady has started to make a speech rather than a short intervention.

**Mr. Thomason:** Local authorities will have that freedom within the broad framework of the allocation policies proposed in the consultation document, and it is up to them to rise to the challenge offered.

May I make a couple of observations to my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration on the consultation paper on allocation? It is important that the accommodation that local authorities seek to make available to homeless families through recommendation rather than direct housing provision is seen to be affordable and of reasonable size and condition for the homeless occupants. Local authorities must not simply hand over a list of names and addresses of property that is available; they must give proper guidance to those who need it and follow up that guidance. They must also ensure that rejections by private sector landlords to whom reference has been made by the housing authority are not simply taken as the end of the story but lead to homeless families being given continuing and further support by the housing authority.

I hope that this initiative will lead to the final disposal of bed-and-breakfast accommodation as a housing alternative. The Government have made great strides in that area, and should be congratulated on what they have done. I hope that we see more moves in that direction as local housing authorities use references within the private sector or other social housing landlords to provide temporary accommodation.

I am conscious that many other hon. Members wish to speak in this debate and it would not be fair for me to say more, except to underline that this thoroughly good Bill needs to be implemented as soon as possible.

5.41 pm

**Mrs. Diana Maddock** (Christchurch): Some parts of the Bill are to be welcomed, but the overwhelming view of people involved in housing provision, whether in the local government or voluntary sector, is that the Bill does nothing to tackle the root cause of long waiting lists, rising homelessness and increased insecurity in housing. The root cause is the lack of product to meet the ever-increasing demand, which hon. Members on both sides of the House have discussed. Once again, the Government are abdicating their responsibility. The Secretary of State spent much of his speech discussing everything but what the Government would do about the problem.

Part II of the Bill gives local authorities the power to set up compulsory registration schemes for houses in multiple occupancy. Those are long overdue but none the less welcome. Liberal Democrats would like the Government to go much further and place on councils a legal duty to enforce minimum standards on housing in multiple occupancy. We shall discuss that matter in Committee. Despite the fact that the Government enable councils to charge for setting up such registration schemes, we are, as usual, concerned about how local authorities will find the finance to do that.

The Secretary of State discussed leaseholds. He criticised other parties for not coming forward with their policies. He has proposed a Bill that he will amend and we still do not know what will happen to leasehold properties. We all agree that something must be done because we have been heavily lobbied by people experiencing problems and the Minister discussed those this afternoon.

We are concerned about chapter I of part III, which proposes to reduce the amount of time that private tenants can be in arrears before their landlords can evict them. It is another blow to private tenants, many of whom are already reeling from the Government's housing benefit changes. If we look closer, we see that the Government's proposals do not add up. They encourage private landlords by making it easier for them to evict tenants, yet they cut housing benefit from every direction. Landlords are being sent conflicting messages. Tenants are being hit on every side, and insecurity will be the order of the day. Tenants on housing benefit can easily run up eight weeks' arrears with no delay on their part.

I should be interested to know whether the Minister or anyone else in the Department of the Environment has ever sat through a housing benefit review board case. If they had, they would realise how difficult it will be to make the Government's proposal work. Many housing benefit departments are already struggling to cope with the changes and are way behind with payments. Moreover, tenants trying to obtain housing benefit must often acquire information and pieces of paper from a wide area, including the Benefits Agency and the Department of Social Security. The Bill will make the private rented sector extremely difficult for all tenants, yet the Government are to inflict that measure on homeless families.

I also welcome the requirement for local authorities to advise people about housing and homelessness. I hope that, during the passage of the Bill, we shall receive clearer information on how the Government expect that to happen. Many of us are concerned that people should have independent advice.

I also welcome most of part V. Local authorities need additional powers to deal with anti-social tenants on their estates. Liberal Democrats make three proposals: first, we need better resource, prevention and conciliation measures; secondly, we need tougher tenancy contracts to ensure that tenants are aware of what their contracts mean in practice and how they will be enforced; and, thirdly, the law needs to be changed to make it easier for local authorities to pursue anti-social tenants. The Association of District Councils has been requesting that for some time. I hope that chapters II and III of part V will fit the bill.

**Mr. Bennett:** What will happen to tenants who are evicted?

**Mrs. Maddock:** If tenants are being extremely difficult to their neighbours, they must be housed elsewhere and helped to ensure that they keep their tenancy going. That will happen only in extreme cases, but people cannot be allowed to get away with making other people's lives a misery.

The Secretary of State presented no evidence that probationary tenancies will work. The pilot projects are still going on. I do not know whether we shall have the evidence from those before the Bill completes its passage. Introductory tenancies will lead to a two-tier system with no real advantages.

I am also concerned about the blanket granting to housing association tenants of the automatic right to buy their homes. Liberal Democrats do not oppose home ownership or allowing people in the social rented sector to buy their homes. Housing associations should allow

their tenants to buy their homes if they can afford to do so, if the homes can easily be replaced and if it is in the local community's interest. We are not unsympathetic to the idea of providing them with grants to do so, and most of the councillors with whom I have discussed this matter share my view that the effects of the voluntary purchase grants scheme will benefit many individuals and many areas.

However, I believe that the Government's mania for a right to buy has led them to produce proposals which are badly flawed. We have heard this afternoon about the exemption for communities of fewer than 3,000 people but, like many other provisions, that is not on the face of the Bill. There is great concern that the Government are using criteria that are too crude. I hope that the matter will be considered in Committee and that other criteria will be brought to the fore.

This morning I received a communication from East Dorset district council in my area. It is very concerned that there will be little money left after the house sales. Although the councils may keep the money that is raised from the sales, by the time they have rearranged loans and so on, less than 50 per cent. of the money will be available to them to build replacement properties.

The Bill also introduces new and far-reaching changes for the Housing Corporation and they will need fairly detailed scrutiny in Committee. There is a strong case for reforming the corporation as it will be assuming extra powers. We welcome particularly the appointment of a housing ombudsman because, if housing companies are to be the new landlords—it appears that this time we shall not have landlords who simply want to make a profit—we must have decent regulation.

I turn now to the heart of the Bill: the changes in the allocation of social housing and the consequent changes in local authorities' duties to the homeless in parts VI and VII of the Bill. In the light of my experience as a member of a large housing authority for almost 10 years and as a Member of Parliament for a constituency with two different types of local authorities, I find it difficult to swallow the Minister's attitude that the Government's proposals are perfectly reasonable and perfectly sensible.

I have shared platforms with the Secretary of State and, to hear him speak about the proposals, one would think that they are uncontroversial. Sometimes one would think that there is no need for housing legislation. One gets the impression that all is sweetness and light and that there is nothing wrong in the housing sector that a little fine tuning will not solve. We heard that sentiment expressed again this afternoon.

That view runs completely contrary to the views of everyone who is involved in the housing world—be it professional organisations, the voluntary sector, local authorities or housing associations throughout the land. When the Government were first elected in 1979, they claimed housing to be a top priority. They promised council tenants the right to buy, more choice in the private rented sector and greater mobility through the property-owning democracy.

Some 17 years later, we are witnessing housing problems which affect individuals and communities as never before. No one is immune—as home owners who took out large mortgages in the 1980s and who are now facing employment difficulties will testify. Some 19 years ago, the late Stephen Ross, a Liberal Member of Parliament—for the benefit of the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason), I supported Mr. Ross then and I still support his actions at that time—introduced the Housing (Homeless Persons) Bill, which enjoyed all-party support. Perhaps the trigger for that legislation was the screening of the television documentary "Cathy Come Home", which alerted many people to the scandal of homelessness on our streets and the dreadful problems that people face when they are left without a home.

In introducing the legislation, Stephen Ross explained very eloquently why homeless families need secure tenancies rather than temporary accommodation, which forces people to move continually from place to place. He said:

> "In 1948 it was believed that a short stay in some kind of temporary accommodation would be adequate to tide people over . . . That may have been so then, but the nature of homelessness today is certainly not like that . . . The need of most homeless people is a permanent solution to their problem which they have been unable to arrange for themselves."—[*Official Report*, 18 February 1977; Vol. 926, c. 898.]

I shall now cite some figures—I make no apologies for doing so, as the Government seem to turn a blind eye when it comes to statistics. In 1977, local authorities in England accepted that more than 31,000 households were homeless. That was regarded as a scandal at the time. For the 12 months to the end of September last year, there were more than 124,000 acceptances. In 1977, slightly more than 4,500 properties were repossessed by mortgage lenders. In the year to June 1995, the comparable figure was almost 50,000.

The problems in housing are deeper now than at any time since the immediate post-war period—there is insecurity, disrepair and homelessness. Yet unlike in the 1940s and 1950s, this Government do not seem to have the political will to tackle the root problem: the simple lack of rented housing which people can afford. Since 1979, Government investment capital in housing has fallen from £6.4 billion to less than £3 billion.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I shall ask the hon. Lady the same question as I asked the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). We have met our manifesto commitment to build more than 150,000 houses since we were elected in 1992, but the hon. Lady criticises the Government's policy. In the unlikely event that the Liberal Democrats were elected to power, how many houses would they build each year and how much would they spend on the social housing sector?

**Mrs. Maddock:** I supported the Government two years ago when they forecast how many houses they would build and how much money they would spend. However, I would not have reneged on that promise: we would have gone on to build those properties. If the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is patient, I shall comment later on how we would pay for social housing.

In 1977, more than 162,000 public sector homes were completed across Britain. We will be lucky if the figure reaches 50,000 this year. For the past four years, social housing output has averaged only 60,000—which is at the bottom end of the Government's estimate of need, ranging from 60,000 to 100,000. The situation will be even worse next year. According to the Budget outcome, the Government have halved their expenditure on housing in

*[Mrs. Maddock]*

the past two years. They have estimated that there will be 51,000 new social lettings—which is 9,000 fewer than the Government's lowest estimate of housing need.

The Government seem to be alone in estimating housing need at 60,000. Even the former chief housing economist at the Department of the Environment—who until 1994 was the official Government expert on such matters—now thinks that the Government have got it wrong. Is the Minister saying that everyone but the Government has got it wrong? It seems incredible that it is almost 20 years since the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 was enacted, but apparently no lessons have been learnt about tackling the long-term problems of homelessness.

The Government continue to take a short-term approach. They are driven by an obsession with the headline figure of the public sector borrowing requirement to the exclusion of almost any consideration of the long-term benefits of investment in good-quality housing. The Government have hit the safety net for home owners and for private tenants and they now intend to hit the safety net for the homeless.

The review of access to social housing was not, of itself, a bad idea—and under different circumstances I might have welcomed it. However, it was clear from the context in which it was announced that it was less about tackling the housing crisis than about reinforcing Ministers' prejudices. Those prejudices include the belief that local authorities are bad, that home ownership is the only answer, and of course we have all heard about "back to basics". It is time that the Government stopped looking for scapegoats for those problems and started to look for solutions.

It was brought home to me very clearly before Christmas what damage the Government have done by attempting to scapegoat groups of people. A charity in my area, which provides assistance and accommodation for young homeless people, conducted an appeal before Christmas. It found hate mail in its appeal envelopes, reflecting politicians' often repeated claim that all young homeless people are wastrels. It is not so, but that is what happens when one maligns groups of people.

If the Bill succeeds, it will be the final undoing of the 1977 legislation. Last summer's judgment by the other place in the Awua case has not altered the way in which most local authorities deal with homeless families. The Government's proposals most certainly will.

The Bill represents a golden opportunity to move forwards, not backwards, from the 1977 Act, but it appears that that opportunity will be lost. Liberal Democrats will fight tooth and nail to defend the Act that Stephen Ross took through the House with all-party support.

**Sir Anthony Grant** (South-West Cambridgeshire): We are waiting with mounting impatience for the hon. Lady to say just what the Liberal Democrats would do about the housing programme. They have already pledged to increase taxation by 1p to pay for more spending on education. By how much would they increase taxation to spend more money on social housing?

**Mrs. Maddock:** The provision of housing is not a matter of revenue budgets and taxation.

The Government's proposals to encourage the use of short-term tenancies in the private rented sector for housing homeless people make bad financial sense and would be bad for families. There is no substitute for a stable, affordable home. Instability damages children's education. Using the relatively expensive private rented sector will increase the Government's housing benefit bill and make it harder for homeless people to take work without losing benefit.

The prohibition on a local authority housing a homeless household in its own property for more than two out of three years is quite astonishing. When the Secretary of State was asked about the problem of families having to move, he said that it would not happen, but the Bill will make it inevitable.

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry):** It might be helpful if I clarify the matter before the hon. Lady takes it any further. A local authority can provide temporary accommodation in its own housing for more than two years. If a family present themselves as homeless, they will be given temporary accommodation in a property owned by the local authority or a housing association, or one in the private rented sector. If that family then fulfil the criteria in the allocations policy—I suspect that the hon. Lady has not read our allocations policy, otherwise she would not have made implications about the moral prejudices that informed it—they can then be housed permanently and very rapidly, possibly in the same property.

**Mrs. Maddock:** We shall have to differ on our interpretation of the Bill. The Bill makes it clear that a tenant could be asked to move after two years in local authority housing.

It is quite amazing that the Government avoid stating anywhere in the Bill or in the consultation paper that homelessness is a factor in housing need. Insanitary housing, unsatisfactory housing conditions and people living in conditions of temporary or insecure tenure are among the proposed criteria for housing registers, yet the most severe and obvious form of housing need—homelessness—is conspicuous by its absence. I have yet to hear a good reason why we shall be debating regulations when we will have almost completed considering the Bill in Committee.

Clauses 145 and 146 are particularly draconian as they exclude a person seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom from any local authority assistance, however temporary. Apparently that includes advice or information on housing. We recently debated the effects of excluding asylum seekers from housing benefit, so the Minister should be in no doubt about my views and those of my colleagues. I remind him that we are talking about those who seek asylum officially—not illegal immigrants or people who fail to be granted asylum, but people who are waiting for the Government to process their appeals. The Government could reduce costs by dealing with those appeals more quickly.

What angers me most is the Government's complete abdication of responsibility for the current shortage of social housing, which has reached crisis level. I am angered by the sight of Ministers, who are responsible for the underfunding of housing and have reneged on promises even since I have been in the House, trying to pin the blame for the waiting lists on homeless families.

The Government are fond of talking about the marketplace. We are discussing a product for which demand greatly outstrips supply. A normal response would be to increase supply, but the Housing Bill will reduce the supply to those in most need.

We have heard much from the Government about the values by which people live in society. The Minister will know as well as I do that that is exactly what prompted the enormous write-in by members of the Methodist Church, who have written to me, to him and to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). I know that many of them will be as disappointed as I am by the lost opportunities in the Bill.

The elements of the Bill that I have welcomed should be part of a housing policy that recognises the importance of investment in housing. We spend £1.5 billion on treating people who suffer ill health because they live in cold, damp homes. There is massive unemployment in the construction industry and that represents considerable cost to the nation. More investment in housing would save the money that is being spent on those people. Most people agree that the capital receipts that are sitting in council coffers should be invested in housing, although there may be differences on how to go about it.

First, we need a change in attitude to public accounting that recognises the difference between revenue and capital spending and the value of long-term capital investment in infrastructure, as in the rest of Europe. Secondly, the Government need to recognise the importance of safety nets, whether people are renting or buying, so that fewer people are in severe housing need. We also need a mortgage benefit.

Earlier in the debate, we were asked what we would do about mortgage income tax relief. As we have said for many years, we would do away with it, but we would introduce a mortgage benefit to provide direct assistance to those who need it most.

If the Minister were to incorporate some of those suggestions into the Housing Bill, he would get more bouquets and fewer brickbats. We have the opportunity to improve the Bill in Committee. I mentioned earlier that Members have received communications from the Methodist Church. I am still receiving them and I picked up another bundle on my way to the Chamber. One of them echoes what I have been saying for some time. It says:

"Homelessness is a scandal. The Government must take responsibility."

6.7 pm

**Mr. Charles Hendry** (High Peak): First, I wish to declare an interest as set out in the Register of Members' Interests. I am chairman of Home Rent 16 to 23 plc, which rents out private rented property, although my speech will bear no relation to that sector. I am also a trustee of Big Issue Action, the charitable foundation set up by *The Big Issue* magazine to help those who are homeless on our streets.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has left the Chamber. Having heard his speech, I felt that he might have benefited from listening to others. I imagine, however, that he has left the Chamber to shave off his beard, having read all those reports in the weekend press that, in order to get advancement in the Labour party these days, one has to shave off one's beard. Having heard his speech today, I regret that, however much he shaves off, it will not make him more credible.

The hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to answer many questions this afternoon, and he chose to ignore them all. He was asked, "How many pounds?"—which I thought was rather rude. My guess would be about 18 stone.

Time and again, the hon. Gentleman ignored questions that he was invited to answer. He was asked how much more money Labour would spend on housing, and whether Labour would make a commitment to bring back MIRAS in the way that it used to operate. The hon. Gentleman was asked how many more houses Labour would build. He did not even make an attempt to answer, but dodged or ignored the issues.

It is clear that Labour's approach is to be tough on policies and tough on the causes of policies—something that even the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) pointed out. It is unfortunate that the only serious part of the hon. Gentleman's speech bore no relation to the Bill. If he had taken the trouble to read the Bill, he would have realised that it directly addresses his concerns about parts of Westminster.

**Mr. Sykes:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was honest about one question directed at him? He could not defend the fact that Labour-controlled Hackney council has 2,000 empty council houses. Was that not honest of the hon. Gentleman?

**Mr. Hendry:** Of course—as honest as I would expect him to be over such a question—but no doubt he wanted to brush it aside for fear that others of my hon. Friends would ask about the number of empty houses in virtually every Labour metropolitan authority. The hon. Gentleman would have been too embarrassed to deal with such questions, so he decided to leave the Chamber.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** How does the hon. Gentleman square his remarks with the situation in Birmingham, which has about 1,800 empty council houses or 1.5 per cent. of the property stock, which is a normal minimum—but 16,800 empty houses in the private sector, which is the result of Government housing policy? How would the hon. Gentleman deal with that problem?

**Mr. Hendry:** If the hon. Lady had bothered to listen to previous debates, she would know that one of my constant themes is the number of empty houses in the private rented sector. There is a difference when it is a matter of an individual keeping his or her home empty. It may be a second home or have been inherited from a parent. Private sector homes are empty for many reasons.

A local authority has an absolute obligation to use its resources sensibly and constructively. For Birmingham to keep 1,800 houses empty is a scandalous disgrace, and reflects badly on the city council. It has chosen to keep 1,800 people in temporary accommodation when they could have been rehoused in fixed-term council property. The hon. Lady's remarks only draw attention to the shame that is cast on the city of Birmingham.

**Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Hendry:** I have given way to an intervention about the Birmingham situation once, and I do not want the hon. Gentleman to dig himself into a bigger hole. I notice that the hon. Gentleman has shaved off his moustache, so clearly he is desperately seeking to crawl back—

**Mr. Burden:** I have not.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. Is the hon. Gentleman giving way?

**Mr. Hendry:** Having maligned the hon. Gentleman's moustache, I really ought to do so.

**Mr. Burden:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I assure him that my moustache is still there. Is he aware that the former Housing Minister complimented Birmingham city council on its housing policies, not once but several times? As a housing management authority, that city council has been complimented by this Government.

**Mr. Hendry:** If—as the hon. Lady said—there are 1,800 empty local authority houses in Birmingham, 1,800 families or household units are being denied access to that accommodation. That figure is far too high, and more should be done to bring those homes back into use.

I refer to two of the most important aspects of the Bill. I welcome the extension of the right to buy to housing association tenants, which will enable money that is tied up in association properties to be recycled, to increase the supply of association properties.

I welcome also the Government's decision to re-examine the impact of that policy in rural areas. There would have been concern in my constituency, which is widely rural, if that policy had applied throughout the country, regardless of the size of the rural communities affected. I am pleased that the Government took note of recommendations and decided that the policy should apply only to populations of more than 3,000.

I urge the Government to resist appeals to raise that limit to populations of 5,000 or more. A community of 3,000 people is sizeable and will have a reasonable amount of housing stock that one could expect to be recycled. If that figure were exceeded, people in reasonably sized towns would be denied the right to buy their housing association property. I urge the Government not to go down that road.

I am disappointed that the Bill omits the original proposal to allow private companies to bid for housing association grant. I take on board my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's remark that that provision will return shortly. I seek from my hon. Friend the Minister a reassurance when he winds up that the policy has only been postponed, not cancelled. Many people would be able to build social housing of extremely good quality at a reasonable price. They could take the risk for themselves to build more houses.

The Bill would enable people who are currently homeless or on housing waiting lists to be properly treated. I approach that issue in my capacity as joint chairman for the past three years of the all-party group on homelessness. The group has examined the issue carefully on a number of occasions. Differing views have been expressed, but we have listened to advice. I commend the constructive way in which Shelter, under Chris Holmes, has put its case, and has sought to avoid political discussion and to concentrate on real concerns.

People who express such concerns do not always consider both sides of the argument. Many of my surgery cases and much of my postbag centre on housing issues. I had a surgery case on Friday of a married couple in rented accommodation who are terrified of their neighbours because of their criminal activities. That couple have been No. 1 on two separate housing lists in the borough for more than one year, but every time a house becomes available it has not gone to them, however deeply distressing their circumstances, because others have had an urgent need to be rehoused.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster): Equally sad are cases of young married couples, when one of them is obliged to live with parents and the other with in-laws. They postpone having a family, because, being responsible, they do not want to start one before getting their own home—yet see other people, probably in far better circumstances, leaping to the head of the queue.

**Mr. Hendry:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The debate has often focused on single mothers who benefit, but another surgery case involved a single mother living at her parents' home, with her six-year-old daughter sharing her bedroom. She had lived in those circumstances for five years, and for that time was No. 1 on the village housing waiting list. If that single mother's parents had said to her, "We're kicking you out and making you homeless," she would have been rehoused immediately. As that young woman decided to do what she thought was right, and her parents supported her, she has been penalised. The Bill is designed to assist in such cases.

**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe** (Bradford, South): The hon. Gentleman cited a serious problem, but is not the real problem the lack of provision rather than the size or quality of the waiting list? Should not the Bill home in on more social homes for rent?

**Mr. Hendry:** I will respond to that point, but first I will mention another recent constituency case, in which—as my hon. Friend mentioned—the person wants to move in with his partner. They are both in council accommodation, so if they were allowed to move in together, they would free up one council property, and the availability of the stock would be increased. His ranking on the list is high, but because people jump above him to a suitable house, neither of those people can move out and free that house for somebody else. Surely more attention should be given to those who have patiently waited their turn. Their rights should be looked after as well.

There is also a fundamental point of principle. Many people who are homeless have an urgent, short-term housing need. By allocating them temporary accommodation for 12 months, we could see whether they needed short-term or long-term housing. People may have a short-term housing need for only a few months, but they are allocated a council house which will be there for 20, 30 or 40 years. It is right, as laid down in the Bill, to consider everybody's housing needs together, so that the allocation of houses can be made according to overall need.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with care. Would he care to

comment on the fact that, among all the housing organisations, the Government are alone in thinking that the Bill will help? Has he seen the advertisement in *The Times* this morning, which is signed by, among many other housing organisations, the chairman of the National Housing Forum, Councillor Graham Facks-Martin, who is the last remaining Conservative councillor in the North Cornwall district? I believe the hon. Gentleman met Councillor Facks-Martin on his visit to Cornwall. Why does the hon. Gentleman feel that the Government are the only people who have got the right answer, when the broad alliance of organisations have not?

**Mr. Hendry:** The hon. Gentleman has a short memory. Every policy that the Government have put forward in the past 16 years has been opposed tooth and nail by Opposition parties and their outside advisers, but many of our policies have later been adopted—the Labour party has moved on, and the Liberal Democrats have moved in different directions. The Opposition parties have accepted what the Government have done in many areas as the only sensible way forward, although they may have opposed it a few years ago. One of the difficulties of being in government, with which the hon. Gentleman will never have to deal, is that sometimes one has to take difficult decisions, and do what one thinks is right.

The constituents about whom I have spoken, who have lost out because of the existing legislation, will welcome the Bill, and many other people feel the same.

**Mr. Betts:** Will the hon. Gentleman return to the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) asked him? My hon. Friend suggested that the problem was not the allocation of houses, but the fact that there were too few houses to allocate. Does the hon. Gentleman not believe that there should be more houses available to rent in his constituency?

**Mr. Hendry:** In answer to the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), I said that I would come to that point. I wanted to hear the hon. Gentleman's point, because, for some years, he controlled the city of Sheffield. My constituency is on the outskirts of Sheffield, and one reason why property prices were so high in my constituency is because so many people wanted to move out of Sheffield under his leadership of the council.

There is nothing in the Bill about removing homeless people's right to help. Indeed, I would suggest that many of the Bill's proposals will improve the type of help available. For example, if a single mother is allocated a flat in a high-rise block on the wrong side of town, where she knows nobody, at a stage in her life when she is most vulnerable and most needs support, that is entirely the wrong way to help her and her child. We should be trying to find the most appropriate form of accommodation for her, which may be with other single mothers or staying at home with her parents. The first way to help single mothers should not be to give them flats on their own, because that often results in their being in a more difficult situation, in which they cannot bring up their children as well as they would wish.

I shall now deal with the point that has been made in a couple of interventions. Some people argue that the problems have arisen only because of the lack of homes. In 1979, there were 2 million fewer houses than there are now. We have therefore seen a significant increase in the number of houses available. That increase has been well above the increase in the population in that period.

The biggest change has been in the number of people who are living on their own. In 1971, there were 3 million single-person households, and they made up one fifth of all households. In 1991, that figure had risen to 5 million single people, or one quarter of all households. By 2011, the expectation is that there will be 8 million single-person households, or one third of all households.

We must question whether it is the responsibility of the taxpayer to build more houses every year simply to take account of people's desire to have a different life style from that of their elders. All of us had parents who started life in rented accommodation, and, as they could, bought their own homes so that they could have more space. We must ask ourselves whether it is right that the taxpayer should be funding young people's desire to leave home earlier in their lives rather than stay at home, as many people did in the past.

**Mr. William O'Brien:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Hendry:** I am very close to the end of my speech, and I do not intend to detain the House further.

I hope that, in his response to the debate, the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) will return to a point that his hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about spending capital receipts.

The Secretary of State was absolutely right when he replied that, under Labour, that would be a way of moving capital receipts and housing money from one part of the country to another. If that will not be the case, I would like an absolute assurance—a 100 per cent. guarantee—that a Labour Government would allow the money that has been raised in High Peak and Derbyshire Dales, which are both prosperous areas, to remain in those areas and be spent there. If not, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras inadvertently said something that he did not mean. I hope that the hon. Member for Greenwich will give that clear guarantee.

There is no doubt that recent homelessness figures have been very worrying, but those figures have peaked and have since been declining. For example, local authority homelessness acceptances peaked in 1991, and the figure has now dropped by some 20 per cent. The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation also peaked in 1991, and has dropped by two thirds for those in bed and breakfast. Of course, progress can still be made.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The figures are still double what they were in 1979.

**Mr. Hendry:** There is no point the hon. Gentleman making that contrast between the figures. They are now coming down. He would do more credit to himself and his party by accepting the reality of the situation, rather than the biggest scare story.

We must tackle the problems of today and the future, rather than those of the past. The Bill is clearly part of the solution, and I hope that the House will give it a Second Reading tonight.

6.27 pm

**Mr. Stephen Timms** (Newham, North-East): I wish to concentrate on the homelessness provisions in the Bill, which I think are deeply worrying. I am worried because of what I have observed as a member of the council in Newham in east London since 1984, and as a member of the housing committee throughout that time.

After I was elected in June 1984, I was appointed to a sub-committee that was directed to address the problem of homelessness in Newham. At that time, the only temporary housing option for homeless people was bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I remember that we had about 30 families in bed and breakfast in November 1984. We were worried by that large number, and we were determined to ensure that every one of those families would be in a permanent home in time for Christmas.

Twelve years on, it seems amazing that we could even have contemplated that idealism. That sort of caring at Christmas must surely belong to another era, but it was only 12 years ago. We managed it—by Christmas 1984 there was not one homeless family in bed and breakfast in Newham. Well, those days of innocence did not last very long. A couple of years later, we had 600 families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The costs were immense, and the council's budget process became a matter of cutting services in order to fund the mushrooming bed-and-breakfast bill.

Cuts in services were not the only damage caused. I vividly remember visiting, in 1986, a bed-and-breakfast hotel in central London which the council was using. Other hon. Members have described the abject misery of a family living in a single room, perhaps with just a wash basin and a gas ring, and eking out an existence for a year or more.

We found an alternative by leasing homes from their owners for temporary accommodation. The Government introduced restrictions to make that as difficult as possible, but it was a means of providing reasonable accommodation, less costly than bed and breakfast, for families waiting for permanent homes to become available.

Homelessness is a desperate plight for a family to endure. Indeed, it destroys families. Until now, at least there has been the assurance that a secure and permanent home would ultimately be available where a family could put down roots, recover from its ordeal and develop as a family should. Unfortunately, that is what the Bill, if implemented, would abolish.

We know that homelessness is deeply disruptive. Families are moved from one temporary home to another. Over the weekend, I spoke to a social worker about the consequences of that movement. Children are barely settled in one school before they are precipitately moved to another. The ordeal is then repeated. Mothers are shifted from families, friends and support to wherever temporary accommodation happens to be. They are then shifted again.

That is happening to those who are already the most disadvantaged families in our communities. What chance do they have after they have been through that experience a few times? The purpose behind the Bill is to make that shifting, transient way of living not merely a temporary feature of people's lives while homeless but a permanent way of life.

If implemented, the Bill would lead to a class of children who would grow up never knowing what it is to have a secure home. That is a chilling prospect. We understand from recent debates that we all want everyone to have a stake in our society. The Bill would take us in exactly the opposite direction. It would rob people of the dignity of a secure home. I know many council tenants in Newham who still enjoy the dignity of a secure council home. They are able to criticise and make complaints to the local councillor, as they do, when things are not right. Their children will not be so fortunate.

What will happen? Under the proposals set out in the Bill, a local authority will have discharged its obligations to a homeless family if it has placed it in a shorthold tenancy of a minimum of one year. Beyond the year, the family can be evicted at any time with two months' notice. The family can never be certain that it will be able to live in the same place for more than another two months.

If, for example, there is finally an upturn in the housing market and landlords are able to start selling property, a landlord will have to give only two months' notice to a tenant on a shorthold tenancy. The tenant will then have to quit the property and become homeless again. The loss of security for an enormous number of people—taking people's housing stake away from them—is the Bill's major feature.

How can a secure family home be built if at any time that home could be lost at two months' notice? That could happen with a shorthold tenancy.

Which local authority takes responsibility when a family becomes homeless at the end of a 12-month shorthold tenancy in which the family was placed as a result of homelessness? Is it the placing local authority or the authority where the shorthold tenancy is located? That is not clear at present.

Which authority pays the housing benefit? If, as I understand, it is the Government's intention that the placing authority retains responsibility, will that remain the position if the shorthold tenancy lasts for longer than a year, for 15 or 18 months, two years or 10 years? At what point does the receiving authority take on responsibility?

A disturbing by-product of the Bill is the incentive that will be created for unscrupulous local authorities—there are a few—to export their homeless families to other areas, so that those areas, or authorities, pick up the cost of education, social services, and ultimately, at the end of the shorthold tenancy, that of rehousing.

Homelessness re-created by the ending of shorthold tenancies is not merely a remote possibility. By 1992, 5 per cent. of all households accepted for permanent rehousing by local authorities were homeless as a result of a shorthold tenancy ending, according to the statistical bulletin issued by the Department of the Environment. By 1995, the proportion had doubled to 10 per cent. It is the third most significant cause of homelessness.

A third of households had become homeless because parents or others were unable to carry on accommodating them. A further 20 per cent. became homeless because of relationship breakdown with a partner. Of this group, 10 per cent. became homeless because a shorthold tenancy had come to an end.

In the most recent figures, for the third quarter of 1995-96, there was an increase to 12 per cent. The trend is clear: the ending of shorthold tenancies is already a

major factor in creating homelessness. It is rapidly becoming more and more significant. If the Bill is enacted, the factor will become much more significant.

We can see the revolving door starting to spin. It is that of temporary accommodation to shorthold tenancy to homelessness. The process continues. How is it possible to keep a family together under such pressure? Where is the Government's support for the family? Who will pay the price of disrupted childhoods, under-achievement at school and family breakdown that the Bill's revolving door to homelessness will create?

I do not object to shorthold tenancies for those who wish to rent accommodation for a limited period. Indeed, a shorthold tenancy is ideal in those circumstances. The damage is done, however, when shorthold tenancies, as proposed in the Bill, become the compulsory and sole housing solution. That is what is wrong.

We should be concentrating all our energies on creating more affordable rented homes where people can enjoy secure tenancies. Since 1979, construction of social housing has halved. It is no coincidence that the number of homeless acceptances has more than doubled in the same period. In 1979, there were more social housing construction starts than homeless acceptances. In 1994, there were nearly four times as many homeless acceptances as social housing construction starts. The problems will worsen while that imbalance remains.

The Bill will divide the pie, which is far too small, in a different and less efficient way. The losers will be those who are already the least well off. That cannot be right.

6.36 pm

**Mr. John Sykes** (Scarborough): I welcome the Bill. I welcome the general provisions that will help the private rented sector. I welcome also the provisions that will herald a clampdown on disruptive and noisy tenants. In addition, I welcome the greater powers that will be available to the Housing Corporation. All these proposed measures will be of great benefit to my constituency.

I reserve my greatest welcome to the measures that apply to badly run Department of Social Security hostels. There will be great rejoicing in my constituency following the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My constituency is well known to hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is a decent family resort, whose future depends upon tourism.

I had not heard much about DSS hostels until February 1993, when my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) asked me whether I had had any problems with them. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) is acknowledging the same experience. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne first raised the matter by means of an Adjournment debate in February 1993. I told him that I had not heard of any problems in my constituency but, by amazing coincidence, the following Saturday an old lady came into my surgery and told me about her experiences with a former hotel adjacent to her flat that had become a hostel. Her experiences were pretty dreadful.

As spring turned into summer, the trickle of complaints that I had been receiving turned into a torrent. My postbag began to swell. People would stop me in the streets of Scarborough to ask me whether there was anything that I could do to help. Mounting concern was expressed by the borough council, the hoteliers association and the police. I canvassed colleagues in the House and, as a result, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and I decided to commission a national survey. It was the most comprehensive report that had ever been carried out on English and Welsh tourist resorts and the way in which they have been affected by badly run DSS hostels. We consulted the housing, tourism and environmental departments of nearly every single coastal resort. We spoke with the forces of law and order. We asked national tourist organisations what their experiences had been. We questioned local hoteliers associations. We conferred with the Department of the Environment, the Department of National Heritage and the Department of Social Security. We consulted leisure companies whose interests lay in tourism.

After several months' work, we were able to present the report to the Prime Minister, at the end of January 1994. It makes distressing reading, for in it is a catalogue of drunkenness, assault, drug dealing, drug abuse, muggings, social security fraud, thieving, organised crime, appalling language, fighting, damage to property— *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may think that this is funny, but they should come to Scarborough and Blackpool and see for themselves instead of making glib comments. We have not heard one policy from them this afternoon. I shall give way to the hon. Members for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) or for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) if they want me to.

We also included in the report a request that consideration be given to changing the "use class orders", to oblige hostels to apply for planning permission in future. I acknowledge with grateful thanks the role that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration played in helping us to secure that objective. In March 1994, we won the backing of the Prime Minister for planning permission regulations.

In addition, the Prime Minister promised to look carefully at the case for the licensing of existing hostels. The case for a licensing scheme was cast into hideous focus by the Richmond fire, which took place in May 1994. I awoke in the early hours of the morning to be told of the grim tragedy that had overwhelmed my constituency, when a tiny baby and a young woman were killed in that terrible fire. I pay particular tribute to the firefighters who, by their efforts, saved many more lives while putting at risk their own. It remains a source of bitter regret to me that in the meantime I have not been able to stop North Yorkshire county council from sacking those same firefighters and throwing them on to the scrap heap.

Twenty long months have passed since then, and the evidence that had been gathered through the eyes and ears of my constituents can now be supplemented by hard facts, which I present to the House tonight for the first time. It was Parliament that decided, in the form of housing benefit, to pay for the accommodation of young people who leave home at 16. It should come as no surprise that some young people decide to drift to Scarborough, Blackpool, Eastbourne and Bournemouth. Indeed, they are encouraged to do so by advertisements. This particular advertisement was for Reynolds Court hotel, in Eastbourne. It reads:

"D.S.S. welcome. Eastbourne hotel just off seafront. Breakfast, evening meal and weekly linen service provided. TV lounges, pool tables etc. Immediate occupation with no deposit required."

*[Mr. John Sykes]*

In Norfolk, another advertisement appeared in a famous housing magazine, which went as follows:

"Peace and quiet. Spectacular ocean views. Magnificent countryside. North Norfolk coast. Cromer/Sheringham. Why be homeless in the city? Accommodation now for up to 80 people in lovely furnished single, double or family rooms. Rooms are sited in shared houses on the cliffs or coming soon is a large former hotel on the seafront"—

presumably with satellite television and in-house movie channel included.

"All assistance given with forms for housing benefit which will cover most of your rent. Spend your time taking it easy or learning a new skill from the many courses available locally.

Act now. You choose. Stay homeless in the city or get a life."

That advertisement speaks for itself.

I commend the actions of Scarborough borough council, whose extremely professional approach to the problem has helped to keep the problems caused by badly run DSS hostels within relative limits. It was the first to use its existing powers of registration. That is why we know that in Scarborough there are 560 DSS hostels. It conducted a survey of the Westville hotel, a well-known DSS hostel—fortunately, it has closed down—in a picturesque little square near Scarborough station. Out of 18 tenants, only five had previous addresses in Scarborough. The rest had come from Wakefield, Leeds, South Shields, Hull, Pontefract, "no fixed abode" and Her Majesty's prison. In other words, two thirds had come from conurbations out of town.

Throughout the campaign, no Member of Parliament representing a seaside constituency had asked for Government restrictions on where people should move or where they can make a living for themselves, but why should small towns such as Scarborough, Blackpool and Bournemouth take more of their fair share of the homeless, when there are empty council houses in Labour-controlled authorities from one end of the country to the other? Even more important, why should a married couple in Scarborough, Blackpool, Bournemouth or Eastbourne, who have been waiting patiently for years for a council house, perhaps for a secure roof over their head before they start a family, go to the back of the housing queue because of some teenage priority waltzing into town? That is wrong.

The drift to the coast can be confirmed in the increase in housing benefit payments. In the four years to 1994, housing benefit payments in Middlesbrough, which is near Scarborough, increased by 30 per cent., whereas in Scarborough the increase was 58 per cent. In Manchester, the increase was only 19 per cent., whereas in Blackpool it was 60 per cent. In Glasgow, the increase was only 18 per cent., but in Margate it was 64 per cent. In Bristol, the increase was a meatier 45 per cent., but in Weston-super-Mare, which is in the same area, it was 70 per cent. In Liverpool, the increase was 29 per cent. In Newquay, it was 80 per cent. Those figures speak for themselves.

There was also an increase in the number of people signing on. In the five years to 1994, the number signing on in Scarborough increased by 62 per cent. In Weston-super-Mare, the increase was 103 per cent. In Margate, the increase was 124 per cent. In Southend, it was 169 per cent. In Eastbourne, it was 196 per cent., and in Worthing, it was 235 per cent. Those are not anecdotal figures, as some in Whitehall would have us believe. There are undue concentrations of unemployed young people drifting to the coast, where there is little or virtually no chance of getting a job. It is unfair to ask resorts to shoulder more than their fair share.

The most unbearable manifestation is the badly run DSS hostel, usually owned or managed by unscrupulous landlords. They are the real fat cats, with their noses firmly in the housing benefit trough. They are the landlords who cram unfortunate tenants like sardines into their hotels. They are the landlords whom I want to drive into the sea and out of business for ever. The badly run DSS hostels can be small former guest houses with five or six tenants, or they can be large former hotels with up to 100 tenants. The effect of just one badly run DSS hostel can be devastating in a town such as Scarborough.

These are just a few of the complaints that I have received from the Scarborough Hotels Association in the past 12 months. Opposition Members must listen very carefully before they vote against the Bill. The complaints included loud music, children crying and screaming, fights and violence, windows smashed, rubbish in hotel gardens, smelly drains, using the garden as a toilet, men holding a dog out of a window, damage to crescent gardens, repairing cars in the street, children being injected with hypodermic needles, guests being accosted, violence in the local store, abuse to guests and hoteliers, obscene suggestions to lady guests, and, finally, guests leaving the hotels, never to return. That is where the problem lies, as it sets up a cycle of despair, a vicious circle, because the hotelier who lives next door does not get any guests the next year, so he in turn has to convert his premises into a DSS hostel, thus establishing the cycle of despair in towns such as Scarborough.

Badly run DSS hostels are often the centre of organised crime and violence. We do not get many murders in Scarborough, but in 1994 we had three, and two of those were directly attributable to badly run DSS hostels. The national crime figures are even worse. They paint an ugly picture that points to drug-crazed youths stealing to feed their vile habits. In the four years to 1994, the national average of convictions for shoplifting increased across the country by 8 per cent., but in coastal resorts, the increase was 47 per cent. The national average for theft from cars increased by 9 per cent., but in coastal resorts, the increase was 30 per cent. The national average for trafficking in drugs increased by quite a terrible 71 per cent., but in the resorts the increase was 101 per cent.

As usual, the devil is in the detail when we look at the figures, because convictions for trafficking in drugs in Eastbourne increased by 81 per cent. In Worthing, they increased by 100 per cent. In Ramsgate, they increased by 165 per cent. and in Scarborough, they increased by a staggering 350 per cent.

These badly run DSS ghettos are no seasonal feature of our cold English winters. They are a permanent and profoundly corrosive feature of life at the seaside. Anyone who imagined for a moment that Members of Parliament such as my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North, for Bournemouth, East, for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) and myself would sit idly back and watch the British tourism industry die a slow and agonising death because of such places would be sadly mistaken.

That is why that group of hon. Members representing British resorts—Tories to a man—are grateful for the support that has been given by our hon. Friend the Minister. That is why we are glad that we have made a sufficiently good case for a tougher scheme, allowing local authorities to cut the cancer out of badly run DSS hostels and thus to arrest the decay that has already eaten at the fringes of our great tourism industry. Some of England's finest jewels will thereby be preserved for generations to come.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I remind hon. Members that Madam Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm.

6.50 pm

**Mr. William O'Brien** (Normanton): Those who read the speech of the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) in *Hansard* will note the effect of 17 years of Tory government. The hon. Gentleman spoke of an increase in crime, of people being driven by unemployment to the coast in an attempt to find jobs and of a rise in homelessness. Indeed, he treated us to a catalogue of failures, and I am sure that the Labour party in Scarborough will latch on to it. The hon. Gentleman's speech emphasised the need for the fair and proper legislation that is not provided in the Bill that we are discussing.

Housing is a major social problem. In my constituency it is paramount, in both the rented and the owner-occupied sectors. For years, the Government have done little to help those with housing problems. Part I of the Bill supposedly deals with the social rented sector, but in fact it deals only with the Housing Corporation, giving it new powers over housing associations, but no accountability to anyone except the Secretary of State. I consider that part of the Bill cruel and dishonest. It does not allow local authorities to build social housing, although they are expert at doing so and have a long history of social housing management.

The Bill offers no help to the 250,000 people who bought their homes from the social rented sector, and now find themselves in the negative equity trap. It also contains no measures to help the 1,000 families a week who become homeless when their homes are repossessed, although that has a devastating effect on family life. In many instances, such suffering is caused by redundancy or a business collapse. The Bill does nothing to help home owners, or to restore confidence in the housing market. Many people expected it to help tackle the underlying problems facing our housing stock, but nothing has been done to increase investment in either the public or the private sector. The Government still prevent councils from investing capital receipts in social rented housing.

Clauses 15 and 16 refer to the right to buy for housing association tenants. The National Federation of Housing Associations has no objection to its tenants purchasing their homes, and the Government are currently introducing a voluntary scheme that is acceptable to housing associations. In the past, the NFHA has argued that associations should be allowed to sell houses to tenants in particular circumstances, but housing associations fear that they too could experience the devastation experienced by local authorities, given the shortage of houses available at an affordable rent.

The Bill is so inflexible that it may well result in fewer houses in the rented sector, causing greater hardship to people who need social housing. Houses in the social rented sector are already in short supply, and unless the houses that are sold are replaced, the number will be further reduced. The NFHA has told the Minister of its fears relating to the selling of certain houses in certain areas, or houses that were built with agreed terms. It has also described the problems of replacing those houses for rent, and the restriction of future agreements with providers of help.

In the past, people have donated money or land to housing associations with the firm intention that it be used for the specific purpose of providing low-cost rented homes for those most in need. If the Government legislate for the sale of houses that were built with a minimum amount of public money, there will be fewer such donations.

**Mr. Curry:** That is not true. We have made it clear that, where properties have been built and land donated, there is no question of housing authorities being obliged to put the houses up for sale. As for existing properties, housing associations must opt into the scheme in any event: there is no question of their being compelled to put the properties on the market. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, I am very sensitive to those issues, and we have gone a long way to meet the NFHA.

**Mr. O'Brien:** I appreciate the Minister's intervention. In Committee, however, there will be more pressure on him to give such assurances, and to ensure that they are contained in the Bill rather than in a consultative document.

The Bill has been criticised by various people and organisations with housing interests, but everyone's concerns have been dramatically heightened by the changes in the law relating to homelessness, which constitute an attack on the most vulnerable people. If the Bill is not amended, some homeless people will never be able to obtain permanent homes from local authorities. Local authorities' duties to help the homeless will be restricted to the provision of a minimum of one year's temporary accommodation. Moreover, if there is suitable alternative accommodation within the local authority area, an authority will not be responsible for housing the homeless. Both local authorities and the NFHA want that part of the Bill to be withdrawn.

The present homelessness legislation provides an important and improved safety net for homeless families and other vulnerable homeless people, allowing them to obtain a permanent home and start to build a stable family life. If homeless people are offered only temporary accommodation, there is every danger that they will constantly be moved around, which will have a tremendous effect on family life. That will have a major impact on stable communities. It will no doubt have a lasting effect on the children of homeless families, who could be moving from school to school every time the family has to move. That part of the Bill should be withdrawn because of the inhuman approach to homeless people.

I recommend to the Minister the proposals by Wakefield metropolitan district council's housing department. In co-operation with the county council's

*[Mr. O'Brien]*

housing association—the Chantry housing association—it is providing homes for homeless people. They are taking over empty properties and improving those properties together. The housing association is making a substantial contribution to the proposals. That will also help some of those unlucky home owners caught in the negative equity trap. The end will soon be in sight for them to be able to sell their properties.

I suggest that the Minister take note of the programme. The housing department press release states:

"Properties need to be in good, general repair to be eligible for the . . . scheme. They must be self-contained with their own bathroom, have a fixed form of heating in living rooms and bedrooms and meet a number of basic safety requirements. Owners remain responsible for maintenance during the leasing period which would normally be three years."

Without the legislation that is being proposed, local authorities and housing associations are providing accommodation for homeless people. If the Minister had more confidence in the work of those who have experience in providing social housing, and if there were more confidence in local authorities and local housing associations, there would be no need for such legislation.

The Bill is a bad Bill. If amendments are not accepted to provide more openness in regard to the quango of the Housing Corporation, there will be a lack of confidence. If there are no amendments to help and to provide for home owners and homeless people, there will be a greater deterioration in the provision of social housing. To allow more freedom to local authorities to provide houses would be a substantial step in the right direction. We need such an amendment to the Bill.

If changes are not made to the Bill, Labour Members must oppose it and assure people who need help with housing that the next Government, in which my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) will serve as Minister with responsibility for housing, will ensure that such people will be given priority, and that democracy will apply to housing issues. If changes are not made to the Bill to meet some of the points raised by Labour Members, we should oppose it.

7.3 pm

**Dr. Ian Twinn** (Edmonton): It is a great shame that Labour Members have chosen, in their destructive way, to oppose the Bill and to announce that they will vote against its principle at the end of this Second Reading debate. It seeks to extend choice in housing. It seeks to extend the stakeholder principle, but Labour Members want to throw it away. As soon as we have a practical illustration of how their policies could be implemented, they want to vote against it. Two sets of standards are being operated by Labour Members. Today, we will see them being operated once again, when they will kick in the teeth people who are trying to get a hold of a stake in society.

Besides extending a stakeholder's rights through housing ownership and through opportunities for private and social renting, the Bill would extend fairness and justice throughout our housing system—principles to which Labour Members should pay a bit more attention rather than sniggering and sighing when they are mentioned. Conservative Members get just as angry about housing issues as Labour Members. We are all constituency Members of Parliament. Most of us sit in our surgeries on Fridays or Saturdays and listen to hard cases about housing.

It is wrong to take individual cases and build laws on them alone: we have to examine what is happening over the whole sector. The present housing allocation system, for example, operates against the interests of people who are being responsible and who have genuine housing needs—they are outcasts from that system. I hope, therefore, that Labour Members will think again about their objections to the principle of the Bill.

The right-to-buy measures are particularly welcome. It is wrong that, if two people are on the housing list, in places one and two, and go along for their allocation of housing, the first one can be allocated a local authority house and gradually develop the right to buy, but the second can be allocated a housing association house and be denied the right to buy. Both properties are developed with taxpayers' money, from public funds. One person gets the right to buy; the other is denied it.

I am pleased that the Government have listened to the pleadings of Conservative Members that there should be some justice, and that people who occupy social housing that is provided from public funds should have the right to buy. That is a great step forward and puts right a great wrong.

I am especially pleased that housing associations will be able to re-use funds thus realised and provide new social housing in their areas. Some Conservative Members who are great supporters of the housing association movement have been disappointed by its allowing itself to become sub-agents of local authorities in housing. Although that matter is not dealt with in the Bill, I hope that my right hon. Friends in the Government will reconsider the way in which housing associations operate, because they could be far more flexible towards specialist groups and in meeting specialist housing needs.

One of things that most frustrates me as a constituency Member of Parliament is that people who thoroughly deserve and need to be rehoused fall through the net of local authority rules on housing. For example, on Friday night a woman came to see me who has privately rented a one-bedroom flat for 17 years. She is a single mother with an 11-year-old daughter. She has been on Enfield borough council's housing list for 17 years. She lives opposite a tower block where vacancies frequently arise, but she has always been denied a place in two-bedroom accommodation.

The mother has been told by the now Labour-controlled authority that it is acceptable for her to share a bedroom with her 11-year-old daughter. *[Interruption.]* The Labour Whip, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), believes that that is acceptable.

**Ms Hilary Armstrong** (North-West Durham): My hon. Friend is not a Whip.

**Dr. Twinn:** The hon. Lady believes that it is acceptable for the 11-year-old daughter to be forced for ever to share with her mother.

The local authority will not allocate accommodation to the mother because, every time there is an allocation, the property goes either to people with an emergency medical need or to people on the homeless list. The Bill's housing allocation changes are therefore to be greatly praised.

**Mr. Betts:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dr. Twinn:** No. We have no time, while there is a 10-minute limit on speeches, for one of the hon. Gentleman's rambling interventions.

The leasehold reforms in the Bill are especially welcome. There is room here for agreement even with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), who appears to take a Stalinist view on most housing matters—perhaps he agrees with what we are trying to do on leasehold reform. The Bill deals with unscrupulous landlords who have found ingenious loopholes to exploit in the present law. Perhaps they divide freeholds between related companies to avoid the right of leaseholders to buy, or do not tell leaseholders when freeholds are transformed, or put in outrageous demands for service charges that are unjustified by the work that has been done, or send grotesquely inflated bills for work that should not have been undertaken. The *Evening Standard* has been especially good at exposing what has been happening. A company called Linkproud has been operating with Empress Estates throughout London in a most outrageous way. The Bill seeks to tackle such practices and to give leaseholders some real power over unscrupulous freeholders.

One group of leaseholders will be listening carefully to Conservative Members on the topic of leasehold and freehold reform. They are the people who bought local authority properties in tower blocks and in system-built blocks. Some of the descriptions of unscrupulous landlords could be applied to some local authorities, which have inflicted inflated and unjustified bills and outrageous behaviour on right-to-buy leaseholders. I hope that, in his winding-up speech, my hon. Friend the Minister will assure us that the proposed provisions for freeholders will apply also to local authority freeholders. That would go some way towards helping those who are trapped, in difficult circumstances, in leasehold properties in tower blocks.

I welcome some of the Bill's detailed proposals, such as the proposed action to end forfeiture proceedings until service charges have been properly confirmed. The absolute right, to be given to leaseholders, to buy their freehold is also important. We must take the gloves off in the battle against freeholders, and the Bill does just that. I hope that, in Committee, hon. Members will stand up for the rights of existing tenants and for those in real housing need who have slipped through the present system. We should not give in to the Opposition, who extrapolate one sectional interest and use it to attack the Government.

It was quite clear that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) had not read the Bill—some of his comments about it were blatantly wrong. As has been said, the hon. Gentleman went perilously close to misleading the House. I am sure that, in his wildest dreams, he would not want to do that. I recommend to Opposition Members that, in future, they spend their weekends more productively by reading legislation before they dare to speak about it in the House.

7.11 pm

**Mr. Clive Soley** (Hammersmith): The fundamental cause of our housing problems is the lack of affordable accommodation. That is why more people than ever are homeless and begging in the streets. It is why there are more people than ever in temporary or bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It is also why the Government are desperately fiddling about with a rationing system for homelessness and entry to the housing queue. Rationing occurs when there is a shortage, but the Government do not acknowledge that and they are not trying to solve the basic problem.

It has not been said today that, in England and Wales, with a population of about 50 million, fewer houses are being built in the public rented sector than are being built in Northern Ireland, which has a population of 1.5 million. We could have an interesting debate about why the Government think that it is necessary to build more social housing in Northern Ireland but do not apply the same criteria to the rest of the United Kingdom.

The second underlying problem is that the Government have done nothing to help low-income home owners. The Bill will not help them either. Conservative Members have asked how we would pay for such help, but until we address the issue of the reform of housing finance we will not be able to get that one right. The housing finance system is inequitable and inefficient. Does anyone seriously believe that £10 billion a year on housing benefit, much of which goes to landlords who do not need it, is a good way to subsidise housing? The Government started to recognise that when they reformed mortgage interest relief—by cutting it. They did it in the worst possible way because they gave no help to low-income mortgage holders, which is what they ought to have done. That is why some people are still in mortgage difficulties.

Conservative Members who ask about financing should remember that about one in nine homeless applications to local authorities come from people who have had their houses repossessed. The mortgage company or bank gets the house and can sell it; the local authority puts the family into bed-and-breakfast or temporary accommodation for which we, the people, pay. As a result, the family suffers incredible stress while the house sits empty awaiting sale in a depressed housing market which it depresses still further.

Before the last election, we suggested to the Government a mortgage rescue scheme that was designed to help such people. I had it costed by the Council of Mortgage Lenders. At that time, the chief executive of the council was a member of the Tory party and had been a Tory candidate at an election. He accepted that the package was cost free, but the Government refused to accept it.

The Secretary of State outlined his proposals for freeholders and the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) said that it was time we took the gloves off. We said that, and tabled amendments to that effect, in Committee on the Bill that became the Housing Act 1988. Conservatives voted them down. The Secretary of State says that he wants to get tough on landlords who are not fulfilling their obligations to people in houses in multiple occupation. We have known about that for years. We twice put down amendments to the 1988 Bill to deal with that, especially in the context of seaside towns about which the Secretary of State also spoke, but Conservative

*[Mr. Clive Soley]*

Members voted them down. It is only now that the consequences of their actions in relation to what became the 1988 Act are beginning to be felt. They must face the fact that they have failed to act on such problems.

The issue of empty properties is dealt with only as an aside in the Bill, but we have heard about it from Conservative Members. For the past 16 years, the Government have consistently been the worst offenders on empty properties. Even now, in the Biggin hill area, they are dumping Government homes on the public market for sale. There is much negative equity in that area, and their action will depress the housing market even further. They could save money by transferring those houses to housing associations or local authorities, which could deal with the queue about which the hon. Member for Edmonton complained. That is a way in which to address the problem of rationing that the Government have created.

Local authorities and housing associations are much more effective at letting properties than the private sector or the Government. Hackney has been mentioned as a bad example. I am the first to accept that, in the past, Hackney's management has not been good. However, a year or two ago, Hackney's voids were about 5.3 per cent. They are now down to about 3 per cent., but only if the tower blocks that the Government have said must be knocked down are taken out of the calculation. The Government are giving money to have them knocked down.

We are in a febrile political atmosphere, but I should have thought that even in this pre-election bonanza period we could still get some cross-party agreement that, by and large, it is desirable to take tenants out of high-rise flats before they are demolished. I have given the reason for the Hackney figures being so high; we should focus on that as well.

My advice to the Government is simple: stop selling Government-owned empty properties, start handing them over to housing associations and councils and start dealing with the rationing that the hon. Member for Edmonton does not like. Conservative Members complain about the right to buy in rural areas in certain circumstances. I wish that the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) were in his place. The right to buy, matched by a duty to replace and a housing finance system that enabled councils and housing associations to replace homes that were sold, is a good policy. A housing policy that consists of a right to buy but does not enable replacement of the homes that have been sold is a disaster, but that is what the Government have given us over the years. Now, suddenly, the hon. Member for High Peak and some other Conservative Members have begun to complain because they fear that too many houses might be sold in rural areas. Exactly the same problem has been hitting us in urban areas for donkeys years. If we could have replaced the houses that were sold, we would not have the queues of today and there would not be 2,000 or 3,000 people in areas such as mine living in emergency accommodation.

The problem is primarily the Government's. Yes, one or two people abuse the system and keep their council houses when they should get rid of them—there are examples of that in my constituency—but the core problem lies with the Government for it is they who have failed to provide the mechanism by which the houses that are sold can be replaced so that more houses can be made available in the rented sector.

What is the fundamental problem? A housing finance regime that allows all the money to be allocated in housing benefit instead of recognising that we need to return to a system—as the Duke of Edinburgh's report, with which just about everyone agreed, rightly said some years ago—of subsidising bricks and mortar, at least in part.

There is no sense in giving, as we do at the moment, housing benefit subsidy to a landlord who is in prison for harassing tenants. The Deputy Prime Minister has the audacity to say that the Labour party is on the side of villains. I have never heard of any Labour policy that argues that taxpayers' money should be used to subsidise people who are in prison—which is what the Government are doing now. It is a disgrace, we know that it is, and it should be brought to an end. If we are to do that, we must reform housing finance and recognise the rights of tenants.

I welcome the introduction of an ombudsman. We proposed that, too, during the Committee stage of what became the 1988 Act, and the Government rejected it. I am in favour of enabling the Housing Corporation to step in when bad management occurs in housing associations or councils, and to take other action to transfer accommodation from such landlords.

Why will the Government not introduce something similar in the private rented sector? Why should we not be able to strike off a bad landlord in the private rented sector who has been harassing tenants? Why do we send them to prison at enormous cost, subsidise them while they are there, and allow them to let the house and receive yet more subsidy when they are released? That is subsidising the villains. That is being on the side of the villains.

Most private landlords are good. Why do we not introduce something adventurous and flexible for a change? I would be quite prepared to subsidise private landlords in exchange for guarantees about good management—another suggestion that I made many years ago. If they failed to deliver good management, they would be struck off. That is the key to housing policy. We should stop worrying about ownership and concentrate on quality.

7.21 pm

**Mr. David Atkinson** (Bournemouth, East): I welcome the majority of measures in the Bill. I especially welcome the further modest encouragement and incentives that it provides for the private rented sector. I am conscious that, in my constituency, many houses are under-occupied, often by elderly people who would welcome a tenant or two. Too often, however, they hear horror stories from people who have experienced bad tenants, so they dare not take the risk.

The Bill provides for quicker eviction of tenants who do not pay their rent and makes the advantages of shorthold more widely available so that landlords may be assured of the agreed period of tenancy. I hope that more potential small and inexperienced landlords and landladies will have the confidence to make their spare rooms available to those who are seeking accommodation.

I welcome, too, the redressing of the balance in the duty of local authorities to house local people who need accommodation, so that those who are born and bred

locally, rather than those who become homeless away from their home town, are favoured. That will give more hope to local people on the waiting list, who see complete outsiders being housed before them. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration confirmed, that proposal in no way removes the safety net for homeless people.

The Bill aims to help local authorities to respond more effectively to the immense problems posed by houses in multiple occupation. There is no doubt about the need for stronger powers. The lives of my constituents who live in the neighbourhoods of some of the properties of a well-known local provider of bedsits, Mr. Dave Wells, are a continual misery, as my postbag testifies.

The behaviour of tenants, of course, cannot be directly blamed on the landlord or the owner of the property, but landlords must demonstrate the responsibility to ensure that the neighbours enjoy a right of privacy and are free from the tenants' noise and nuisance. Unfortunately, as my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) said, people dare not complain for fear of threats and retaliation from those against whom they are complaining. Tenants are also entitled to a reasonable standard of accommodation that is safe and free from damp and rot and crumbling walls, which is certainly not the case in some of Mr. Wells' properties, as I have seen for myself.

Until my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's speech this afternoon, I feared that the Bill would prove inadequate to deal with houses in multiple occupation. That fear results from the change of use of buildings from hotels and guest houses to bedsit hostels, primarily aimed at benefit claimants, which has occurred in my authority and others in tourist areas, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) so vividly referred.

Such hotels are bought and converted into multiple units to house a maximum number of tenants. It has become big business for commercial landlords, who advertise in the inner cities and in the Republic of Ireland that those on benefit should claim in a more attractive area. As my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough said, some of those hostels have a reputation for being places of drug-related, drink-related and crime-related behaviour. As well as being offensive to local residents, the hostels very quickly lead to neighbouring hotels, especially those that cater for young families and coach parties, losing business, and the entire tourist area becomes threatened by a vicious cycle of decline and decay.

It is now clear that the planning controls introduced almost two years ago to address that problem are not working because of a lack of precise definition of a hotel, a hostel and an HMO. In any case, the controls cannot be applied retrospectively.

The new powers that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced today will allow local authorities to close down hostels without compensation in response to legitimate complaints from people in the neighbourhood. I welcome that, as I am sure does my local authority in Bournemouth.

The Bill does not, however, give local authorities what I believe they need to be able to respond effectively to the problem of HMOs once and for all. We need a licensing scheme, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough referred, which local authorities can opt for, depending on the severity of the problem in their area. It would require not only that the property be fit and proper, but that its owner be a fit and proper person to run or manage the property.

The Government have decided that such a scheme would be too costly and bureaucratic. I do not agree. A licensing scheme need not be universal. It could be limited to local authorities such as mine and those in other seaside resorts such as Blackpool and Scarborough, which are pressing for it as the only way in which to protect their tourist areas.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** And Morecambe.

**Mr. Atkinson:** And Morecambe, as my hon. Friend says. The scheme would be no different from that which applies to rest and retirement homes for the elderly, which are run by a licensee whose licence is subject to periodic renewal.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration to give further thought to the need for a voluntary licensing scheme that local authorities could use when they experienced particular problems with HMOs, which a registration scheme, such as that in the Bill, will not address.

7.28 pm

**Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): In June last year, the Chartered Institute of Housing published a report entitled "A Point to Prove" which examined cities such as Sheffield and my own town of Birmingham. It demonstrated the direct relationship between poor housing conditions, the crises in education and health and the problem of rising crime. It also demonstrated that repossessions, negative equity and rough sleeping were symptoms of the much wider housing crisis that is facing Britain.

With Government estimates showing that there will be about 3.5 million new households in England alone in the next 10 years, the institute calculated that around 120,000 new homes would be required each year in the social rented sector. Against that background, the Government have a great opportunity with the Bill to deal with those issues and to do something about an experience that I am sure every hon. Member encounters every week at his advice desk.

Unfortunately, neither the Bill nor the White Paper that foreshadowed it begins to tackle the problems. I welcome some parts of the Bill, albeit with some qualification. It is good that some progress is being made in relation to anti-social behaviour, but many more and different actions could be taken as well. It is also good that efforts are being made in relation to leasehold reform and houses in multiple occupation. I agree, however, with the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) that much more needs to be done in those spheres, and that we particularly need to examine the issue of a proper licensing scheme.

Against that, however, other aspects of the Bill are downright odious, such as weakening tenants' protection from eviction and restricting housing authorities' duty to provide accommodation for the homeless. I am still waiting for Ministers to provide a definition of which homeless families they think it appropriate to put into temporary accommodation and throw out of that

*[Mr. Richard Burden]*

accommodation later. We have given examples of possible families, but they have said, "It's not them." Sooner or later, Ministers will have to say which homeless families are appropriate for temporary accommodation. If they cannot say which families are appropriate, Ministers will have to question why that particular provision is necessary.

The Bill will have a particularly severe effect on young people. In my constituency, the south Birmingham young homeless project has already shown how the Bill, combined with the changes in housing benefit regulation, would do much to prevent young, single, homeless people under the age of 25 gaining access to secure and affordable housing.

The most striking feature of the Bill is perhaps its utter irrelevance to solving the central problem, which is the shortage of affordable homes. There is a desperate need to increase housing investment. In the west midlands, the number of homeless people in 1979 was only 6,360. By 1994, that figure had risen to 16,800. In 1979, 8,103 council, new town and housing association dwellings were started; in 1994, less than half that number were started. In the four years between 1990 and 1994, the number of mortgage possession actions rocketed in that one region.

On one level, Ministers seem to think that the shortage of affordable homes is an issue—at least they appeared to acknowledge that in what they said about the right to buy for housing associations. Why do they not follow through with the same logic when it comes to local authorities and do something to release the capital receipts that are necessary to take action against the housing shortage?

Obviously, we have become used to the Government's prejudice against local authorities. However, they must recognise that housing associations are also suffering under the financial policies that have been imposed on them by the Government. Housing associations reckon that we need about 90,000 new social housing units a year from now on. In the coming year, however, there will barely be 50,000.

The housing crisis in Britain is not just about building new homes, as important as that is; it is also a question of repairing existing homes. Because of my advice bureaux in Birmingham, I know exactly what that means. Each year, Ministers require local authorities to understate what they need to invest in home repair and, each year, Ministers then under-allocate according to that understated request. To put right its housing stock, Birmingham's real requirement is about £200 million per year, but it is not allowed to ask for that money. This year, less than £40 million has been allocated to it in terms of borrowing approval.

Let me tell the House what that means in human terms. At my advice bureau last week, I received two delegations of residents who live in tower blocks in my constituency. One delegation was from a block called Kempsey house, in Bartley Green, and the other was from three tower blocks off Long Nuke road in the Weoley ward. The conditions in which they have to live were summed up in a recent letter sent by a local Labour councillor to the local housing department after a visit to those blocks. He said:

"I am concerned about the appalling dampness in the flats in David Cox Tower in Long Nuke Road. Spending a winter in these blocks means a winter of misery. The heating is totally inadequate, the insulation in a pre-cast concrete building is hopelessly inadequate and undoubtedly contributes to massive condensation. The general dampness that results from this is injurious to the people who live there. Of particular concern is the health of the young children. To start life in the atmosphere that pervades these flats throughout the winter and spring is dangerous and contributes to these children being prone to bronchial and other diseases to the chest. Many of the people in the flats are on low incomes and get into awful financial problems because of the cost of electric heating in one room only. It costs them a fortune to fight what is frankly a losing battle."

That councillor went on to describe the situation of one resident as follows:

"Her bedroom is, at the moment, impossible to live in. I would say it is positively dangerous to sleep in because it is so damp. I put my hand on the boarded area that obviously houses a metal downpipe and that was wringing wet. I could see water dripping off the ceiling and the whole window wall was very damp. The carpet was damp and wet in sections. Clothes in wardrobes and chest of drawers quickly become damp and attract mould so they cannot be left in the room".

The residents in such blocks are not well off. However, in order to make up some of the shortfall in housing investment that the Government have allowed, tenants in Birmingham last year agreed to a £2 a week rent increase in order to begin a programme to fit UPVC window replacements and to install central heating. This year, however, Government policies will make the problem worse. Is the Minister going to deal with the problems that proposed changes to rent rebate subsidy will cause? In Birmingham, the proposed changes will mean that any rent increase above £1.17 will entail the council losing Government housing subsidy.

The system is complicated—they always are—but the impact is real enough. If the housing revenue account is to be balanced, something that would have required a rent increase of about £2 a week under last year's rules, will—if the Government's proposals go ahead—require Birmingham council tenants to pay an extra £10 a week in rent. Tenants will not be able to afford that, and the consequence is likely to be cuts in the window and central heating replacement programme. That means that people in my constituency will continue to live in cold and damp surroundings. That is the real impact of the Government's housing policy, but it is not even mentioned in the Bill.

The craziest thing of all is that the Government's attempts to save money end up costing money. The extra burden on the national health service because of asthma alone, which is induced or aggravated by poor housing, is estimated to cost £437 million every year. Where housing is poor, criminal activity is high. Wealthy homes are not the most likely to be burgled. The poorest council tenants are more than four times more likely to be burgled than those in affluent suburbs.

When all political parties are stressing their wish to improve standards in education, how can we ignore the impact that poor-quality and insecure housing is bound to have on children's performance at school? How can we ignore the impact that constant changes in housing have on those children? Those changes are likely to happen because of the changes in regulations regarding housing the homeless and temporary accommodation.

Faced with all that, why do the Government refuse to take action? I should like to conclude with a quotation from Peter Ambrose, who is the director of Urban and Regional Research, in Sussex. He said:

"Poor housing affects over ten million people"—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. I am sorry, but time is up.

7.38 pm

**Mr. Harold Elletson** (Blackpool, North): I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the very good news that he gave my constituency towards the end of last year on the housing investment programme. Blackpool's HIP allocation, which was £1,866,000 in 1995–96, has risen to £2,734,000 for 1996–97—an increase of 47 per cent. No other local authority has received such a substantial increase, and that is good news for housing in Blackpool and for my constituents.

That contrasted significantly with what the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) said about the Government failing to invest in housing. The hon. Lady has, of course, disappeared—she is no longer in her place. The longer I stay in this place, the more I notice that Liberals tend to be here today, gone tomorrow.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** As far I can see, there is not a single Liberal Democrat Member in the Chamber. Clearly, housing is of no great importance to the Liberal Democrats. Once a Liberal Democrat makes a long-winded speech, that is the lot for the day.

**Mr. Elletson:** Absolutely. As my hon. Friend says, the hon. Member for Christchurch made an extremely long-winded speech, which means that there is much less time for other hon. Members.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Government on the Bill, because much of what it proposes will be welcome news for my constituents. The Bill builds on the Government's record over 17 years of giving people more choice in housing and of enabling more people to own their own home. The Bill's proposals to increase home ownership are good news, and there is also good news for the increasing numbers of council tenants who, during the past 16 years, have been given the right to buy. It is good news also for those who want a real say in how their homes are managed.

I also thank the Minister for the help that the Department of the Environment has given to my constituents in the Queen's Park estate, who have been struggling for the past two years to free themselves from the Stalinist clutches of Blackpool's housing authority.

**Mr. Sykes:** It is a Labour authority.

**Mr. Elletson:** As my hon. Friend points out, the housing authority is controlled by Labour. It has not, however, been subject to the recent breath of fresh air of so-called new Labour that has apparently swept through other local authorities. Blackpool is, unfortunately, still a very old-fashioned housing authority. The tenants on Queen's Park estate are seeking to run their own affairs and manage their own estate and, in that regard, they will be given a great deal of valuable help and advice by the tenants' participation advisory service. I was asked to pass on the thanks of the tenants to the Minister.

**Mr. Dennis Turner** (Wolverhampton, South-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Elletson:** No. I have given way once already, and I have only 10 minutes in which to speak. I should crack on, because I want to make one or two points that are of specific relevance and importance to my constituents.

The two aspects of the Bill that I want deal with have great importance not only for my constituents but for those in seaside resorts throughout the country. First, I shall refer to the provisions in the Bill dealing with houses in multiple occupation. Secondly, I want to say a few brief words about the provisions for dealing with anti-social tenants. Those provisions will make a great difference to the quality of life of a lot of people in my constituency and throughout the country.

The House has heard what a significant problem HMOs, or benefit hostels, are for seaside resorts. It is difficult for hon. Members who do not come from seaside constituencies to understand how damaging such places can be to the tourism industry and to the quality of life of the ordinary people who live in towns such as Blackpool, Morecambe, Scarborough or Bournemouth.

Unfortunately, the tourism industry does not always get the attention it deserves. It is one of the biggest employers in the country, and one of the fastest-growing industries world wide. The industry significantly depends on its seaside element, as about 50 per cent. of all tourism in this country is connected with the seaside. We must not underestimate the importance of dealing with this crucial problem.

The growth in the number of benefit hostels in seaside resorts has been highly damaging to the tourism industry. There are about 2,000 to 3,000 benefit hostels in Blackpool—a staggering figure. There is no way on earth that the people in those hostels come exclusively from Blackpool, the Fylde coast, Manchester, Liverpool, Lancashire or anywhere in the north of England—they come from all over the place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) has pointed out that thoroughly unscrupulous landlords, who operate the most Rachman-type businesses and often put tenants into the most disgraceful Dickensian conditions, are deliberately advertising for customers to come and claim their benefit by the seaside. That has had an appalling effect.

I shall refer briefly to a number of roads in my constituency to give an example of the sheer scale of the problem. These are roads throughout Blackpool and the surrounding area to the north. In Pleasant street on North Shore, cars have been broken into and cars and local shops have been vandalised. Fights have occurred between groups of residents from the hostels and rubbish has been set alight.

In one particular hostel, the New Beverley hotel on Pleasant street, there have been four drug-related deaths in the past year. One of the victims was a 19-year-old drug addict, who was well known to the police. He had beaten up a pregnant woman and some elderly folk, he burgled homes to feed his drug habit and he had a string of convictions—exactly the sort of character one wants living in the middle of prime tourist accommodation. Just two days before his death, he had been released on bail from Lancaster Farms young offenders unit.

*[Mr. Elletson]*

In Regent road, Blackpool, there are a number of HMOs. The inhabitants bring out their armchairs from the hostels and sit on them on the pavement. They block the footpaths and swear at and abuse the passing public. One of the law-abiding citizens who has to live in this street was recently threatened with a bayonet. The police are called to this road usually every week.

I have received regular complaints that inhabitants in Knowle avenue, further up North Shore, have been sitting on the pavement all day, drinking and verbally abusing the passing public. One young woman wrote to me to describe how she witnessed a young man from a hostel urinating from the second-floor window on to street. Many residents are too frightened to walk past the hostel at any time, day or night.

The complaints that I have heard about Maitland avenue in Cleveleys range from music being played loudly until 2 am every day, to constant loud and foul abusive language, known drug-taking and fights on the premises that usually result in the police and paramedic services being called. In one particular incident, a man wielding a carving knife and shouting a torrent of abuse chased another man down the street. There is a massive amount of theft of property from cars.

How can we deal with that problem? The Government have gone some way in the Bill towards addressing the issue of a registration scheme, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) that the Bill does not go far enough. I was delighted to hear what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had to say about the scale of the powers that he appears to be ready to offer to local authorities to enable them to close down places that are having a significantly deleterious effect on the local community. I believe that the best way of ensuring that that happens is through a proper licensing scheme—possibly self-financing—that allows local authorities to opt in. In any event, we need a licensing scheme. I hope that when the Government table their amendments to the Bill, we shall see the introduction of such a scheme—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order.

7.48 pm

**Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe): We were not long into the Secretary of State's speech before the difference between what the Government say about housing and what they intend to do about it became apparent. The Secretary of State managed that in his first sentence, when he talked about the right of every family to a decent home. Unfortunately, nothing in the rest of his speech pointed to a single measure in the Bill that will provide any more homes to make that aspiration come true.

It is not that we are spending less on housing now than we were in 1979. It is just that we are spending the money on different things. Judging by the breakdown of total expenditure, we are spending only a quarter of the total housing budget on bricks and mortar. In 1979, we were spending three quarters. The difference is simple. In 1979, 10 per cent. of the total budget was spent on housing benefits and support for rent, but now it is 50 per cent. In their housing standards, the people of Britain are paying for the Government's policy of creating unemployment and forcing up rents. The money is there, but it is not being spent on providing houses and improving housing in the way that it was.

Indeed, the target that the Government set for themselves in the White Paper that they issued last year aimed not at increasing the number of homes, but simply at making more of them owner-occupied. The Government's obsession with owner-occupation has been a problem for the past 16 years. Rather than having an obsession with providing decent homes, they have one with trying to make as many homes as possible owner-occupied.

Hon. Members have mentioned people who have bought flats in tower blocks, and face massive charges for them. Of course, if the charges are over-inflated, it is wrong, but during the 1980s, under Conservative Government legislation, the Government urged people to buy the flats, criticising Labour councils that warned them of the difficulties that they would get themselves into. Again, that shows their obsession with owner-occupation and with pushing into owner-occupation people who should never have been encouraged into it in the first place.

Our surgeries show us the real housing problems. Housing is certainly the major issue in my surgeries. In the 1970s, council tenants would have been asking for repairs, but that is not the case now as we have an excellent and responsive repair service in Sheffield. People now come with their rehousing and homelessness problems and because of neighbour disputes. The first two problems can be put down to the fact that we are building half the homes for rent that we were building in 1979. Homelessness has doubled in the country as a whole and, in Sheffield, it is running at six to seven times the rate that it was when we had a Labour Government in power as well as a Labour council.

The homelessness provisions in the Bill and the way in which the Government intend to deal with homeless families will cause me to vote against it tonight. Several Conservative Members, including Ministers, have said that they have not read the Bill, as published. I have read it several times and the more I read it, the less I like it. No one will pretend that there are not some difficulties with the administration of the present homelessness legislation. Of course, there are conflicts when there is a shortage of housing—conflicts between the homeless and those in housing need. Occasionally, people use the homelessness route to queue-jump, but that is not a reason for tearing up the legislation and throwing away the rights of every homeless family. Local authorities are under pressure because of unsatisfactory and insufficient housing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) said, it is a problem of rationing. There are too few houses to go round.

Hon. Members cite examples of queue jumping and, of course, there may be some truth in some of them. In others, what is meant by queue jumping is the fact that, in the early 1980s, families could have expected to get a family home through the waiting list after two or three years and would have waited with their parents or in-laws, but as the waits have increased to 10 years for the same properties in my city, family pressures become so great that people cannot manage to live together any longer. That is why many young couples end up homeless and at the local authority's door. They are forced there by the intolerable pressures that the Government and their

housing polices are putting on family life. That is not queue jumping, but the failure of Government policy, and that is what needs to be rectified.

Ministers have said over and over again that homeless families may still get secure accommodation, but they will have no right to it. In some circumstances, they may be fortunate enough to get it. If the Minister intends to deal with the problem in his reply, he must explain how the legislation will work. My understanding is that a right to interim accommodation comes under clause 147. Clause 151 provides a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation, which may not be applied if other accommodation in the area is available—clause 155—and if the temporary housing offer is in local authority housing, a family can stay only for a maximum of two years in three. In the meantime, under clause 151, the family might become eligible for a local authority property through the housing list, according to the allocation policies in the consultation document.

There is no certainty that a family that is given a two-year temporary tenancy, which is subject to periodic review—possibly every year—will be eligible for that property at the end of, or during, the two years and no certainty that it will be offered any local authority tenancy during that period. At the end of the two years, the family, which has been accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, could be forced on to the streets, or into a hostel or a property that the local authority has temporarily leased. Even if the family gets a local authority tenancy because of its position on the housing list and according to the allocation criteria on which the Minister is consulting, it could be a different property from the temporary property. The family will therefore be faced with upheaval, not merely of its home life, but of its social life and its children's education. That is not good enough. It is not acceptable and we shall fight as vigorously as we can against it, today and in Committee.

If the Minister thinks that I am wrong and that he has a correct understanding of the Bill, I hope that he will respond. I will even give up my time now for him to explain precisely how I am wrong. If he does not explain it, I shall take it that I have given an accurate description of the Bill and that it takes away the right to secure and permanent accommodation. That is why we shall oppose it.

Neighbour nuisance is now a significant problem. We welcome some of the measures as far as they go, but I am concerned that we should not treat all council tenants as potential problems. I am worried about introductory and probationary tenancies because they stigmatise every tenant before they do anything wrong.

Secondly, it is not only tenants who create problems of neighbour nuisance. Some of the worst cases that I have come across have involved owner-occupiers. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) proposed a community safety order, which could apply to anyone, not merely to tenants. I hope that the Government will consider that idea, because we have to be even-handed when dealing with the problem.

Finally, on houses in multiple occupation, we need a licensing system. All the responses to the Government's consultation exercise showed that the organisations concerned with housing believed that that was the right way to proceed.

There is a further difficulty. The Government must define what a house in multiple occupation is. Last year, in a difficult court case involving Sheffield city council, because some students in a house happened to share certain domestic activities, such as eating, the courts found that what everyone thought was a house in multiple occupation was not classified in law as such. That is worrying. It is a loophole about which I have written to Ministers. I hope that they will define what is a house in multiple occupation and conclude that the law needs changing.

In conclusion, the Bill is a missed opportunity at best. At worst, it does damage to those people in greatest housing need, and we shall vigorously oppose those elements of it that do so, particularly the removal of the right of homeless families to secure and permanent accommodation.

7.58 pm

**Sir Anthony Durant** (Reading, West): I welcome the Bill as a further step forward in our housing policy. It deals with tenants, landlords and leaseholders. I listened carefully to the extraordinary speech by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). There are several implications to be drawn from what he said. He implied that the Labour party would bail out people with negative equity, raise mortgage tax relief, lower rents for council tenants—thereby increasing costs for council tax payers—and build council houses, thereby stopping grants to housing associations.

**Mr. Raynsford** *indicated dissent.*

**Sir Anthony Durant:** That was what was implied by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Anthony Durant:** I shall not give way. I have said what I have to say on that, and I feel that there was such an implication.

I welcome several of the proposals, because they have been raised by my constituents over the years. First, there is the right to buy from charities and housing associations. That has been a great grievance in my area, which has a large amount of such property. People felt that the situation was unfair.

I am delighted that the powers of the housing ombudsman will be increased. That has not been mentioned this evening, but it is an important step forward. The right to buy has been one of our great policy successes.

There is some agreement across the Chamber on multiple occupation. We must have more safeguards and standards. There is a lot of multiple-occupation property in Reading. I do not have the same problems as hon. Members with seaside constituencies, but many people live in such properties. Registration must come and monitoring must follow it to keep decent standards for people in multiple-occupation houses.

I am delighted that housing benefit will be tightened up. That has been a great racket and there have been cases in my constituency. We need better guidelines.

Small landlords need more help. There was great criticism of reducing the time for non-payment of rent from 13 to eight weeks. I am in favour of that. How can

*[Sir Anthony Durant]*

small landlords stand so long a period of non-payment before they can go to court? That is wrong. I also welcome the move to shorthold tenancies so that we can further develop the rented sector.

I favour tightening up the homeless list. Queue jumping is a great grievance in my town. Many people come to see me who have been on the housing list for years, waiting and waiting. Every time they come near to getting a property, someone on the homeless list jumps the queue. I favour one queue—a system whereby the homeless will be put into temporary accommodation and take their turn in the housing queue. I support that strongly because it is the right way to proceed.

I want more hostels. London's experience has been successful in developing hostels for homeless people. Many such people are not in the best condition when they come into accommodation. I do not have many homeless people in my constituency, thank heavens. There are only about 50 people sleeping on the streets in Reading, so I am fortunate. Some of them live in squalid conditions and when they come into accommodation, they need help and guidance. We need more hostels around the country.

I am much concerned about leaseholders. I trust that amendments to the Bill will be introduced to safeguard their position. There was a leasehold property in my constituency in which all the balconies were falling down. It was dangerous and I tried to find the owner, but it was practically impossible to find who owned the block. I went round and round in circles and never found out who owned it. In the end, I think that the council did something about it and safeguarded the balconies on the flats. We have to do more about leaseholding and the ownership of leasehold properties. The present law on tenants trying to take over leaseholds is far too complicated. I look forward to when we can introduce commonhold. I hope that we shall move in that direction. I look forward to the Government introducing further amendments, as mentioned in the press, to strengthen the position on leaseholding.

I hope that the Government will, as announced today, introduce a further Bill dealing with the Latham proposals on contracting, which are important to the construction industry. I am disappointed that this Bill does not deal with them. As chairman of the all-party group on construction, I am very keen about that. I hope that I will be reassured that a second Bill will implement aspects of the Latham report. It was a good report, which is supported by the industry in general—although not by some of the bigger companies. We need to encourage the construction industry. It has gone through a bad time from which it has still not emerged. It needs help and I was disappointed that there was not more help for it in the Budget.

I welcome the Bill. All its aspects have come up in my constituency surgery. If we can implement it, some of those grievances will go. It is a useful and worthwhile Bill which I support strongly.

8.5 pm

**Mr. Cynog Dafis** (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I shall be brief, but I am the only Welsh Member to speak tonight and there is an important Welsh dimension to housing policy.

The problem with housing policy, as with many other policies, is that it has been bedevilled by ideology. That has been particularly unpleasant for us in Wales because the ideology that has informed policy development has been so alien to us. It is only because enlightened people in Wales have insisted on being pragmatic that anything at all has been achieved over the past 16 years—and quite a lot has been achieved. Despite those achievements, in 1994 there were still 23,000 people homeless, according to Welsh Office statistics and according to Shelter, there were nearer 60,000.

I shall base my remarks on the publication, "Target 2000", which has been prepared for the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations. The first point made by the document is that we need a proper description of need both for the local level and for the whole of Wales. There is no such description currently, which means that we do not have an adequate strategy. The existing strategy is one for the allocation of available resources, which is another thing altogether.

Resources are declining. The number of dwellings provided in the social sector through Tai Cymru funding, along with private funding, has decreased from 5,274 in 1992-93 to 4,197 this year. It is projected that the number will go down to just over 3,000 in 1996-97.

Secondly, we have something close to parity in Wales between the number of dwellings and the number of households—in fact, there is a small surplus—but we still need about 10,000 social houses per year to achieve decent housing for all by 2000.

Thirdly, there is overwhelming evidence that the priority need in Wales—and I am sure that this is also true in England—is for affordable, rented accommodation. With owner-occupation at 72 per cent. in Wales in 1994, compared with 59 per cent. in 1979, it is clear that the trend towards owner-occupation has gone far enough—perhaps too far. According to the 1991 census, 8 per cent. of private homes in Wales were vacant or not being used as a prime residence, compared with less than 2 per cent. vacant in the social housing sector.

Some owners are unable to sell their property and let it on a shorthold tenancy. There is nothing wrong with that in itself, but it is an indication of a surplus of owner-occupied properties.

Some 20 per cent. of the Welsh population earn less than half average earnings, which means that they are probably ineligible for a mortgage. According to the report's author, the home ownership market in Wales is saturated. It is in those circumstances that the Welsh Office, obedient to its London masters, has set a target of 80 per cent. owner-occupancy in Wales by 2000. Such a target is clearly perverse, irresponsible, probably damaging, and ideologically driven rather than pragmatic. Policy in Wales is currently moving in the opposite direction to what is relevant. The 80 per cent. target could be achieved only at the expense of a reduction in the number of properties available for rent, unless the number of house completions is significantly increased.

A strategy for providing the necessary additional social housing should consist of a combination of new build and a significant number of acquisitions from existing housing stock, both houses in good condition and houses for renovation. That would be good environmentally as it would discourage the development of green-field sites. It would also be appropriate in a country where, in 1993,

13.4 per cent. of occupied first homes were considered unfit, many houses dating from before 1919, which puts Wales just below central London in terms of the proportion of unfit properties there. Housing associations, along with what will now be other social housing providers, should be empowered and encouraged to make such acquisitions from existing housing stock. The funding process must recognise the higher costs of renovation, not least VAT.

We also need a means to enable demolition and infill building where appropriate. The time comes when all buildings reach the end of their useful lives and demolition is a more cost-efficient solution than renovation. I was glad to note that Tai Cymru has recently restored housing associations' power to acquire existing property. But that power is severely restricted and housing associations, local authorities and the new local companies that will come into force need greater freedom. More emphasis must be placed on that activity.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) spoke about the need for resources for such a programme. I previously mentioned that 10,000 properties per annum were needed for the social sector in Wales, which means doubling the existing programme. Plaid Cymru has no hang-ups about the amount of public investment as a proportion of the total economy that is required for that, nor about funding such investment from general taxation if necessary, especially as that activity creates employment and reduces the benefits bill in the process. We recognise, however, that other people have problems about that approach. The Government's answer, at least in part, is to create local housing companies that can raise private finance and therefore mobilise additional resources.

I agree with the recommendations in the Chartered Institute of Housing report, which suggest a two-pronged approach: first, a shift of emphasis in terms of public spending from the current use of the public sector borrowing requirement to a general Government financial deficit approach, distinguishing between public spending and public investment; and, secondly, the creation of non-profit-making local housing associations, wholly owned by local authorities and able to borrow against the security of the rent stream and asset values.

The case for more public subsidy in bricks and mortar to reduce rents is now well established. Moreover, the fact that central Government only partially pay for housing benefits to council tenants means that other tenants subsidise those benefits. That is unjust and an anomaly.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I call Mrs. Jacqui Lait.

8.15 pm

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Hastings and Rye): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this debate, especially as I was able to speak last week on a subject that was also of great interest to my constituents. All aspects of this Bill affect my constituency in some way, so I welcome the remedies that it will provide for many of the problems that I and other hon. Members find in our postbags.

I welcome the exemption in the Bill of rural housing from the right-to-buy provision. That is not because I am not a great supporter of the right-to-buy policy but because I have had representations from almost all my parish councils and from many people who live in villages in my constituency saying that they do not want their communities to expand. The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) said that housing stock that is sold should be replaced. That is easy to say, but when an area is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty, a site of special scientific interest, an environmentally sensitive area and, now, a European special protected area, it becomes extremely difficult to find the land on which to replace that housing.

I welcome the provisions on anti-social behaviour. Several hon. Members have outlined the problems in their areas. I particularly welcome the proposal that both social and private landlords will be able to take action against those who behave anti-socially without the victims having to give evidence before the courts. I have been struck by the number of people who tell me that they dare not stand up in court for fear of being victimised further.

I also welcome the proposals on homelessness. Although I do not wish to repeat many of the points that my hon. Friends have made, I have been struck by the number of honest, decent, respectable people who have come to my surgeries or written to me saying that they have endured difficult housing conditions for a long time and then been pipped at the post when it was their turn at the top of the housing list. A recent "Panorama" programme highlighted a 17-year-old girl who was four months pregnant, based in Hastings, and who had been given her own flat. That is a result of current policy. We should ensure that the waiting lists help those most in need, including those who have waited for a great length of time.

As I represent a seaside constituency, I welcome the measures on houses in multiple occupation. I shall not add to the litany of complaints about those houses because I agree with all the points that have been made. Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that the definition of "houses in multiple occupation" excludes self-contained flats and flats in large houses where a flying freehold has been long established?

My hon. Friend the Minister may recall a case in my constituency where the local environmental health department was making life very difficult for residents in a mansion block with flying freehold, largely because the concept of flying freehold is not well understood. I am glad that we have been able to clarify that situation, but I would be grateful if my hon. Friend will confirm that those sorts of flats are excluded from the legislation. It reads as though they are, but I would appreciate that confirmation.

I turn now to the issue of leaseholders. There has been much publicity about leaseholding in London blocks and on large estates. On most of those estates, the freeholders are very respectable and responsible and they are only too keen to ensure that their leaseholders get an extremely good deal. In areas such as Hastings, freeholders may once have been residents of Hastings, but that freehold has been sold on and on. In such circumstances, it is very difficult for leaseholders not only to trace the freeholder but to withstand the demands of the freeholder and the managing agent.

Leaseholders in my constituency face two problems. The first concerns their ability to purchase their freehold. An elderly lady in my constituency wishes to buy her freehold and she made an offer in September 1994. On 5 January

*[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]*

1995, she informed me that she had not received an answer, despite letters from her and from her solicitors, and from me, to the managing agents, Oakleigh Property Management Ltd., and to the freeholders, Ashcorn Estates Ltd. Interestingly—or suspiciously—both of those companies share the same address of 2a Belmore Hill court, Morestead road, Owslebury near Winchester. I hope that, as a result of my comments this evening, they now take action. I believe that the Bill will make it easier for people such as my constituent to buy their freehold.

The second problem concerns the notorious area of repairs, insurance, builders and surveyors, and residents being forced to pay inflated bills for shoddy work. I am grateful that the Bill addresses these issues too. One of the remedies for leaseholders involves the use of the leasehold valuation tribunal. Will my hon. Friend confirm whether that tribunal has any right of enforcement? If not, how is it proposed to enforce the tribunal's decisions?

I welcome those aspects of the Bill which deal with leaseholding and I am sure that many leaseholders will agree that they are practical suggestions for resolving existing problems. I hope that they will close existing loopholes and that no more will be opened. The current situation whereby leaseholders are forced to take their cases to court definitely works to the advantage of the freeholders. I am very conscious that changes which will enable leaseholders to hold freeholders to account more cheaply will go some way to addressing that problem.

In light of that and given the fact that my private Member's Bill, the Leasehold (Reform) Bill, is designed to reform aspects of leasehold law, I was grateful to receive the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) on the issue of commonhold. I plan to include that in my private Member's Bill, and I hope that—in tandem with the body of law that is being developed regarding leaseholding—we shall resolve the difficult and aggravating position of leaseholders and freeholders. It seems to be a particularly English and Welsh system of law and, as a Scot, I do not find it easy to understand.

I also endorse the recommendation by my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West that the Latham proposals be carried forward in the next Housing Bill. I hope that we shall move quite quickly, as much of the construction industry is very keen to support the Latham report. That should assist the construction industry in the future.

8.24 pm

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth** (Coventry, North-East): I shall spend most of the time available to me tonight addressing that part of the Bill which deals with criminal and anti-social behaviour on housing estates. However, I cannot speak to the Housing Bill without also referring briefly to several other issues.

I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) graphically expose the conditions at the Clarendon Court hotel, which is under the authority of Westminster city council. Taxpayers are funding that hotel and its appalling conditions through the housing benefit system—that is a modern scandal of epic proportions. Although we do not have the equivalent of a Clarendon Court hotel in Coventry, I assure hon. Members that the provision made by some private sector landlords amounts to a disgraceful rip-off of the housing benefit system and of the taxpayer. The Government know that, but they tolerate it and allow it to continue.

Housing cost figures mean different things in different parts of the country, but the local authority in Coventry can still provide a decent size family dwelling for less than £40 a week. However, families are forced increasingly into small, antiquated and unhealthy accommodation for which the taxpayer is paying more than £80 per week through the housing benefit system. That is a growing problem.

When considering the dilemma of our public finances, one should look no further than the Government's mismanagement of the housing benefit and housing subsidy issue. In large part, that money is going to landlords who should not receive such support. They are ripping off the taxpayer while providing inadequate housing.

Although other hon. Members have covered the issue adequately, I shall turn briefly to the Government's proposals on homelessness. The House is facing an adverse public reaction to the passage of bad law. That fact was graphically illustrated by the poll tax and the Child Support Agency. We are in danger of doing the same thing in this instance because dogma has overtaken common sense. The laws with regard to housing allocation for the homeless have been reviewed again and again not by Labour, but by Conservative Ministers and Conservative Governments. We are now finding that proposals which were thrown out by Conservative Ministers are being offered as law.

I believe that this measure is born not of common sense or any attempt to introduce fairness into housing waiting lists, but of scapegoating. The Conservatives have realised that people are very angry about the length of housing waiting lists. In Coventry there are waiting lists of up to 14 years for local housing stock in some of the more desirable parts of the city. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras exposed the fact that the supply of local authority housing has fallen to the disgraceful level of only 400 new houses provided nationally.

How have the Government responded to that situation? Instead of accepting the failure of their policies and addressing the problem, they have looked for a scapegoat. Government Members try to tell ordinary people who are on housing waiting lists—which were created by the Government's policies—that it is the fault of the homeless. They say that they shall sort out the homeless; they shall be put at the back of the queue, housed in temporary accommodation and then everything will be all right. That is another example of the Government's looking for a scapegoat instead of a solution. The legislation simply will not work.

I now turn to anti-social behaviour. At the start of the debate, the Secretary of State said that the Government were committed to action, but did not have the support of the Labour party. He said that the Association of District Councils was opposed to the only solution—introductory tenancies.

I have a document from the Local Authority Working Group On Anti-Social Behaviour, which lobbied Parliament last Thursday. That document is supported by the ADC and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. It endorses the Labour party's position on anti-social

behaviour, and demands—as it has demanded Government action for the past four or five years—that the Government give local authorities the power effectively to tackle criminal and anti-social behaviour on our council estates.

The Secretary of State had the audacity to suggest that the ADC is opposed to tackling the issue. The position is quite the reverse. The document states that introductory tenancies will not work unless they are

"accompanied by action to restrict the availability to tenants of judicial review to challenge a Local Housing Authority's decision to terminate an introductory tenancy.".

Those are the real grounds for opposing introductory tenancies, not those that the Secretary of State attempted to put to the House.

Criminal anti-social behaviour is a growing problem on housing estates. The issue has been raised in the House, sometimes by Conservative Members with specific problems, but mostly by Labour Members demanding that local authorities be given the powers to sort out a small element on our housing estates that drives the overwhelming majority of residents to distraction.

We are not talking just about music in the middle of the night or rowdy behaviour outside somebody's house, although that can be a massive problem. We are talking about escalating intimidation, including violence, burglary and forced entry into people's houses. The issue cannot be tackled without additional powers.

In one case in Coventry, a tenant exercised the right to buy and bought a council house in the middle of what became a problem area. There were problems next door and the house was effectively destroyed—along with the one next door—leaving the family with massive negative equity on a property that was no longer worth a light. The wife had a nervous breakdown, and when I met him, the husband was attempting to hold down a job in London and commute back and forth, desperately trying to keep the family's finances together. That is an example of a huge problem that the Government have refused to tackle for a long time.

It is disgraceful for the Government to suggest, as they did at the weekend, that the Labour party is not prepared to tackle crime. The record shows that the Labour party, the AMA, which has a Labour majority, and the ADC have been demanding effective action from the Government for some time. They are worried that the Bill will not lead to that effective action.

For heaven's sake, let us have some proper scrutiny of the proposals in the Bill to make sure that they work. Let us listen to the local authorities that will have to exercise those powers. If we do not, we shall wind up with soundbite politics, the Conservative party attempting to say that it is tackling law and order, and a piece of legislation of absolutely no value.

If Conservative Members do not make the legislation work, they will expose themselves as interested in law and order only when it affects a rich and privileged elite, and not being concerned with issues that affect the majority of law-abiding people living on housing estates in our cities throughout the length and breath of the country. If they do not take action, we shall expose them for exactly that.

8.34 pm

**Mr. David Nicholson** (Taunton): I welcome the opportunity that the Bill provides to explore in detail the present housing problems and examine various alternative proposals. I agree with the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) that there should be proper scrutiny of the various proposals in the Bill, in Committee and afterwards. I say that with some comfort, because I am already serving in one Committee, so I will not be serving on the one considering the Housing Bill.

I should like to lay down two basic principles regarding housing policy, neither of which refers to tenure. In Britain, we have been concerned to advance owner-occupation, but that has not been the case even among the middle classes in some other countries in Europe or in north America.

The first principle is the right of all to a secure roof, although we might argue about the location, the cost and with whom it is shared. In that context, I welcome what has been achieved since 1990 by the rough sleepers initiative in substantially reducing the number of those sleeping rough in central London. I am concerned to hear from Shelter the suggestion that hostels in central London cannot always cope with the number of people seeking access. I hope that that problem will be addressed, and that the rough sleepers initiative will be continued, properly resourced and extended where necessary to other centres outside London.

I hope that we can be more effective in going back to first causes regarding those sleeping rough, and finding out whether it was the local authorities or perhaps their families who let them down and caused their unhappy circumstances. Many of them suffer from mental difficulties or drug or alcohol problems, and other caring or public authorities should take responsibility for them.

My second principle was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait). We must make better use of existing housing stock and areas of development, rather than constantly intruding into green-field sites. In my constituency, there has been strong resistance to the development even of private housing estates on green-field sites, and I am sure that the development of council or similar estates would also be resisted.

We have an opportunity to do that, because, for the first time in more than a century, perhaps as a tragic consequence of the recession, we have balanced development in our economy. There is no longer the constant flow of people from the north coming south in search of work, that has continued for the past century. That has certain merit in that it gives us the opportunity to look again at our housing policy.

In that respect, I welcome the view of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. It agreed with the view expressed in the Government White Paper that predated the Bill:

"The Government must ensure its housing policies support sustainable development—getting the right kind of housing in the right amount in the right place and in the right way so that the environment is protected and enhanced."

The CPRE continues that it is rather disappointed that the Bill

"makes no reference to environmental and planning concerns and contains no measures to help integrate housing, planning and environmental policy."

*[Mr. David Nicholson]*

Those measures are necessary; if we cannot address them in the Bill, we must do so elsewhere.

Like many Members, I welcome certain measures in the Bill. I particularly welcome those relating to homes in multiple occupation and neighbour nuisance, although I know that the two issues are not totally interrelated. Those problems do not occur only in seaside resorts, although we have heard powerful and impressive speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) and for Hastings and Rye.

Problems have occurred in Taunton. Rowbarton, in the northern part of Taunton, has many houses in multiple occupation. One night last autumn, there was an incident in which someone got hold of some firearms that were being illegally kept in a house, and shots were fired. The police were called, and there was much fear and concern in the neighbourhood.

Subsequently, there was a large public meeting, which I and representatives of the police and every possible public authority attended. The feeling was strongly expressed that there should be more rigorous control of some landlords. I noted with interest the remarks of my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East and for Blackpool, North about the Bill's provisions in respect of landlords of property in multiple occupation. I hope that that issue will be examined as the Bill proceeds.

I welcome the exclusion from the right to buy of housing association properties in certain rural villages. I hope that Ministers will carefully consider the views of the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and the Rural Development Commission on the Bill's proposed safeguards, because those organisations have raised particular concerns in their letters to us.

I have no particular brief for Shelter, which recently organised a meeting in my constituency which I, the Bishop of Taunton and the director of Shelter attended and addressed. Shelter went about things in a fairly overtly party political way—perhaps we should expect it to do so, in a pre-election year. However, I know and respect certain people in my constituency who, through the organisation South-West Housing Aid, work closely with Shelter.

A letter from Chris Holmes, Shelter's director, states:

"Shelter's experience, even with the existing safety net, is that many homeless families and vulnerable single people experience long stays in temporary accommodation before being offered a permanent home. The proposals in the Bill will mean that many homeless families and their children will be forced to move from one insecure temporary place to another, facing the poverty trap of high rents on restricted housing benefit. They will also add to local authority bureaucracy.

The cost of these changes will not only be borne by homeless families. They will cost the taxpayer too."

After the meeting in my constituency, a friend and neighbour who happens to be a Labour voter wrote to reiterate those concerns:

"Insecurity is one of the most stressful and divisive dangers to family unity, and the proposed provision only for short-term help, followed by even shorter-term help . . . will result in many more broken families, with all the distress and the expensive burdens that places on society".

Another constituent wrote to point out, for example, that a number of people in professional and other posts are employed on short-term contracts, which creates an insecurity of income that relates to the problems of obtaining secure housing.

I hope that the Committee will examine those important issues, because we need to be reassured, as we approach a general election, that there are not the problems that Shelter and others have alleged will arise.

I have spoken on housing matters several times since I was elected, and Opposition Members will recall my concerns. However, I am aware of the danger of intrusive substantial new housing developments on green-field sites, which is why I made an important point about that matter at the beginning of my speech. At the same time, it is offensive to us to see people sleeping rough in central London.

I hope that central Government, local authorities and voluntary organisations will be able to tackle that problem—which stems from wider issues, including the breakdown of families. The Conservative party believes in the integrity of the family, which means helping people who have suffered as a result of family breakdown and providing a housing policy and accommodation that keep families together rather than breaking them up.

8.44 pm

**Mr. John Gunnell** (Morley and Leeds, South): First, I must declare that I have registered interests in housing, but as far as I can see, they are not affected in any way by the proposed measure.

The Bill is a prime example of the Conservative party saying one thing and doing the opposite. It has continued to preach the virtues of owner-occupation, but the Bill, while offering the prospect of wider owner-occupation at the expense of housing associations, will create only 1,200 sales in the first year. The Bill does nothing for the 1,200 people and more whose homes are repossessed every week, who lose their status as owner-occupiers and get nothing in return.

The Government also preach the virtues of the family, but Bishop Jim Thompson, of the Church of England's social policy committee, rightly said of the Bill's proposals for tackling homelessness:

"We believe that these represent a step backwards for a civilised society to make and have seriously adverse effects on the lives of homeless families with children."

Even the Bill's title is hypocritical. It cannot properly be described as a Housing Bill when it does not provide resources for additional housing or for improving the quality of existing properties. Instead, the Bill introduces measures to deprive people of housing. It will shuffle thousands of people into temporary accommodation, restrict tenant choice, restrict the activities of councils and housing associations, and add a further sorry chapter to the Government's 16 years of neglect of social housing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) pointed out that homeless legislation has survived intact since 1977, including the whole of the Thatcher era. Even Nicholas Ridley, who was hardly a liberal, concluded that it was working well. No one outside the Tory party and its various front organisations supports the Bill, except those who hope for a cash return from it. The Bill deserves to perish, and the Government should be judged by it and perish with it.

As a Member of Parliament representing a Leeds constituency who spent some years on the city council's housing committee, I can say that the Bill's effects on Leeds well illustrate my abhorrence of the measure and my condemnation of its homelessness proposals in particular. The council states:

"households found to be homeless and with a legally defined priority need should have a reasonable priority in rehousing. However, in Leeds homeless households with a priority need are treated as part of Group A"—

the top group—

"of the waiting list and the Council aims to achieve a balance in allocations between homeless households on the waiting list and council tenants seeking a transfer.

In 1994/95, 17.5 per cent. of new lettings of council homes were made to homeless households in priority need; 40 per cent. were to other households on the waiting list; 41 per cent. were to existing council tenants transferring to other council housing (including those transferring by mutual exchange) and 1.5 per cent. were let as part of the National Mobility Scheme.

In addition"—

to its balanced policy on the rehousing of people who are homeless—

"the Council does not have sufficient temporary accommodation, for the homeless households it accepts as homeless over the year."

The proposals in the Bill

"could inevitably mean the Council having to resort"—

for the first time—

"to the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation. There is also insufficient available, affordable family housing of sufficient quality in the private rented sector into which homeless households could be directly rehoused."

Therefore, the legislation would actually make life much more difficult for the council, which already has a balanced housing policy.

The council's views are in line with the Church of England's national housing coalition, which has conducted much research on the proposals, and published that research in October 1995. Its report said:

"It is not true to say that homeless people are 'jumping the housing queue' and forcing other 'more deserving' people to wait longer on the Council housing waiting list".

It continues:

"The main factor determining the rate at which people are rehoused . . . is not the number of people accepted as homeless, but the supply and availability of social housing".

The report pointed out that people are not homeless as a temporary measure but, in general, on a long-term basis. It pointed out that people are not homeless from choice. They are not responsible for being homeless. People pushed out of their homes, as the report makes clear, include those who are

"forced to flee difficult even dangerous situations".

Homelessness is often a problem of safety and security for families, especially families with children.

The Government, of course, have only just released the guidance on which they are consulting local authorities. The Government should have thought twice before they published lists for councils that are already making their own sensible priorities on housing homeless people.

In Leeds in the past financial year, although 2,318 households were accepted as homeless, a further 3,212 were found to be homeless but without a priority need for housing. The breakdown of the figures shows that more people are housed as a priority for reasons including domestic violence, the loss of private rented housing and mental ill health, and for special reasons, perhaps because they are vulnerable young people. Anyone would agree that those categories of homeless people deserve urgent attention. Some of those categories are included in the guidance on which local authorities are being consulted by the Government.

Why is consultation taking place at that time, when the results of that consultation will come back to the Government after the Standing Committee has considered all those issues? Is that a thoughtful way to proceed? I agree that local authorities need time to reply, but they must reply by 25 March 1996, by which time the Committee will probably have finished. Surely the timing suggests that the Government's consultation is again intended to provide a rubber stamp for what they already propose to do.

The alternative of the private rented sector, which is suggested by the Government as a possible way forward, does not appear to be any answer. The Church of England's research shows that most landlords in the private sector want a deposit and guaranteed rent in advance, and they provide less security and, assisted by the Government, higher rent levels.

The Bill is a package of misery for all those who are in genuine housing need. It should be thrown out.

8.54 pm

**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe** (Bradford, South): I wish to be brief because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

A civilised society is one that creates an environment in which there is adequate housing for its people. What is wrong with the Bill is that the Government have looked only at one type of housing for the past 17 years—owner-occupied. Their policy and dogma have been created around that.

Hon. Members from all parties have said today that housing should be a concern for all of us. We can all quote casework from our surgeries of the number of housing problems that come along. The core of the Bill should have been about increasing social housing provision in the rented sector. The Bill has 181 clauses and 144 pages, and the core of it is the question of waiting lists and how people figure on the waiting lists, not meeting need.

I find it offensive that the Government, who have tried to divide society for the past 17 years in many economic areas, are now trying to divide those in housing need by saying that certain people, and they mention single-parent families, are a problem that has to be resolved. That is very offensive.

There have been 10,000 objectors to the Bill. The Minister will have to reply to them, because they are not people with knee-jerk reactions but professionals in the housing sector, the voluntary sector and other charitable organisations.

The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) mentioned the rough sleepers initiative. It is scandalous that, as we approach the 21st century, we have rough sleepers not just in London but in towns and cities all over the country. That is an absolute disgrace when one considers the resources that the Government have had at their disposal for the past 17 years.

*[Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe]*

The Bill is about dogma. The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration has said many times in the House that he does not think that it is appropriate for local authorities to build houses. Why not? That is a legitimate choice for tenants, if they want their local authorities to build houses.

We have seen a move to housing associations. There are many good housing associations, especially those that have coped with special needs in society. However, housing association grants have been cut. The money that was spent by local authorities was moved to housing associations and their grants were cut. That has meant that the smaller associations have been put in jeopardy and have been unable to provide the services that people require. The housing associations are now having to compete for grant, so they have become bigger and moved away from their local areas, where they developed, and have lost local accountability.

I believe that local authorities should be allowed to build houses because that is what people want. Local authorities, through elected members, know the needs of people in their areas.

There is nothing in the Bill to help with the problem of negative equity and mortgage arrears. People have faced the pain of living in a house that is no longer worth what it was when they first bought it and they have got into arrears because of the economic situation. We must look at housing and plan it differently. The job for life is no longer available, and people have to change their job profile up to three times during their career. The 25-year mortgage for those who can afford to buy may not be sustainable. We must consider different housing finance.

We are approaching the 21st century and it is time to consider the problems that we have created. For example, there are problems on large estates where the Government encouraged people to buy their homes. It is interesting to reflect on projects such as city challenge and the regeneration budget. Those who bought their houses were not able to benefit from the regeneration schemes. It was ridiculous that in many areas people were penalised for buying their homes. In some instances, the result was behavioural problems on estates.

I am concerned that tenants' rights in the private sector have been weakened. I am concerned also about women who are the victims of domestic violence. How will they be treated under the new regime? The Bill leaves many questions unanswered. I am sure that we shall take it to pieces in Committee, clause by clause. There are 10,000 objectors and many of the organisations that represent them are not automatically friends of the Labour party, despite what Conservative Members have said. Instead, they are organisations that care about housing. We must ensure that we provide housing to meet the needs of society into the next century.

My hon. Friends have raised many of the matters to which I wished to draw attention. I hope that there will be the opportunity to examine them in more detail. Rightly, we have had a major debate that has focused on the rights of individuals to be properly housed. A Labour Government will be the only vehicle to ensure that people get what they deserve.

9 pm

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am delighted to be able to speak in this important debate. The Bill is yet another example to prove that the Government still have positive policies for the future. When I asked the hon. Members for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) what their policies were, how many social homes they would provide and how much money they would spend, neither of them—they are Opposition party spokesmen—was able to give me a positive answer.

The Government are making positive decisions. They have introduced a major Bill with many provisions that are designed to improve the plight of all those who want a roof over their head. During the 17 years that a Conservative Government have been in power, we have enabled and empowered people to make choices about their own lives. As a result, 78 per cent. of the population own their own home. That is a creditable achievement. Given a reasonable economic improvement in the housing market, I am sure that we shall see further increases in owner-occupation.

We are concerned also about the private rented sector. I am delighted that there are provisions in the Bill to encourage it still further. During the currency of the Labour Government in the 1970s, they regulated out of existence 400,000 private rented sector homes. Instead, this Conservative Government wish to encourage that sector. I welcome further deregulation, which will encourage more landlords to let their houses.

A sector that should be especially encouraged is homes over shops. There have been several initiatives to do so. In every small market town—there are many in my constituency—there are homes that could be let by the private rented sector. They are not let because of fear of Labour Government regulation. At the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s the Labour Government introduced a penal regime. A future Labour Government might return to it, so we should not become complacent. Rental income was classed as unearned income and taxed at a staggering 98 per cent. If the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) is proud of that record, what else is he proud of? That penal regime was a disgrace. That is why 400,000 houses were regulated out of the market.

**Mrs. Maddock:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I have less than 10 minutes now, but I shall let the hon. Lady intervene briefly. After that, I shall not give way.

**Mrs. Maddock:** How many flats over shops would the hon. Gentleman like to see come into use? How much money would he like to see the Government make available for such a scheme?

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** As I said, I shall not give way again because I have only a short time available to me.

The answer to the hon. Lady's question is that not every issue can be addressed by money. There must be confidence in the private rented sector. Liberal and Labour Members are not doing much to bring that about by their speeches.

There are many parts of the Bill that I welcome, including the formation of a housing investment trust. It will be an excellent vehicle to enable the Government to

lever in money in addition to the £18 billion a year that they are spending in the housing market. I am delighted that the private sector is playing its part. I do not know why the hon. Member for Greenwich laughs, because I thought that the Labour party would be even more pleased to provide more homes and to let the private—

**Mr. Raynsford** *rose—*

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I am not giving way, as I have only 10 minutes.

I thought that the hon. Gentleman would be pleased that the private rented sector would be spending more and more on providing social housing. I wish that the Government would go further and allow, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith), the private sector to take part in the housing investment programme grants, so that it could take some of the risk of producing social housing as well. I urge the Government to go further and faster in that respect.

There are many other areas of the Bill that I warmly welcome. As has been said many times, we all have surgery cases involving obnoxious next-door neighbours who cannot be evicted by the council or the housing association. I warmly welcome the fact that the Government are acting in that respect. If those obnoxious neighbours are given a temporary house, I urge that if they misbehave still further, they should end up with lower and lower-quality housing. That is what they deserve.

The *Evening Standard* ran a campaign on bad landlords. Nobody would support bad landlords under the leasehold system, and I warmly welcome measures in the Bill that will clarify some of the misunderstood provisions in the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, particularly in relation to the scam that has been perpetrated by a small minority of leaseholders who have been creating flying freeholds. It is a disgrace that they have used loopholes to get round the provisions of the Act, although I do not particularly approve of it. I welcome the fact that the Government, through the Bill, have filled those loopholes.

As a chartered surveyor, I warmly welcome the valuation provisions that the Bill includes in relation to the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act, because they will clarify the role of the valuer and precisely how he is to value marriage value and so on. It is wrong that we have not had an ombudsman who could cover housing trusts. The fact that he will be given powers to decide difficult cases must be warmly welcomed.

The Government are courageous to introduce the Bill. The major area of contention, as has been mentioned this evening, is that of the allocation of housing lists. For too long, it has been politically incorrect to talk about the categories of people who are entitled to be housed in local authority housing.

I shall give the House an idea of the gift that we give people in public sector housing. Let me quote some figures that I unearthed today. A typical rent for a one-bedroom house in the Cotswold district council area today is £45 per week. I went to a leading building society to obtain a mortgage cost [illegible] over £40,000, and found that a typical repayment mortgage over 25 years was £67 a week. If one had to buy an annuity after tax, the difference would be a staggering £18,000. So in effect every single housing association and local authority that allows a tenant to come into a one-bedroom house, built at a cost of £40,000 of taxpayers' money, is getting a capital gift of £18,000. That is why it must be right, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) said, that where there is a finite amount of public sector housing, we should encourage greater mobility in that sector. I asked the council how many tenants it encouraged last year, because of declining requirements in their older age, to move into a smaller house. I was told that the answer was six—three of whom have written to me—so we are not getting the mobility in the public sector that we deserve.

I warmly welcome the Bill. The paucity of policies that both Opposition parties displayed this evening is a disgrace. Every single person should be reminded of that time and again until we discover how much the Opposition parties will spend on their housing policies. Will it be more than the £18 billion that we are currently spending? If so, by how much? The Opposition parties can laugh, but the people are entitled to know the answer to that question as soon as possible.

I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity.

9.9 pm

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): I shall take a very different line from the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown).

In his opening speech, the Secretary of State said, in connection with part II—which deals with houses in multiple occupation—that he already intended to introduce amendments to a Bill that was printed as recently as 18 January. It is incredible that the Government should wish to amend their own Bill before it has even been given a Second Reading. I accept that the Government may well be moving in the right direction, but—unlike Conservative Members—I want to see all the implications, and all the loopholes, in print before I support the legislation.

Conservative Members should bear it in mind that numerous attempts have been made to control the appalling problems that we are discussing, although we accept that regulation is needed to deal with those problems. I say "regulation"; given that Conservative Members constantly speak of deregulation, it is surprising that they should now recognise that regulation is necessary to make such houses safe for people to live in. I stress the word "safe".

Part V deals with the conduct of tenants, a subject that is likely to provoke considerable debate during the Bill's later stages. Hon. Members on both sides of the House want to ensure that council tenants can live in peace and quiet without being disturbed by the life styles of others, but we should not allow that to be seen as merely a council estate problem. I am told, in writing and by those who visit my advice bureau, that the problem is on the increase: it is a sign of the times, and it now affects many areas of Burnley. It may be easier to control it by means of legislation applying to council estates, but we should ensure that those living elsewhere can also live peaceful lives.

Chapter II of part III makes "minor amendments" to the leasehold reform provisions in the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. During the passage of that legislation, we repeatedly told the Government that they were not tackling the problem

*[Mr. Peter L. Pike]*

properly, but I do not believe that the minor amendments contained in the Bill deal with outstanding major leasehold reform issues. The hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) mentioned commonhold; I know that that is not a matter for the Department of the Environment, but some people want the difficulties to be resolved once and for all.

The Secretary of State referred to the consultation document on the allocation of accommodation by local authorities that was recently issued. A response is demanded by no later than Monday 25 March. It is no use our being able to discuss what the Government say in the document in Committee and on Report; we need to know what responses are forthcoming, and what the Government intend to do.

Opposition Members have said several times that the Bill does nothing to deal with real housing problems. A monthly snapshot survey that is produced by the National Council of Building Material Producers underlines the problem. Sixty-one per cent. of respondents say that order volumes have decreased. To the question:

"Are you working at a satisfactory level of capacity utilisation?"

100 per cent. say no. Zero per cent. say that business confidence has increased and 39 per cent. say that it has decreased. Those are the latest figures, published in December. What an appalling reflection it is of what those people feel about the position.

In 1979, there were 8,649 council and new town dwelling starts in the north-west; last year, there were three. What has the Tory party done on housing since it won the election in 1979? Homelessness was a big city and a London problem; the Conservative party made it a national problem. In every town, we now have homelessness.

Like other councils, Burnley council did away with its points system and had an open waiting list. Other than for people wanting specific houses of a specific nature, there was no problem. It had a surplus of houses in 1979; it now has a waiting list and has had to go back to a points system.

The Government do not deal with housing grants in the Bill, as they had originally planned. I believe, however, that that will be done in the other Bill that will go to the other place. The Minister knows that every council cannot apply the mandatory grant system in the way that they are supposed to because they do not have the money.

Homelessness has been created. There are not enough houses because we are not building them. I want local authorities to be the main provider of housing to rent, but if the Government favoured housing associations and were to let them meet the need, I would accept the position. However, they are not doing that. We know that every independent body says that we need to build about 100,000 houses to rent a year, but we are not building half of that, which is appalling.

The Churches' response to the Bill is presented by Church Action on Poverty, the Catholic Housing Aid Society and the Churches National Housing Coalition. Their view, which is reflected by Shelter and by almost every independent body, is that the Bill's proposals on homelessness are wrong. Their briefing states:

"The Government has accused homeless people of 'queue-jumping' and maintains that the changes will be fairer to people on the waiting list. Yet this claim is refuted by housing departments and organisations across the country. None of the local authority associations believe there is a need for change. No evidence for this 'queue jumping' has ever been produced by the Department of the Environment. The argument is further undermined by Government commissioned research showing that 74 per cent. of households accepted as homeless are already on the waiting list."

The Bill will create more problems than it solves. It tackles the problem and tries to do away with homelessness by saying that people should go into temporary accommodation. The Government need to provide resources now to ensure that there are houses for people to rent before it is too late and they are kicked out of office.

9.17 pm

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): I was the sponsor of an early-day motion on rural housing in the previous Parliament, which led to the successful policy specifically dealing with the particular problems of rural areas. The early-day motion was a precursor to the change in Government policy leading to local authorities being able to grant planning permission for low-cost homes to be tenanted by local people on low incomes, on land outside the village envelope, provided by sympathetic landowners at less than the market value for building land. I welcome the fact that the right to buy will not apply to settlements of fewer than 3,000 people, although I understand that it will be necessary now for the Government to designate individual parishes accordingly.

In some cases, that may lead to a certain amount of disillusionment and disappointment in instances where there are communities of more than 3,000 souls, but which regard themselves as essentially rural communities. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister therefore to adopt maximum flexibility in the matter so as not to prejudice the success of a policy that has been introduced to deal with a specific problem and is working well, with a fund of good will from all sides. There is good will from the people who provide the land and from the planners and, of course, the policy has been welcomed by the beneficiaries.

I remind the Minister that South Shropshire district council in my Ludlow constituency is one of the relatively few local authorities to have implemented large-scale voluntary transfers of council houses to housing associations. I urge my hon. Friend to study the effect that that has had upon the finances of that authority and to look sympathetically at the consequences.

9.20 pm

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): I declare an interest, which is recorded in the Register of Members' Interests. I am a consultant to HACAS, the social housing consultancy.

We are considering the Government's second Bill on housing during this Parliament. The first became the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, and it was announced shortly after the 1992 general election. The current Bill represents the Government's last realistic opportunity to legislate before the coming general election. What are we to make of their two legislative offerings in this Parliament, and how do they match Conservative party promises that were put before the electorate in 1992?

An analysis of the contents of the 1993 Act and of the Bill is an instructive and revealing exercise, especially when the contents are contrasted with the Government's promises to the electorate and placed in the context of what has been happening to housing in Britain over the past four years. They have been grim years for people in every tenure. Home owners have endured continuing problems of mortgage debt, repossession and negative equity on scales that have never before been experienced. No wonder they feel betrayed by a Government who promised to help home owners but who turned their backs on them when the going got rough.

The Government promised to maintain mortgage tax relief but cut it twice. They have compounded insecurity in the market by cutting the income support safety net. They are led by a Prime Minister who, as my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, claimed in January 1992 to have stopped repossessions, but who has not lifted a finger to help the 200,000 householders who have had their homes repossessed since then.

I understand that the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), the chairman of the Conservative party, has recently launched what he calls a "hypocrisy watch". He could make no better start than by comparing the glib promises that his party and the Prime Minister made in 1992 about helping home owners with the systematic and cynical betrayal of home owners that has characterised the Government's actions over the past four years.

In case any Conservative Member has a doubt on the subject, I remind the House that, in the week when the latest repossession figures are due to be announced—they are expected to show repossessions continuing at the appalling rate of 1,000 every week—we are considering a Bill that contains nothing for home owners in difficulty, nothing to ease their fears, nothing to help to restore confidence in the market, and nothing to reduce the tide of repossessions which, according to the Prime Minister, was supposed to have stopped four years ago.

All that the Bill offers to home owners in difficulty is the prospect, if they have their homes repossessed, of even harsher treatment as homeless families. They are more likely to be refused help under the broader definition of intentional homelessness. Even if they are accepted by local authorities, they will be condemned to linger in temporary accommodation because the Government intend—although the Secretary of State revealed earlier that he was a little confused on the issue—to prohibit councils from rehousing homeless families directly into permanent housing. Home owners have been betrayed by the Government and the Bill compounds that betrayal.

Leaseholders have suffered an equally raw deal over recent years. Many leaseholders in former council properties have found themselves trapped with no prospect of selling their homes, or have been confronted with huge repair bills that they simply have not the means to pay.

Private leaseholders have every reason to feel betrayed by the Government, for the Tories promised them the chance to enfranchise their homes. Indeed, that was supposed to have been one of the main purposes of the 1993 Act. As we warned at the time, the Act was so riddled with complexities and loopholes it proved only too easy for landlords to frustrate the hopes of leaseholders. Consequently, very few leaseholders in flats have been able to buy the freehold of their homes.

The 1993 Act was of course the third attempt by the Tory Government to legislate on leasehold reform. Their previous attempts in 1985 and 1987 had equally failed to provide effective remedies for leaseholders confronted with incompetent or unprincipled freeholders or managing agents. In the course of the past year, we have seen all too many examples of that—some from supposedly reputable bodies, such as Smith's Charity, which sold the freehold of its estate over the heads of its leaseholders in breach of the 1987 Act, and got away with it because the Act contained no penalties against defaulting landlords.

Other examples have arisen in less illustrious quarters, including a certain Harold Bebington, mentioned by name by the Secretary of State, and his accomplices Malthouse and Chevalier, who have been terrorising leaseholders all over London with unreasonable demands backed by threats of forfeiture. We should be quite clear about who is responsible for this deplorable state of affairs. Responsibility lies fairly and squarely with the Government, who promised to help leaseholders but failed them—not just once but three times.

Nor can the Government plead ignorance. We warned them time and again when the 1993 Act was going through the House that it would not work. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) pointed out, he warned them too in the late 1980s about the failure of measures to provide proper redress for leaseholders. They ignored our warnings and they have only themselves to blame for creating this mess. Sadly, all too many leaseholders have had to pay a heavy price for the Government's stubborn incompetence.

The reason for the Government's failure to give effective help to leaseholders is all too clear. The Tories dare not act decisively in the interests of leaseholders because they are beholden to the big landowners who have contributed large sums of money to Tory funds. The hypocrisy watch, if the right hon. Member for Peterborough is serious about it, could well find a great deal of interesting evidence on that particular issue. That is why we are sceptical of the promises emanating from the Secretary of State about the measures in the Bill that are supposed to give redress to leaseholders.

Although the Secretary of State does not look the part, he has all the hallmarks of the second-hand car salesman, whose firm has already conned an unfortunate motorist with not one but three successive dud vehicles, none of which worked. Now he is trying to convince the unfortunate buyer that the fourth old banger that he is offering will turn out to be a top-class, high-performance vehicle. Like any such salesman, he is not giving the potential victim the opportunity to inspect the vehicle or take it for a test run. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) pointed out, the Secretary of State is promising clauses that are not in the Bill, yet it was published only 10 days ago.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** The hypocrisy watch could still apply to the hon. Gentleman because his party tried this line of leasehold enfranchisement in 1968, yet did nothing about it during its time in office in the 1970s, because it realised how complicated the matter was.

**Mr. Raynsford:** On the contrary, the Leasehold Reform Act 1967—not 1968—was the one and only successful piece of legislation. It has helped hundreds of

*[Mr. Raynsford]*

thousands of leaseholders to enfranchise. It did work, it was a Labour Act, and the contrast between it and the Tory efforts of the 1980s and 1990s is very interesting.

The Bill's proposals for leasehold reform are quite inadequate, and the Government admit as much. They acknowledge that the clauses in part III, chapter II involve only "minor amendments" to the 1993 Act. The Secretary of State is promising to introduce more clauses as the Bill progresses, but he is still refusing to countenance a right to manage for leaseholders, which would give them a powerful means of redress against rogue landlords.

Against a background of intensifying threats of forfeiture and scandalous demands for large service charges, the Secretary of State has not even bothered to reply to the urgent request that I made of him a week ago for a short emergency Bill to provide immediate protection against forfeiture, providing cover for leaseholders throughout the period—it will be a long one—that this long, complex and controversial legislation will take to wind its way through Parliament. Why is the Secretary of State so reluctant to act decisively? Once again, it is difficult not to suspect the influence of the big landowners.

What about more fundamental reforms, including the introduction of commonhold—supported by two Conservative Members in this debate—which was promised in the 1992 Conservative manifesto but not delivered? That is yet one more broken promise. Leaseholders, like home owners, have every reason to feel betrayed by the Government.

Tenants in all tenures—private, council and housing association—have equally good grounds to complain about the Government's record. They have seen their rents forced up deliberately by Government policy by between two and three times the rate of inflation. When tenants and Labour Members complained, Tory Ministers repeatedly told us not to worry because, in the felicitous phrase much used by the current Secretary of State for Transport, then the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction:

"Housing Benefit would take the strain."

What a con that was.

Millions of tenants were forced deeper into benefit dependency and the poverty trap and when, inevitably, the housing benefit bill went through the roof, the Department of Social Security cried, "Halt." The outcome is an appalling mess in which large sums of public money have been expended on housing benefit, with not all of it, by any means, going to people in need or to bona fide claimants, while investment in new housing has fallen—as many of my hon. Friends have emphasised in this debate—to the lowest level for 50 years.

During the past five years, we have on average started only 35,000 new rented homes a year, compared with more than 130,000 rented homes on average each year under the previous Labour Government. Is it any wonder that we face such a crisis today? Is it any wonder that the level of homelessness is double what it was when Labour was last in power? Is it any wonder that families are consigned to long periods in bed-and-breakfast hotels, or that young, single people are sleeping and begging on our streets? They are the sad symbols of the failure of Tory housing policies during the past 17 years.

The Bill will do nothing to remove those symbols from our society. It will do nothing to stimulate a new building programme, which is so desperately required. That programme could be kick-started today if only the Government had the will, and the imagination to release local authority capital receipts. That programme would help our hard-pressed house building industry and get thousands of unemployed building workers back to work. It is a programme which everyone in the country other than the Government knows makes economic and social sense.

Instead of decisive action to get more homes built, the Bill gives us more tinkering from the people who, in their previous housing Bill, gave us the remarkable rents-to-mortgages scheme. I am sure that Ministers would like to forget that little episode and draw a veil over it, but they cannot because it was the flagship of part II of their 1993 legislation and their main offering to tenants in the social rented sector. We warned them at the time that the rents-to-mortgages scheme was a non-starter but, as with their flawed leasehold measures in part I, the Tories stubbornly pressed ahead, insisting on the merits of their proposals.

What has happened? As we predicted, the scheme has proved a hopeless flop. The Minister was forced to admit in a parliamentary answer last autumn that, to date, despite 13 clauses in legislation and more than £140,000 in promotional expenditure, there have been only 13 takers in the whole country. I may be doing the Government an injustice—perhaps the number of takers has increased in the past two to three months. If so, I will happily give way to the Minister to allow him to announce the number of tenants who have taken up the rents-to-mortgages scheme. He might perhaps even add a few thoughts on the cost-effectiveness of the whole exercise.

The Bill comes from the very same stable—from the same Government who botched three previous attempts at leasehold reform and gave us the rents-to-mortgages scheme. Is it any wonder that the Government are so mistrusted?

Tenants in the private rented sector in particular will be alarmed by the latest Tory legislative offering. Not only does part III further weaken the already very limited safeguards available for tenants seeking private rented housing, but part II lets down large numbers of tenants living in bedsits in what are known as houses in multiple occupation. Ministers are well aware of the concentration of problems in such properties—the high incidence of unfitness and serious disrepair, the squalid conditions that too many bedsit tenants have to endure and the often life-threatening hazards that are sickeningly brought to our attention time and time again when fires or defective gas appliances kill innocent people week after week, month after month, year after year. The hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) highlighted one particularly tragic case that occurred in that town two years ago.

The Government know all about that dreadful toll. They issued a consultation paper a year ago that admitted the existence of problems, and they saw the evidence that was presented in response. Three quarters of the respondents told the Government what was needed, and a number of hon. Members from both sides of the House have given the Government the same message this evening. We need a national licensing scheme to ensure that there are proper standards in all such accommodation in all parts of the

country, but the Government will not listen, and they will not act. They have put their ideological hostility to regulation ahead of their responsibility for safeguarding the lives of tenants. They have tried to cover their tracks by tinkering with the existing local authority powers to register some types of multi-occupied housing, but they know that that will not be adequate. Some Tory Members have said that tonight also.

Perhaps the most telling comment on the Bill's proposals is the contrast between the powers given to the Secretary of State to fix the maximum level of fee that can be charged for registering a property, as against the restriction preventing a local authority from registering houses containing four or fewer bedsitting rooms, even though those properties are known to be death-traps. The interests of the landlord and his freedom to let squalid property count for more with today's Tory party than the lives and well-being of tenants. There can be no more shameful example of the dereliction of duty of this discredited Government.

While the Bill manifestly fails to meet the country's pressing housing needs—in many respects, it will make a bad situation worse—it is not entirely devoid of worthwhile measures. On the old principle of an infinite number of monkeys with an infinite number of typewriters eventually composing "King Lear", it would have been surprising if the Government, having spent so long on working up such a lengthy package, had not managed to hit on at least one or two sensible proposals.

We support—indeed, we originated—the concept of local housing companies proposed in part I, although we are looking for a rather different framework to give more safeguards to tenants and to the local authority that decides to set up a company. We support—indeed, we advocated several years ago—the establishment of an independent housing ombudsman, and we shall back that proposal. We support—indeed, we have campaigned for—more effective measures to deal with anti-social behaviour. Again, we want to see proper safeguards in place to avoid the innocent being caught up.

We must also nail the pernicious lie that implies that only tenants are guilty of such behaviour. It is sadly symptomatic of the Government's attitude that part V, which addresses this issue, is headed "Conduct of Tenants". I spell this out to the House—anti-social behaviour is unacceptable, whether it is perpetrated by tenants, owners or anyone else. It must be stopped, whoever is responsible.

We also support the principle of voluntary purchase grant and the right to buy for housing association tenants. Once again, however, we are looking for safeguards to ensure that the benefit for those who are able to buy their homes is not at the expense of others who depend on a good supply of affordable rented housing.

Those rays of light are sadly eclipsed by the main thrust of the Bill, which is profoundly misconceived and will do immense damage. It is hardly surprising that the Government's attack on the homeless is relegated to the end. The fact that it comes in parts VI and VII is perhaps a sign of the embarrassment that the Government should feel about these mean-spirited proposals, which have rightly been condemned by the overwhelming majority of people who have examined them.

The 10,000 people who responded to the first consultation two years ago were almost unanimous in calling on the Government to abandon the planned changes to the existing legislation. The housing profession, local authority associations, the housing association movement, the voluntary organisations representing and working with homeless people, and the Churches—plus all of the signatories to today's advertisement in *The Times*—have spoken with one voice in calling for the Government to think again. Only a Government as stubborn, stupid and out of touch as this one could still press ahead regardless. Everyone else is out of step except our little Johnny, is presumably the sad attitude that they are taking.

What the Government are proposing in parts V and VI is wrong. If it were to be enacted, it would put the clock back to the era of "Cathy Come Home", when homeless families were all too often trapped in a destructive, downward spiral of insecurity, recurring homelessness and desperation. The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, introduced as a private Member's Bill with support from both sides of the House, except for right-wing Tories, broke that cycle. It is a sign of how far today's Tory party has lurched to the right that the Government are proposing to attack the 1977 legislation, which was reviewed by the Deputy Prime Minister, when he was Secretary of State for the Environment in the early 1980s, by the late Lord Ridley and by the Governor of Hong Kong, when they were Secretaries of State in the late 1980s. The latter said:

> "The present terms of the Act strike a reasonable balance between the interests of the genuinely homeless and others in housing need."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1989; Vol. 160, c. *243*.]

Now, with no material change of circumstance in the meantime and with the numbers of homeless exactly the same as in 1989, today's Tory party proposes to scrap that framework. The Government have no justification for what they are planning, no electoral mandate and no support outside their own ranks.

We shall vote against the Bill because those and other measures in it are wrong and damaging. We shall fight it tooth and nail through every stage of the parliamentary process. We shall do all in our power to stop the Bill in its present form reaching the statute book.

9.40 pm

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) for indicating his support for a large part of the Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) said in his very sane speech that the measures should be put into some form of strategic context. It might help the House if I outline that context.

We have to face a background in which new social patterns are emerging. It does not matter whether we like it or not, it is a fact and policy must address itself to it. The multiplication of households and the changes in families are matters that we must note. There is pressure everywhere, in all advanced industrial states—*[Interruption.]* It is no good Opposition Members cackling—their Treasury spokesman has recognised that pressure.

There is pressure on public expenditure and pressure in all industrial societies to redefine the frontiers between a legitimate demand on public expenditure and what people

*[Mr. David Curry]*

ought to assume as their own responsibilities. That is inescapable and it is the broad context in which the Bill must be seen.

For example, we want—I want it in particular, given my responsibilities—housing to be seen much more in the context of regeneration. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, touched on that theme in what I thought were perfectly sensible remarks.

We want diversification of tenure, for example. That is why the right to buy will enable housing association tenants to buy their existing homes and to anchor home ownership and diversity in the same neighbourhood. My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South and the House will be interested to know that more than 120 housing associations, from the very large to the very small, have already shown an interest in taking up the voluntary conditions that we will offer when the Bill becomes law.

**Mr. Turner:** Is not the Minister being hypocritical? Why is there no proper provision in the Bill for housing co-operatives? Why have the Government given them such a terrible deal in the past four years? How can he stand at the Dispatch Box and say that he is interested in diversity of tenure, when he has a report before him telling him that housing co-operatives have the best added value and security of tenure that one could ask for? He has a report from Price Waterhouse telling him that. Why does he not act on it?

**Mr. Curry:** For someone who has only just arrived in the Chamber, that was a marathon performance—and irrelevant to the Bill. The hon. Gentleman should have been here for longer.

Secondly, we want to develop the idea of estate renewal for the same purpose of helping some of the worst estates. Thirdly, we want to establish housing companies to open the way for private investment in housing. That is part of the process of diversification.

We want to achieve a better balance in the housing market. I have constantly said that I do not believe that a sort of apartheid division of the housing market between owner-occupation and social housing is satisfactory. There must be a more vigorous private rented sector. That is why there are measures in this Bill and in the Finance Bill to deliver it.

We also need sustainable home ownership, because there are young people who want to start their lives, when they are getting established, in a property with a flexible form of tenure. That is important as part of a sustainable agenda. We want communities to be more able to sustain themselves. That is why we are going to take action against tenants who behave badly—the victims are always their neighbours who live on the estate. We must deal with houses in multiple occupation so that people have security without a mammoth amount of regulation such as the hon. Member for Greenwich promises.

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Curry:** I have given way once and it was a mistake that I am not going to repeat.

**Mr. Turner:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish that the Minister would answer my question.

**Madam Speaker:** That is not a point of order.

**Mr. Curry:** We have to tackle abuses by freeholders exercised against leaseholders. That is the framework in which we are bringing the Bill forward.

Finally, and importantly—although it is by no means the dominant part of the Bill—there is the fair allocation of resources, which brings us to the duty to the homeless. Bringing new players, expertise and resources into a sector that, until now, has depended heavily on public expenditure and must seek new sources of supply, is the strategic purpose of the Bill. It is worth setting that out.

I realise that many hon. Members are concerned about the homelessness provisions, though, to judge by their remarks, I doubt whether many of them understand the provisions, which have to be read alongside the proposals on allocations that we issued at the end of last week for consultation. The present legal situation is that, under the House of Lords ruling on the Awua case, there is no safety net and the duty to the homeless can be discharged in as little as 28 days. It does not matter what most authorities do; that is the obligation on them.

We intend to create a fair system of allocation while preserving the safety net so that people are treated equally. We intend to spell out the effect of the provisions in guidance, a draft of which we published for consultation last week. When a homeless family presents itself for housing, it will be placed in temporary accommodation that must be appropriate to its needs and affordable. That could be in local authority housing, housing association property or the private rented sector. If the family meets the criteria set out in the guidance—the allocations have been framed to take special account of the needs of children—it will be able to receive permanent accommodation as a priority through the housing register criteria.

**Mr. Betts:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Curry:** No. That could include housing in the same local authority or housing association property used for temporary accommodation. Very few families will still in be in temporary accommodation after two years.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Curry:** I shall not give way because I have important ground to cover. I am interested in one thing only: setting out a fair system of allocating housing to those in need according to their need. I am not in the business of doing down the homeless or of persecuting or rescuing fallen women or anyone else. My concern is to meet need and not to pass judgment on people's life styles. I want those with needs to know that they have a fair chance to get housing. I want to ensure that the genuinely homeless family with long-term social needs is housed and that the family struggling to make do, to make ends meet and hang on, will also have its needs recognised.

Homelessness is not a single circumstance. Our basic allocation rules go back to the Housing Act 1935. That is when the criteria for insanitary and overcrowded housing,

and large families in unsatisfactory housing, were set down. Those are physical conditions. We must now bring that legislation up to date and recognise the new social needs that have arisen from the changes in society to which I referred earlier, and the fragmentation which many of us may not like but which policy must address. That is what our allocation criteria and consultation try to do.

Some people become homeless because they have long-term social needs, and they will receive priority. Others become homeless because of shorter-term circumstances—perhaps economic circumstances that can be changed. It is not reasonable that everyone who is declared homeless, irrespective of whether it is short or long-term homelessness, should necessarily enjoy a route to permanent accommodation, with all the rights that that brings, including the right to buy and, in some circumstances, virtually the right of succession. That is at the heart of our argument on homelessness.

Our guidance recognises the needs of people with temporary or insecure tenure, families with dependent children or expecting a child, households with a special need for settled accommodation, and households with limited opportunities to secure accommodation. The Bill is about need, not morality; it is about fairness, not discrimination; and it is about openness in allocation, not fixing.

I respect the local government history of the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) and the sincerity that he brings to this debate. He asked me a specific question to which I shall reply. The Government oppose one local authority being able to transfer to a second authority its homelessness duty to rehouse after 12 months. We shall consult local authorities on how long it is reasonable to maintain that responsibility and the housing benefit charge with the placing authority.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) was wrong to say that there would be exclusions from advice. It is a complicated measure in the Bill, so I shall write and give her chapter and verse to sustain the statement that I have just made.

As one or two hon. Members mentioned it towards the end of their speeches, it might be sensible if I discuss the rough sleepers initiative. It has been a successful programme. We have built new accommodation units and many people who are taken off the streets by the outreach agencies are then placed in permanent accommodation. Anyone who considers this matter for more than a second, however, will realise that it is wrong to say that people's problems, no matter what they are, can be solved by giving them a roof over their heads. We know that we face increasing problems of drink, drugs, mental illness and ordinary illness and we must find the means to help those people in a much more specialist way. That is why we are moving towards a new phase of the rough sleepers initiative. We have collected the replies to the consultation document and are studying them now. They follow the broad lines of the Government's ideas and I hope shortly to lay down the route that we intend to take to advance that important initiative.

Many hon. Members mentioned the housing association right to buy. Let me make it clear what we are doing. Rural areas will be exempt for the reasons that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave. Housing associations can opt in, in respect of their existing housing, but can withhold property built with charitable donations, property whose sale price will not meet the debt on the property, and a wide range of special needs housing. We have designed the measure as a practical response and it is fair to say that it has been welcomed by the National Federation of Housing Associations, and more than 120 housing associations have already shown an interest in taking it up. The hon. Member for Greenwich said that he supported the broad principle of the measure. We want to anchor different sorts of tenure in the local community so that we do not have ghettos of home ownership, social housing or any other sort of housing. We want to create communities that work because that is the essence of regeneration.

I recognise the urgency with which some of my hon. Friends want action on houses in multiple occupation. The work of my hon. Friends the Members for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) and for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) in mobilising opinion on that matter has been important. My hon. Friends with south coast constituencies have also experienced difficulties. I accept that the problems are considerable and that they must be addressed. The provision of hostel accommodation must be placed alongside the needs of the local community and the requirement to maintain a mixed community. There is no point having benefit hostels if the jobs that are sought migrate because of the damage done to the reputation of the towns by the establishment of the hostels.

Local authorities must have clear and enforceable rules on safety. They must be able to say "enough is enough" when it comes to approving new establishments and closing those which are not managed effectively and responsibly. It is stated on the face of the Bill that the registration and control scheme can be refused if the owner is not a fit person to manage the establishment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) mentioned the issue of self-contained flats. They are within the scope of the definition of houses in multiple occupation and they are excluded from the scope of the registration schemes.

Our measures on anti-social behaviour received an equally warm welcome. I recognise that nobody will formulate a perfect solution to that problem, but we have a duty to assist local authorities when they are determined to tackle it. I think that that determination is shared by most hon. Members. I am sure that we have all had the experience of visiting local housing estates and speaking with tenant groups, perhaps in the local church hall or at the local library. They tell us how a handful of people, and perhaps their children, have made life a misery and how they intimidate witnesses. It is very difficult to get prosecutions and there is a downward cycle of intimidation and fear on the estates.

We do not have a perfect answer any more than the hon. Member for Greenwich does, but I promise that we shall seek to collaborate in Committee to find measures that will address that problem. It is an urgent issue which is related to quality of life and to making communities work effectively. We are determined to deal with the intimidation and fear which many people—particularly the elderly—in those circumstances face.

I am grateful for the support shown for the measures dealing with leaseholders. Housing for private sector development is not in the Bill because we had to make room for the leaseholders issue, which is an extremely urgent matter. The Bill already contained more than 180

*[Mr. Curry]*

clauses and, while I may have a number of unrealistic ambitions, the ambition to be in charge of the largest Bill ever to be introduced in this place is one that I can forgo without any great sense of self-sacrifice. A second housing Bill, which will contain the Latham proposals, will be introduced in the other place. We shall deal with the leasehold measures; it is an urgent matter and we are committed to bringing proposals forward.

The hon. Member for Christchurch mentioned her commitment to phase out mortgage interest relief coupled with mortgage benefit. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, she has no doubt read her party's submission to its Whips Office. Under the heading "Lib-Dem Weaknesses" it states:

"our intention to phase out MIRAS will cripple mortgage payers and exacerbate negative equity . . .

our policy on helping home owners suffering from negative equity is expensive and ill-thought out".

If the hon. Lady had read the document produced by someone who is described as "Political Warfare Officer", no doubt she would have been better informed for the debate.

As for the Labour party, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) may have inadvertently picked up the speech that he intends to deliver on Wednesday in the revenue support grant debate. If I know him, I suspect that parts of his speech today will be largely interchangeable with that speech. However, the Labour party has not said what it intends to do. We know that old Labour wants to build council houses. Labour Members say continually that we must build more council houses, but they will not say how they would pay for them.

Labour Members recite the magic incantation, "We will release capital receipts"; that is the magic abracadabra of the Labour party's policy. However, Labour Members will not say how many or over what period. They will not reveal their mechanism for redistribution due to the inconvenient fact that the receipts are not where they are needed. In other words, all we have is a slogan which is devoid of any substance. As my right hon. Friend said, we have been promised a blinding revelation in that area for months, but it has not come.

I think that Labour is acting out a charade. Is it opposed to the creation of housing companies in the private sector? The answer is no. Is it opposed, in principle, to the housing association right to buy? The answer is no. Is it at odds with us over helping local authorities deal with anti-social behaviour? The answer is no. Is it disputing the need to develop the private rented sector to provide real choice in housing? Again, the answer is no. Is it contesting the need to help leaseholders who suffer exploitation by bad landlords? No. It is a matter of degree, not direction. Is it against the need to improve the quality of regulating HMOs? No. It is a question of degree. Even on homelessness, I suspect that Labour agrees that we need a single route towards housing.

It is all hypocrisy and humbug. The Opposition have no housing policy. It is constantly promised and never delivered. We have a surrogate opposition to our measure. They have no measures of their own and I commend ours to the House.

*Question put*, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

*The House divided*: Ayes 290, Noes 259.

**Division No. 37]** **[10.00 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald *(Epsom and Ewell)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*

Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Timothy Wood and**
**Mr. Gyles Brandreth.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*

Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Ms Janet Anderson and Mr. Joe Benton.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).*

## HOUSING BILL [*MONEY*]

*Queen's recommendation having been signified—*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),*

That, for the purposes of any Act of the present Session resulting from the Housing Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of the Act, and

(ii) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of the National Loans Fund under any other enactment; and

(c) the payment into the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund of any sums received under or by virtue of the Act.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## COMPANIES

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

That the draft Companies Act 1985 (Miscellaneous Accounting Amendments) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 16th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94H(1) (Scottish Grand Committee (Sittings)),*

That—

(1) in respect of the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in the Highland Regional Council Buildings, Inverness, on Monday 5th February, the Order of the House [11th December] shall have effect with the substitution of the words 'half-past Eleven o'clock' for the words 'half-past Ten o'clock' and the Chairman shall interrupt the proceedings at Two o'clock, and—

(2) the Chairman shall interrupt the proceedings at One o'clock at the subsequent meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee specified in paragraphs 4 to 12 of the said Order.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## Roundgrant Ltd.

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

10.16 pm

**Mr. William Powell** (Corby): One of the features of social life of which one can feel most proud is the amount of money that is given by our fellow citizens to charity. There is an extraordinarily wide range of charities and large sums are raised by a variety of purposes. Nothing that I wish to say is designed to get round the fact that it is my belief that 99.9 per cent. of our charities are magnificent institutions and deserve the general support of our fellow countrymen. There are, however, a few that amount to nothing more and nothing less than a criminal scam.

Nearly all our charities are of credit and renown. Their work deserves our attention and support. Whether at home or abroad their activities are an essential part of civilised life. This evening, however, I shall raise the issue of bogus charities and a criminal scam that demean all outstanding charitable institutions and whose activities insult the public. Let the message go forth from the House that we must all be vigilant against fraudsters, tricksters and criminals who pretend that they are raising money for charity.

In September 1993, Roundgrant Ltd. of 285 Welland road, Peterborough, the directors being Mr. Ian Irwin of that address and Mr. Terence Wyre of 64 Lavender crescent, Dogsthorpe, Peterborough, was incorporated. At the same time the Roundgrant Society was established from the same address. Some promotional literature was prepared, in which it was claimed that the Roundgrant Society would cover East Anglia, the midlands, Lincolnshire, London, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Essex, Surrey, Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. It was then claimed that

"at the moment we are planning to expand down to the south coast."

Roundgrant Ltd. also prepared a pamphlet, which was given to those who responded to the buckets that were held out for street collection, and £1 would provide the donor with a copy. On page three of the edition that I have—this is issue No. 5, and there have been a number of editions—it thanks the public for supporting Roundgrant Ltd., which, it says

"is a non profit making company. Formed within Government guidelines to raise funds for the Roundgrant Society."

If I may pause for a moment, the Government guidelines referred to are a mystery to me, and I think that they would be a mystery to anybody reading this document, which continues:

"Our aim is to help as many people as we can regain the independence which is rightly theirs . . . Of course as every fund raising company Roundgrant Ltd. has its expenses, from time to time its directors will be paid remuneration which will be calculated on the basis of what in the directors opinion is reasonable, taking into account the time spent by the directors in managing Roundgrant's affairs, and the level of the funds Roundgrant is successful in raising.

We are not like so many so called fund-raising companies who give as little as possible to their said cause. All the net profits of Roundgrant Ltd. will go to the Roundgrant Society to enable them to do as much as possible."

The rest of the document contains a recipe for chicken and ham loaf and for raspberry and banana trifle; a number of advertisements, including advertisements for medical supplies; a couple of crosswords; a page entitled "humour and laughter" and other matters. The really important part of what it had to say was that it was not like so many so-called fund-raising companies.

Roundgrant Ltd. was formed in 1993 as a limited company. Unfortunately, almost no documents have been lodged in Companies House about its activities, but there is in Companies House a set of accounts that were prepared for Roundgrant Ltd. up to 31 August 1994. They show that a gross income of some £43,748.38 was raised in a period up to that date. Roundgrant Ltd. continued long after 31 August 1994 and no subsequent accounts have been lodged. The breakdown shows that directors' fees and pensions amounted to some £10,620, and that commissions payable—I surmise mostly to the directors and their nearest and dearest and those whom they could control—amounted to some £14,859.48.

There are a number of other mysterious items in the breakdown, all of which suggest that the amount that was taken by the directors in one form or another by way of fees, pensions, commissions or whatever was an astonishing proportion of the total. Indeed, at the bottom of the accounts, Roundgrant Ltd. claims that the amount that was transferred to the Roundgrant Society, which, of course, would be using the money for the purposes of providing equipment for the disabled, was only some £2,000. About £43,000 was raised, but only £2,000 apparently was distributed. The essence of the fund raising was the holding out of a bucket so that people could put in £1 coins. There is absolutely no guarantee that those coins were not transferred into the pockets of those who were collecting or the pockets of the directors behind them, without appearing in the accounts at all.

There are those who have considered the matter closely and have assisted me in the preparation of my evidence tonight who believe that the true sum that was raised by and on behalf of Roundgrant Ltd. over 18 months—a wider period than that covered by the accounts to which I have referred—was not less than £100,000, and I have heard it suggested by responsible people in Northamptonshire that the sum raised might be substantially in excess of £100,000. We know that the only claim that it makes for what was transferred to the Roundgrant Society, the body that had the power to make sums available for equipment for the disabled, was only about £2,000. It is well within the realms of everyone's imagination that the sums in the accounts could have been understated, but it would be impossible to imagine that the amount passed on to the Roundgrant Society has been overstated. If it had wanted to, it could have entered a much larger sum without anyone being able to check up.

We know that the Roundgrant Society and those acting on behalf of it operated in a number of counties: Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. It is likely that they also operated in a number of other areas, and that that occurred over 18 months. It came to my attention last autumn that people acting on behalf of Roundgrant had made a number of visits to Oundle, near Peterborough—in my constituency—in July and August, and had held out collecting buckets. It is beyond doubt that all those who put money into the buckets thought that they were giving to charity. They received, if they wanted it, a copy of the pamphlet to which I have referred. Of course, almost none of the money went to charity.

*[Mr. William Powell]*

A number of my constituents were approached during that period. I have copies of witness statements from them, prepared by and on behalf of Oundle town council and for the environmental health office of East Northampton district council, which suggest that constituents of mine—some of whom I know personally—were approached and gave money in the belief that it would go to charity, although it did not. That happened on a continuing basis, and we know that similar collections were made on a continuing basis in Kings Lynn, Breckland, south Holland, east Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, south Kesteven, Cambridge, Nottinghamshire, Boston and Hemel Hempstead. It is not surprising, therefore, that substantial sums were raised.

I contend that that was a criminal scam, and that the directors and those running Roundgrant knew exactly what they were doing. They realised that it was a good wheeze that would enable them to hoodwink the public and persuade people to give money, ostensibly to charity. My constituents were told that the money would be used to help the disabled, specifically those in Oundle, and that it would be allocated with the assistance of the social services department. Needless to say, the Northamptonshire social services department did not know about this; nor did local doctors, whose advice would allegedly be used by Roundgrant in the distribution of the money.

By early autumn last year, it was obvious that something serious was going on. As a result, on 3 November 1995, the Northamptonshire police, East Northampton district council and Oundle town council issued a news release, stating that they were

"investigating and warning the public about the operation of an organisation which has been selling brochures on the streets of Oundle at £1 a copy."

The news release went on:

"The organisation is based outside the county and operates in a similar manner in other areas of Northamptonshire and a number of other counties.

Sales of the brochure are promoted on the grounds that funds are being raised for the disabled and the brochure claims the organisation to be charitable.

Members of the public making donations are misled by the cover of the brochure and by the sales pitch of the collectors into believing they are giving money to a charitable organisation for the disabled. However, this is not supported by the contents of the brochure or by the facts which are now becoming evident.

Not only are the public being misled, but it is feared the operation of the organisation could well have a detrimental effect on the fund-raising activities of bona fide groups who are raising money for charity.

Members of the public are advised to be on their guard against this type of deception and when making any donation should question what proportion of the money is going to the stated good cause."

It is important to underline that money that the public thought they were giving to charity, but that was not going to charitable organisations, was being denied to other bona fide charities that deserved the public's support.

By September, it was clear that, in all probability, a number of breaches of the Companies Act 1989 had been committed because the necessary documentation required for a limited company had not been lodged at Companies House. One of the things that I ask of my hon. Friend the Minister is that he draws those possible breaches of the law to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

It is likely that the people who were raising money were in breach of social security law. In particular, employment records by Roundgrant are hard to find. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will draw to the attention of the Secretary of State for Social Security possible breaches of the law in relation to employment records and social security that may have occurred. Because of all that, a working group was formed from the various local authorities and from police from a number of counties. The Charity Commission was involved and a number of meetings of that group were held in Oundle, the most important of which was on 6 November. The minutes of that meeting state that Mr. Larkin of the Charity Commission advised the group that

"when operations such as Roundgrant were constituted they formed two distinct and autonomous organisations, in this case, Roundgrant Ltd. and Roundgrant Society. The purpose of Roundgrant Limited was to raise funds specifically for the Roundgrant Society, and under the Charities Acts of 1992 and 1993 it was necessary for a legal agreement to exist determining the financial arrangement between the limited company and the society. It was the view of the Charity Commissioners that the legislation which determined the terms of agreement was in the case of Roundgrant not being met. Legal advisers to the Charity Commission had therefore concluded that Roundgrant were trading illegally. Mr. Larkin advised that the Charity Commissioners would be issuing an order restricting the transactions and payments of the Roundgrant Society accounts on the 7 November 1995 which would effectively in law, stop Roundgrant trading . . . should Roundgrant continue to trade once the order had been issued the Charity Commission would have the power to treat this action as contempt of a High Court order."

Those orders were issued to Mr. Irwin, one of the directors to whom I have referred, at 285 Welland road, to Mrs. O'Brien, also of that address, to Mr. Dennis Tomlin of Moorview, Bondleigh, North Tawton in Devon, and to Mr. Horace Gilson of 3 Aboyne avenue, Orton Waterville in Peterborough.

I note the interest of Mr. Tomlin in Devon. I contend—and I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware of this important point—that, in relation to charitable collections, breaches of the Theft Act 1968 by organised criminals are taking place across the country, and that they are not confined purely to Roundgrant Ltd. and to activities in the eastern counties. I merely use Roundgrant, whose activities I now believe have ceased as a result of the interest that I and others have shown in its activities, as an example. I believe them to be illustrative of what is taking place much more widely throughout the country. It may be that in Devon, as well as in the eastern counties, serious breaches have been taking place.

The statutory notices forbidding any further activity by Roundgrant Ltd. and the Roundgrant Society were issued, and the meeting on 6 November was advised that any breach of them would be a breach of a High Court order. I have evidence that further breaches occurred in November in south Lincolnshire and Ely. The Charity Commission was advised by the relevant local authorities that Roundgrant had made further collections in breach of the statutory notices.

In view of what happened, the Charity Commission should have acted at once to take this matter to the High Court. It did not, and continued to investigate the matter. I deplore the fact that it did not take instant action, and I hope that in future, as soon as evidence from reputable

sources becomes available—and the evidence in this case was from East Cambridgeshire district council and the South Holland district council—action will be taken. In this instance action should have been taken in the High Court against those who were in breach of the statutory notices.

As soon as I became aware of these events in different counties, I approached the Director of Public Prosecutions and suggested that some kind of co-ordinating activity should take place involving the police, because it was apparent to me that whatever the breaches of legislation in relation to street collections, there was in all likelihood a serious breach of the Theft Act 1968, section 15 of which provides that obtaining a pecuniary advantage by deception is a serious criminal offence. In this case the pecuniary advantage consists of the £1 coins being dropped into the buckets, and the deception is that those who dropped them in were led to believe that they were giving money to charity when they were not. Not only would there be breaches of section 15 of the 1968 Act but there would be possible charges of conspiracy.

Alas, the Director of Public Prosecutions, as is her wont—and I have found this on other occasions—was not at all helpful, unlike her predecessor who would certainly have ordered a police inquiry and a report to him of what happened. I drew the correspondence to the attention of the various chief constables. The chief constables of Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire responded, but it is a matter of some regret to me that the chief constables of Cambridgeshire and Nottinghamshire did not. I hope that the Minister will draw these matters to their attention.

In this case there is ample evidence of serious breaches of the criminal law, and it is likely that the people behind those breaches are serious professional criminals who deserve a long time in the slammer. Certainly, most of my constituents hope that they go there as soon as possible in view of what is abundantly plain. I hope that the Minister will draw not only my remarks but the whole background of the case to the attention of the various Government Departments and chief constables to ensure that wherever this kind of danger exists in future action is taken to prevent substantial sums being raised for purposes quite different from those that the donors intended.

10.37 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) on raising this matter. I certainly confirm that I take it extremely seriously, and that his words will be drawn to the attention of the various agencies he mentioned.

As my hon. Friend said, charities have a very special place in our national life. They probably raise some £14 billion a year, and that shows a great deal of generosity. Overall, the voluntary sector thrives, and it depends on trust and good will, and on action that is motivated by generosity to others. When things go wrong, and particularly when it appears that the public's generosity is being exploited, it is a matter for considerable concern.

Through its support and investigative division, the Charity Commission aims to identify those areas of concern and take action. In many cases, that means helping those concerned to rectify errors, but the commission also has powers to investigate abuse of charity funds and to protect those funds when they appear to be at risk. I shall give a résumé of what is known to me about the case that my hon. Friend has raised.

I understand that there are two parties: Roundgrant Ltd., a commercial company, as my hon. Friend has described, which was selling magazines with a representation that some parts of the proceeds would benefit a charity, the second party, the Roundgrant Society. The Charity Commission has taken a very close interest in the matter, together with the relevant local authorities and the police.

Having written to the charity inquiring about the amount of money reaching it from the sale of magazines and having not received a satisfactory reply, the Charity Commission took action early in November. It served on the charity trustees an order prohibiting them from entering into transactions on behalf of the charity, from raising any funds for the charity, and from making payments in the administration of the charity. The order was copied to the charity's bank, effectively freezing the charity's fund.

As I understand it, only some £3,500 out of the declared £43,700 sales by the company reached the charity. While each case must be treated on its merits—such margins may be appropriate in cases where the public are buying an item that represents fair value—I understand that in this case a very insubstantial publication, which my hon. Friend has already described, was being sold, representing almost no value for the £1 purchase price.

In those circumstances, I certainly share my hon. Friend's view that the venture may indeed be nothing more than one for private gain falsely masquerading as a charitable venture. If that is indeed the case, I share my hon. Friend's view of what those involved have been up to, and I am horrified to hear that the fraud has been perpetrated on the public.

As well as writing to the charity, the Charity Commission wrote to Roundgrant Ltd. drawing its attention to the new requirements of the Charities Act 1992, pointing out that, before selling magazines with a representation that part of the purchase price will benefit a particular charity, it must have a written agreement satisfying conditions prescribed in the Charitable Institutions (Fund-Raising) Regulations. The commission pointed out that the company's existing agreement did not meet those requirements, and that the company would be unable to obtain a new agreement, because the Charity Commission's order prevented the trustees of the Roundgrant Society from entering into any agreement.

Since then, the commission has become aware that the company appears to be selling an amended version of the magazine, collecting for general charitable purposes. Given what went before, that new activity obviously raised further alarm. The commission therefore wrote to the company seeking details of the new arrangements. Not having received a reply, the Charity Commission invoked its powers under the Charities Act 1993 late last week, and issued a direction to Roundgrant Ltd. demanding details of its finances.

Further steps depend on what action the company takes and what information is forthcoming, but the commission has extensive powers. Should the company be unwise enough to ignore the direction that it has just received, the Charity Commission can issue a further order, and, if necessary, seek its enforcement through the High Court,

*[Mr. Tom Sackville]*

where possible sanctions include imprisonment. The commission is also maintaining its liaison with the police and local authorities.

We await developments with interest. My hon. Friend may, however, be interested to hear that the company's initial response has been to telephone the Charity Commission to inform the commissioners that it intends to close down its operation. Even if that is indeed so, the Charity Commission will have a continuing interest in the distribution of charitable funds that the company has raised.

I can reassure my hon. Friend that all concerned will be looking carefully at the case and the implications stemming from it. The new investigative powers of the commission and the new controls on professional and commercial involvement in charitable fund-raising have made an important contribution, and have enabled the commission to take a more proactive role.

I know from what my hon. Friend has said that he is critical of the degree of enforcement in this case, and—perhaps—of the powers and safeguards available. As to the law relating to charities, however, I hope that he will appreciate the difficulty of framing legislation which gives the greatest possible obstruction to bogus fund-raising, but which helps bona fide charities to raise the funds they need with the minimum of inconvenience and expense. We will, of course, keep this difficult balance under review.

Co-operation among the various agencies involved is essential, as such cases can involve several interests, and can require co-ordinated action to be taken. To strengthen such co-operation, it is our intention to issue a circular to the police, local authorities and others, summarising the new charities legislation, drawing to the attention of all those agencies the role of the Charity Commission and encouraging practical co-operation where that can be of use. These steps also emphasise the importance of vigilance and continued choice by the public.

Clearly, the message that must go out is that people should be willing to give to genuine causes but be wary of propositions that seem doubtful. If one is in doubt, one should ask the collector or seller for more information or decline to give. If it is thought appropriate, one should refer the matter to the police, the Charity Commission or the local authority.

My hon. Friend will agree that the case that he has brought to the House's attention is in the minority, but it is important that we have and exercise powers to investigate, and that we act as quickly as possible.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 30 January 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

ALLIED IRISH BANKS BILL

HENRY JOHNSON, SONS & CO., LIMITED BILL

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON BILL

*Read a Second time, and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.*

EDINBURGH ASSAY OFFICE BILL

*Considered; to be read the Third time.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## ENVIRONMENT

### Drinking Water

1. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he takes to ensure the independent monitoring of the quality of drinking water. [10368]

**The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer):** Before privatisation, there were no proper standards for drinking water and no effective monitoring. Since privatisation, strict monitoring by the drinking water inspectorate has been introduced and standards have risen every year since 1991.

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** The Secretary of State will probably be aware of the recent red alert on drinking water in the Wakefield area as a result of the discovery of cryptosporidium in drinking water supplies. Given the complete lack of public confidence in the privatised utilities, especially Yorkshire Water, will the Secretary of State ensure that, when there are red alert procedures in future, they automatically trigger an immediate objective evaluation and monitoring of the safety of that drinking water? Why are the Government unable to offer a definition of safe or unsafe levels of cryptosporidium in drinking water?

**Mr. Gummer:** Before privatisation, there would have been no testing, there would have been no way of finding out about cryptosporidium and companies were not required to report it. Companies are now required to report it at once. The drinking water inspectorate runs independent tests and deals with the matter independently—another advantage of privatisation.

**Sir Jim Spicer:** Do we not have the finest drinking water in the world? Is it not acknowledged that 99.3 per cent. of all the tests are passed with flying colours, and is it not disgraceful that, time and again, we find that very high quality being rubbished by Opposition Members?

**Mr. Gummer:** I do not know of any other country in the world that has such good data and so universal a system of monitoring drinking water. In the whole of Europe, this is the only country to publish properly audited data and we believe—we cannot say for sure because other countries do not publish properly audited data—that we are among the best, if not the best, in Europe.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** In Yorkshire, people may consider the Secretary of State's answers to have been complacent. Is he aware that the public health authorities in Sheffield and in the other parts of Yorkshire feel that the cryptosporidium leaks that have been acknowledged in the Elvington and Barmby Moor sewage treatment plants are serious? Is he further aware that they affect 20 per cent. of all Yorkshire Water drinking supplies? Does he realise that there is a possibility that those increased levels of cryptosporidium may be linked to the reduced flow through the waste water system because of the cuts and the drought?

**Mr. Gummer:** I agree that this is a serious matter and, in that view, we are unlike any other country in Europe. No one except the United States treats the matter with the same seriousness as we do. We are the only country to have a system of monitoring and of dealing with the problems as they occur. It undermines public confidence to suggest other than that we have the safest drinking water in the world and the best services to ensure that it remains that way.

### Local Authority Services

2. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to meet representatives of Unison to discuss the provision of local authority services. [10369]

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry):** None.

**Mr. Hughes:** My hon. Friend's reply is somewhat disappointing. Will he arrange a meeting with representatives of Unison, and use that as an opportunity to explain to them that compulsory competitive tendering has saved enormous amounts of taxpayers' money and has led to the improvement of many services—benefits that are now widely recognised across the political divide? Will he impress upon them the importance of removing their armlock from Labour party policy so that Labour drops its stupid opposition to CCT, which proves once again that it cares for those who pay for the Labour party and not for those who pay for local services?

**Mr. Curry:** I am afraid that my hon. Friend is seriously wrong in one of his statements: that view is not shared

across the political divide because the Labour party quite clearly does not share it. Labour is hostile to competition because it is funded by Unison and, if Labour ever came to power, we know that the council tax payer would finance Unison.

**Mr. Dobson:** Does the Minister recognise that we acknowledge that we meet with trade unions? In the past few weeks, I have met the ex-Tory Member of the European Parliament, whom the Secretary of State appointed to chair the Countryside Commission, people from the City of London and from London First, and the people whom the Secretary of State has appointed to the Audit Commission and to the Local Government Commission. While we are on the subject of ministerial meetings—this is the Department that managed to lose £300 million in taxpayers' money through the privatisation of the Property Services Agency—will the Minister tell us whom Ministers and officials met when they organised that transaction? Did they meet any ex-Tory Ministers when they were deciding to sell off that industry?

**Mr. Curry:** I am very reassured to learn that the hon. Gentleman has such a busy social diary. However, he will know that his remarks have nothing whatever to do with the question. We sold that company because it was better in the private sector than in the public sector. The employees have benefited from that sale, and it has become an efficient company.

The hon. Gentleman persists in believing that such bodies are run better by the state than in the private sector. There is no evidence to support that view—and I am not even sure that his leader believes it.

**Mr. Butterfill:** Did my hon. Friend see the report in an edition of *The Spectator* from last year in which Mr. Leo McKinstry—who was the aide to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) at the last general election—said that the unions still have a great deal of influence in Labour town halls? Is it not true that they are more interested in representing the producers than the consumers in our society?

**Mr. Curry:** One of the encouraging signs in recent years is the way in which a great many people in local government have embraced the partnership between the public and the private sectors. However, I am not sure to what extent that is followed by the Labour party at Westminster. It seems wedded absolutely to the idea of trade union power and the trade unions finance many of its activities. If my hon. Friend wants to discover what Labour is really like in government, I suggest that he makes some calls on a few local authorities, and he will find out in a very short time. Perhaps he should start with somewhere like Hackney.

## City Pride Initiative

3. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend the city pride initiative to more cities. [10370]

**The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones):** Birmingham, Manchester and London are making excellent progress in carrying forward their city pride prospectuses. We shall look at what they have achieved before extending the initiative. Meanwhile, there is nothing to stop other cities adopting a city pride approach and I am pleased that Sheffield is doing so.

**Mr. Michie:** I am interested in that reply because it appears that the Government do not intend to extend the scheme. We must bear it in mind that most towns and cities have pride. Why must they wait for some sort of lottery, which is governed totally by the Tories at Westminster, before they get the resources that they require? Is not the best and most logical way to allocate resources to establish a proper regeneration programme for all cities and towns and to stop messing about with Government diktats?

**Mr. Jones:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be one of the first to recognise that pride is not restricted to one, two or three cities and is felt throughout the country. However, putting a specific programme in place is a different matter. We are assessing what has happened in the first three cities. The single regeneration budget has benefited enormously not only Sheffield, which receives some £200 million from the private and public sectors as a result of its two successful bids, but rural and suburban areas that have responded well to problems.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Does my hon. Friend agree that city pride can work only with efficient local government? Has he read the report in today's *Evening Standard* that Hackney had a policy, which cost the ratepayers £2 million, to employ officials to do nothing? Is he aware of what is happening in Lambeth, where corruption is rife and the council is renowned for its sheer damned inefficiency?

**Mr. Jones:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The records of Lambeth and of Hackney, and indeed of Walsall, mean that the alternative to the Government's city pride programme would be Labour's city shame.

## Water Conservation

4. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's planned expenditure in the current year on measures to promote the conservation of water. [10371]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison):** Measures to promote water conservation among customers are the responsibility of the water companies.

**Mr. Davies:** Is the Minister aware that the north-west has now experienced some 10 months of below-average rainfall? There is growing concern that, if that continues, not only will there be a dry summer, but circumstances could become very bad indeed in 1997? Does he accept that the Government cannot continue washing their hands of the matter, blaming the water companies and suggesting that it is their sole responsibility? It is time that he accepted his responsibility and produced some measures for water conservation.

**Mr. Clappison:** The hon. Gentleman realises that it is a serious matter and that the north-west has been affected

by exceptionally dry conditions. We are taking a serious long-term view of the issue. That is why we imposed a duty on the water companies to promote water conservation and gave the Director General of Water Services additional powers. We are also consulting on future byelaws. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the Government are looking carefully to learn the lessons of last year's drought. As for the hon. Gentleman's allegations about the water companies, they are in the best place to promote conservation. They have also substantially increased their investment, which this year is more than two and a half times as much as it was when Labour left office. The hon. Gentleman would do well to avoid the trap that was identified by his own policy makers, when they wrote:

"The Liberal Democrats do not always practise what they preach and are prepared to ditch environmental policies for short-term political gain".

We shall not do that.

**Sir Anthony Grant:** Is my hon. Friend aware that Anglian Water has the lowest leakage rate of any water company in the United Kingdom and has spent £110 million on those matters since privatisation? In our area, on this subject as on so many others, we regard the views of the Opposition as total, unmitigated bosh.

**Mr. Clappison:** I appreciate the comments of my hon. Friend. We recognised in our consultation paper on water services that particular difficulties face Anglian Water and other water companies in the south-east. Those companies have clearly risen to the challenge and provide an efficient service.

**Mr. Jack Thompson:** This is a serious issue. The Minister may recall that there was a big problem in my constituency earlier this month, when the water supply was lost in half of it because of bursts in the mains system over Christmas and the new year. When those bursts occur in domestic, commercial and industrial premises, the water just drains away. Will the Minister consider, as part of his ministerial responsibility, modifications to the building regulations to include the provision of lagging for water systems, particularly in domestic premises, to minimise that risk?

**Mr. Clappison:** We would be happy to consider the propositions that the hon. Gentleman has raised when we examine the future of the water byelaws and building regulations.

### Single Regeneration Budget

5. **Mr. Forman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the quality of the bids his Department received during the second bidding round under the single regeneration budget. [10372]

**Mr. Curry:** The high quality of the bids received in the second round of the single regeneration budget challenge fund demonstrated the value of competitive bidding. Sutton Regeneration Partnerships and the Wandle Valley Partnership have been successful in both rounds of the challenge fund entirely on the quality of the projects put forward.

**Mr. Forman:** I am sure that my constituents will be delighted to hear my hon. Friend's commendation of the quality of the bid that came recently on behalf of Roundshaw, South Beddington and Wallington. Does my hon. Friend agree that the distinguishing feature of that successful bid was the way in which it tried to ensure that there would be the fullest co-operation with the private sector, especially with leading firms in my constituency such as Superdrug, Homebase and Canon UK? Will my hon. Friend ensure that this feature of the regeneration process continues to be a dominant one in Government consideration?

**Mr. Curry:** I shall certainly do so. First, the essence of our regeneration proposals is that as well as a diverse range of players from the public sector, partners are brought in from the private sector. Secondly, the public sector money that is made available attracts private sector finance. By that approach, we arrive at a much more effective scheme. It is one that is generated by the community and it reflects its priority.

**Mr. Rooker:** Will the Minister take account, in future, of bids from urban areas that may be classed as outer rather than inner areas? We are in great danger of separating the two. Good bids come from outer areas. In my constituency, for example, one has come in from Kingstanding and south Aston in Birmingham. I make no complaint about the successful bid in respect of the inner-city area of Birmingham. There is no evidence, however, that the Minister's officials take seriously bids from outer areas, simply because they are outer rather than inner. Is the Minister aware that that approach is building up a great deal of resentment in the populations of our great cities?

**Mr. Curry:** I can reassure the hon. Gentleman. I scrutinise all the bids personally to ensure that they are chosen on merit. There are some, however, who would argue that all the bids should be focused on the inner city. Where discrete and sensible programmes can be put together with proper partnerships, however, they can have a major impact on areas that otherwise might be considered to be relatively well off, even though they contain corners or areas that suffer from deprivation. I am determined that the scheme should continue to have national coverage. Where bids succeed on merit, we shall award resources. That can apply equally to outer parts of our great cities as well as to some smaller rural areas where problems need to be addressed.

**Sir Donald Thompson:** Is there any method by which unsuccessful bidders can reassess their bids for the next round? Is there any co-operation from his Department to enable such bids to be rejigged to fit the pattern?

**Mr. Curry:** There is indeed. If bids have not been successful in one round, we have made it clear that the bidders concerned should contact regional offices and go through their bids with them to ascertain where there are deficiencies. In the second round, there are many schemes that failed in the first round. For example, in Pendle there was a bid of poor quality in the first round that became a very good bid in the second. We work with local authorities and other partners to try to get bids into the best possible state so that they are competitive. Once they are in that condition, we judge them on their competitiveness.

**Ms Armstrong:** I am sure that the House will be pleased that the Minister is now accepting that quality

should be an issue in competitive tendering. That has not been the position to date. Will the Minister tell us how the Government will make the entire system more open? He has implied that Ministers interfere in the process and in decisions and there is no feeling at local level that there is any accountability. Is he aware that it is felt that Government officers are making decisions that should be made openly, properly and accountably in the political process?

**Mr. Curry:** I did not say that Ministers interfere. I said that Ministers fulfil their proper constitutional duty to scrutinise because we must take responsibility for the outcome. If the hon. Lady does not want Ministers to do that, it will be done, as she falsely describes, by officials. That would not be an accountable system. A Select Committee gave wide approbation to the regeneration scheme and I shall continue to scrutinise the bids to ensure that we get the best possible value for money and that the best bids receive the funds.

**Mr. Thomason:** Has my hon. Friend noted the conclusion of the Environment Select Committee, that the single regeneration bids represent extremely good value for taxpayers' money? Does he agree that the local and regional offices of his Department have an important role to play in assisting partnerships to come together, and that partnerships that fail can still sometimes undertake work in future by virtue of the communications that they established in putting in a bid?

**Mr. Curry:** My hon. Friend is right. The job of the regional offices is to facilitate bids and assist people who are bidding. We do not ask people to put it together entirely by themselves without any form of a device or assistance. We want to get the maximum number of people into a competitive position. That is why we have had such successful schemes, and one of the most successful regeneration projects in recent times has been the Hulme redevelopment in Manchester. I am glad to see the Leader of the Opposition praising such a Tory initiative in this field.

**Private Residential Accommodation (Leaseholders)**

6. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to provide redress for leaseholders in private residential accommodation from unfair treatment by (a) freeholders and (b) managing agents. [10373]

**Mr. Gummer:** We utterly condemn the behaviour of unscrupulous freeholders, and the measures in the Housing Bill will attack wrong where it occurs and thereby ensure that the bad are driven out and that decent freeholders can continue to offer a valuable service.

**Mr. Etherington:** Given that answer, will the Secretary of State give an undertaking to the House that no matter how people may try to evade legislation as it is introduced, as they have until now, he will not allow the Government's dogmatic attitude about regulation to prevent them from getting justice?

**Mr. Gummer:** That proposal has already been introduced by the Government. It is tailored directly to meet the real needs of those who have suffered as a result of a small minority of unscrupulous freeholders, one set of which I named in the House yesterday, and we shall ensure that the legislation sticks.

**Mr. Ashby:** Would my right hon. Friend consider amending the Housing Bill to add a clause whereby costs can be awarded against unscrupulous freeholders who refuse reasonably to negotiate with leaseholders in the lands tribunal?

**Mr. Gummer:** I hope that my hon. Friend will see that I have suggested that we might move cases to the lands tribunal where there is an argument between the leaseholder and the freeholder about the costs. I hope that, after consultation, that will seem to be the right way forward, because it will make the whole process cheaper for the leaseholder who needs so to do. Freeholders who behave in the way in which some have behaved will be liable, for the first time, to criminal sanctions, and that is right.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Secretary of State has acknowledged that a number of unscrupulous freeholders and their agents are threatening leaseholders with extortionate service and repair charges, backed by the threat of forfeiture. By all accounts, those pressures are intensifying and will put many leaseholders at risk in the months ahead while Parliament considers the Housing Bill. It is not good enough to wait until that reaches the statute book. The Secretary of State will know that I wrote to him more than a week ago, asking him to introduce a short, streamlined Bill that can go through the House immediately—it would have the support of the Opposition—to give instant protection to leaseholders in difficulty. Will he agree to that request—yes or no?

**Mr. Gummer:** I note that when we started to legislate, suddenly the Labour party decided that it would have a go. The fact is that it is very complicated legislation, which we have to get precisely right, and the Opposition can help us. If they will allow the Housing Bill to go through the House quickly and expeditiously, as they should—the Bill will give fairness in housing, look after leaseholders and deal with houses in multiple occupation, all of which are good measures—the hon. Gentleman will be seen not to be hypocritical.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that, all too often, leaseholders who attempt to exercise their statutory right to extend their leases or to buy their freehold face a great deal of elaborate and extremely ingenious obstruction from freeholders and their legal advisers? Is he further aware that he will have widespread support in the House for any measures that he introduces to ensure that the will of Parliament as expressed in the existing legislation does not continue to be thwarted in the present way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why I hope that the Labour party will not continue to obstruct the Housing Bill, which will introduce reforms for HMOs and reforms that ensure that those in need get social housing before those in less need. I look forward to the Labour party's support, and then we will get the proposed legislation through.

**Sea Pollution**

7. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on reducing pollution of the sea; and if he will make a statement. [10374]

**Mr. Clappison:** My right hon. Friend led the debate in the fourth North sea conference which has agreed a strategy for preventing pollution in the North sea.

**Mr. Welsh:** Given that this is the third anniversary of the Braer disaster, which showed how vulnerable to pollution our coastline is, will the Minister take further steps to control tanker traffic? Is he aware that the narrow sea route through the Minches daily carries three tankers through an area whose industries are very dependent on a clean environment, and which contains 100 sites of special scientific interest? An accident is waiting to happen. Will the Minister take steps now to prevent that accident?

**Mr. Clappison:** That is a serious issue for the North sea coast. The hon. Gentleman will know that, following the Braer disaster, the Donaldson report produced 103 recommendations, many of which dealt with this very subject. The Government have accepted a large number of those recommendations, and my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Transport will soon present proposals for their implementation.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that particular problems are involved in the surveillance and enforcement of oil tankers' discharges and activities. Great care must be taken to protect our coast.

**Mr. Allason:** Will my hon. Friend give some support to the campaign mounted in the south-west by Surfers Against Sewage, an organisation which is anxious to improve the quality of sea water? Is he aware that Liberal-controlled Torbay borough council does not appear to be willing to reply to letters from Surfers Against Sewage, having originally campaigned on its behalf and encouraged it? Is that not another classic example of Liberal Democrat cynicism?

**Mr. Clappison:** I am surprised by what my hon. Friend tells me about the Liberal Democrat-controlled council in Torbay, which would have been expected to take an interest in the subject. My hon. Friend will know that, more generally, there has been a big clean-up of our beaches, as there has been a clean-up of our rivers and other waters. Water quality is now improving in our rivers, as it is at the seaside.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** Will the Minister be having discussions with his European counterparts with a view to offering their expertise to the Australian Government, who plan to monitor the seas in the area where the French nuclear tests took place and to measure the levels of radioactive pollution?

**Mr. Clappison:** It is important for us to learn all the lessons that we can from international environmentalists. The hon. Gentleman will be interested in the judgments reached about this country by many such environmentalists, including David Bellamy, who says that our recent record suggests that we are now on the way to becoming the clean man of Europe.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in welcoming the large reduction in the amounts of contaminated substances going into the North sea, such as lead, mercury and cadmium. That is a significant achievement.

**Water Supply**

8. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange to meet the chairmen of the water companies to discuss the quality and reliability of water supply. [10375]

**Mr. Gummer:** I met leading figures in the water industry earlier this month to discuss how they are seeking to safeguard supplies in the summer in the case of a repetition of last year's weather. I press the importance of those matters on them at every opportunity.

**Mr. Canavan:** How can the water companies possibly justify raking in more than £3,700 in profits every minute, while allowing more than half a million gallons of water to leak away every minute—largely because they have cut capital investment by £282 million since privatisation? Is it any wonder that, in the Strathclyde referendum, 97 per cent. of people voted against the quangoisation of Scottish Water, which they suspect is merely paving the way for the privatisation that has been an unmitigated disaster south of the border?

**Mr. Gummer:** If privatisation is such a bad thing, why does the hon. Gentleman not ask the hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Mr. Dobson), Labour's spokesman on water, why the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers made such a sizeable investment in Thames Water? If the hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras says that he does not know, it will be very surprising, because he is a sponsored member of the RMT. What is more, it appears that Thames Water dividends pay for his agent and pay his expenses. Here is another example of "say one thing and do another"; it is hypocrisy from Labour.

**Mr. Batiste:** Does my right hon. Friend recognise that many of us in Yorkshire look for a much improved service from Yorkshire Water in the years ahead, and for sweeping boardroom changes in the company as the best way of achieving it? Is it not clear that, given the existing drought, but for privatisation and the substantial investment made with it, many of us in Yorkshire would have been on standpipes long since?

**Mr. Gummer:** My hon. Friend is right. In 1976, when the weather was nothing like as extreme, more than 1 million people depended on standpipes or on rota cuts: in the recent weather, no one was so dependent. There are questions to be asked about Yorkshire Water, but it is now possible to ask them, whereas when it was nationalised there was no chance of gaining redress.

**Ms Ruddock:** Is the Secretary of State aware that pre-payment meters such as Waterkey, which are being trialled in the poorest households, result in higher charges

to the consumer and can and do lead to self-disconnection? Is he further aware that, by providing the means for self-disconnection, water companies' powers contradict local authorities' power to intervene in disconnections on behalf of the most vulnerable people? Will he raise that issue, and its consequences for the poor, when he next meets the people who have become very rich by selling water?

**Mr. Gummer:** On no occasion when the hon. Lady or other Labour Members have raised these matters have I been unwilling to look into them, and I shall certainly do so, but I hope that she will respect me for displaying characteristic restraint, because I failed to mention the fact that the RMT also has shares in Cable and Wireless, British Gas and electricity companies. When she attacks such people, she is attacking the RMT, nearly 20 per cent. of whose investment is in privatised utilities.

**Mr. David Martin:** If my right hon. Friend spoke to the chairman of Portsmouth Water Company he would hear that there has been no hosepipe ban since 1976, that it is top of the water quality league and that its water leakage level and water supply charges are the lowest in the country.

**Mr. Gummer:** There has been no ban since the last Labour Government. Water companies in the privatised world are subject to tough controls. When the water industry was nationalised, there were no independent controls, so the consumer benefits enormously from privatisation, and the Labour party invests in privatised companies.

### Regeneration Policies

9. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his current regeneration policies. [10376]

**Mr. Curry:** Our regeneration policies will focus on the single regeneration budget, which will continue to be distributed on a competitive basis.

**Mr. Livingstone:** Does the Minister agree that the fact that only one in five bids are successful represents a huge waste in terms of expenditure on consultants' fees and working out schemes? If we could remove that beauty contest element from the policy, the money could be used to improve areas?

**Mr. Curry:** The hon. Gentleman is factually incorrect, because the success rate is about 50 per cent. If local authorities are not working out how to regenerate their areas, they are clearly deficient in one of their major functions.

**Mr. Bellingham:** Is my hon. Friend aware that there was great rejoicing in the North Lynn part of my constituency when it was announced that his Department was making available a large amount of single regeneration cash? Will that not make up for the jobs lost at Anglian Canners four years ago and lead to new jobs and welcome environmental improvements? Is it not a good example of the public and private sectors working together?

**Mr. Curry:** It is an excellent example and it illustrates one of the points made earlier: that these funds can be spent in regions that are not metropolitan, where considerable needs exist and where they secure considerable benefits. The bid succeeded because it qualified competitively. No one receives an award without qualifying competitively.

### Fire Authority Budget

10. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the fire authority budget for 1997; and if he will make a statement. [10377]

**Mr. Curry:** My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, met a delegation from Tyne and Wear fire and civil defence authority on 10 January to hear representations about our proposals for the 1996-97 local government finance settlement.

**Mr. Mullin:** Is the Minister aware that, as a result of the budget announced yesterday, Tyne and Wear fire authority faces the prospect of having to cut 92 fire-fighters and four appliances, but that we could avoid that if he would set the cap higher? Will he please bear that in mind when he determines the cap?

**Mr. Curry:** There is a set procedure if local or other authorities come to determination. The hon. Gentleman will be aware what that procedure is, and we shall of course pursue it scrupulously. There has been a 2 per cent. increase in Tyne and Wear's permitted budget—£500,000—to allow a catch-up because of the circumstances of last year's settlement. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the local auditor's report, which suggests where certain savings could be made by the fire authority.

### Butterfly and Moth Conservation

11. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding new measures for butterfly and moth conservation. [10378]

**Mr. Clappison:** I shall be glad to hear of the hon. Gentleman's support for the biodiversity action plan, which has been widely welcomed and is being copied by others. It contains, among other things, plans for butterfly and moth conservation.

**Mr. Flynn:** Is the Minister aware that the priority species, the marsh fritillary, has declined by 62 per cent. in recent years, and that there are threats to four more of its habitats from opencast mining? Will he give an undertaking that the Government appreciate that the marsh fritillary and other butterflies are prime indicators of biodiversity, and will he give an assurance that the Government will protect that delicate and most beautiful living jewel of nature?

**Mr. Clappison:** The marsh fritillary is one of the species that will benefit from a costed action plan under our biodiversity plans. Our plans will address the points made by the hon. Gentleman. I know that he takes a close

personal interest in the subject, particularly in moths such as the dingy mocha. I am sure that all the matters to which he referred can be taken into account.

**Mr. Barry Field:** Will my hon. Friend commend to the House the campaign that has been waged on behalf of the Granville fritillary, a butterfly that is found only on the Isle of Wight? Does he agree that urgent action is necessary given the number of endangered Opposition Members with moth-eaten policies?

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Isle of Wight produces some remarkable species. Unfortunately, our action plans cannot deal with the problem of the endangered species on Labour's Front Bench—those who practice what they preach.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** May I take it from the Minister's comments that the Government are to adopt the biodiversity action plan and implement its recommendations? They have not publicly said that they will.

**Mr. Clappison:** Our response to the biodiversity action plan will be made very quickly, but the hon. Gentleman should know about the widespread acclaim that our plans have received and the important initiative that we have taken to promote biodiversity in this country and in the rest of the world.

### Home Purchases (Right-to-buy)

13. **Sir Ralph Howell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants bought their homes under the right-to-buy legislation in the last year for which figures are available. [10380]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** Between October 1994 and September 1995, local authorities and new towns in England reported total sales under the right-to-buy legislation of almost 36,000 homes, while corresponding sales by housing associations totalled almost 700.

**Sir Ralph Howell:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and congratulate the Government on the success and popularity of their right-to-buy policy. Is not it remarkable that, after all these years, we are still selling more than 100 houses a day?

**Mr. Jones:** The only thing on which I would disagree with my hon. Friend is that it is remarkable. Our policy matches the aspirations of the British public, which is why the Conservative party has been in power since 1979 and the Labour party has been in opposition.

**Mr. Betts:** Will the Minister confirm that, as an extension of the right-to-buy scheme, the Government introduced a rent-to-mortgage scheme in 1993? Will he also confirm that, by the end of 1995, only 13 houses had been sold under the rent-to-mortgage scheme, at a total cost in promotion of £140,000 of taxpayers' money? Is that not another example of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of a failed Government and their failed policies?

**Mr. Jones:** I can certainly confirm that the hon. Gentleman is critical of every policy that we adopt to give ordinary people a chance to own their home. Over the years, many Labour councillors, and some Labour Members, have taken advantage of the right to buy. The carping attitude of the hon. Gentleman and others is a disgrace.

### British Gas Pipeline (Scotland-Northern Ireland)

14. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conditions the Health and Safety Executive requires to be satisfied before agreeing to the commissioning of the British Gas pipeline between Scotland and Northern Ireland. [10381]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** The Health and Safety Executive will need to be satisfied that Premier Transco Ltd. has properly assessed the risks to health and safety and fully meets the standards required.

**Mr. Foulkes:** But how was British Gas able to lay a pipeline along a route that the Ministry of Defence opposed? How did it have a prohibition notice lifted, in spite of the opposition of the Health and Safety Executive? What influence has British Gas in the corridors of power in Whitehall?

**Mr. Jones:** As the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, the route was moved in response to comments made about it. That is why it is north of where it was originally proposed.

## PRIME MINISTER

### United Nations Secretary-General

Q1. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had on the election of a successor to Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations, when he last met (a) President Chirac and (b) Chancellor Kohl. [10398]

**The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major):** None.

**Dr. Godman:** In addition to a new Secretary-General, is there not a need for a deputy Secretary-General, as advocated by Sir David Hannay, to take charge of administration and finance, thereby allowing the new Secretary-General to re-examine most carefully such serious matters as Lockerbie and Libyan sanctions? At the very least, do we not need a public debate on those appointments and on reform of the United Nations?

**The Prime Minister:** I certainly agree about the need to reform the United Nations. I raised that at the last meeting of the G7, where there was general agreement about it. In terms of internal reform, I can see some justification for a deputy Secretary-General, and I can certainly see some for a proper reform of the United Nations. By reform, I mean not just a reform of procedures but the abolition of many United Nations bodies that no longer serve a useful purpose.

### Engagements

Q2. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 January. [10399]

**The Prime Minister:** This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that the vast majority of my constituents strongly support the Government's measures to give the Attorney-General power to appeal against unduly lenient sentences? Is not the fact that the Labour party voted against that yet another example of hypocrisy?

**The Prime Minister:** It is a matter of record that the Labour party voted against that measure, but it has voted against many other law-and-order measures over recent months, such as the right to silence. We increased the maximum penalty for cruelty to children from two years to 10—Labour opposed that. We increased the maximum penalty for carrying a gun in crime—Labour opposed us. The reality is that it may sometimes use tough words on crime, but when it comes to actions it is very soft.

**Mr. Blair:** Conservative Members should remember that under their party crime has doubled.

Does the Prime Minister share and understand the sense of anger of the British people at the behaviour of the privatised water companies? Given the figures released today showing that the cost of delivering water to customers has risen by almost £300 million and that although water companies' profits rose to a record level last year their investment fell, is not it high time that they were properly regulated in the public interest?

**The Prime Minister:** With reference to his earlier remarks, the right hon. Gentleman might also remember that under this Government crime is falling for the first time in 40 years. *[Interruption.]* Statistics show that quite clearly, across a whole range of crime, and that is something that no previous Government have been able to say.

When he refers to the privatised water industry, the right hon. Gentleman would do well to remember, too, that "Governments cannot run companies". *[Interruption.]* I am interested to hear that the Opposition disagree with that, because I was quoting the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

**Mr. Blair:** Yes, but Governments can regulate those companies, and this Government are not regulating them. Will the Prime Minister confirm that over the past few years investment has been falling, that prices to customers have risen by more than 40 per cent., that 500,000 gallons of water are now being leaked every minute of every day and that customer complaints have doubled? Those are the facts about the water industry under this Government. Why do the Prime Minister, his Cabinet and his other colleagues defend each and every action of the water companies, rather than standing up for the customers who are being fleeced by them?

**The Prime Minister:** About £15 billion has been invested in the water industry since privatisation, £1 billion more than originally planned. That is because over several decades in the public sector there were not sufficient resources for investment in the water industry or in other public utilities. Of course, there is investment in them now, not least by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers as a shareholder. That union sponsors the deputy leader of the Labour party; it is one of the stakeholders in the Labour party, and also one of the shareholders in the water industry and in most of the other privatised industries. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. We have very little time. Keep quiet.

**Mr. Robert Jackson:** My right hon. Friend will have seen the lead stories in today's editions of the *Financial Times* and *The Times*. Will he confirm that universities are, in law, private bodies, that their financial relations with their students are a matter for them to determine and that the Government have no intention of nationalising the universities?

**The Prime Minister:** I certainly see no need for universities to introduce top-up fees. They certainly complain about how they have been treated by the Government. Between 1989-90 and 1994-95, university funding rose by 23 per cent. over and above inflation. I hope that the vice-chancellors will recall that when they consider their future policy.

**Mr. Ashdown:** How does the Prime Minister reconcile his claim last night that the Conservative party is the only party interested in law and order with the fact that although he promised at the general election to increase the number of police officers on the streets by 1,000, the latest figures show that the number has fallen by 1,000? Is that what he means by saying one thing and doing another?

**The Prime Minister:** I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman looks more carefully at what is happening in law and order. If he does he will see that right across the range, for the first time in 40 years, crime is falling. He will also see the resources there for an extra 5,000 police officers—

**Mr. Ashdown** *indicated dissent.*

**The Prime Minister:** There is no point in the right hon. Gentleman's living in some Disneyland of his own and waving his hands about; those are the facts. It is the Conservative party that has toughened the law and order position time and again, and his party, and the Labour party, have been in the Opposition Lobby whenever we have sought to do that.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Will my right hon. Friend give the House a firm undertaking that he will not take advice on law and order from the party that would change the meaning of the Sunday joint?

**The Prime Minister:** I happily give my hon. Friend that assurance.

Q3. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 January. [10400]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Davies:** To return to education, does the Prime Minister recall that his Government slashed school

budgets by £500 million last year, causing great difficulty to school heads? Does he recognise that the Government have slashed the higher education budget by £300 million this year, causing great difficulty to vice-chancellors? Why should our institutions and their students suffer because of the Government's economic failure?

**The Prime Minister:** On the hon. Gentleman's last point, the Government's economic policy is exceeding in a more spectacular fashion than that of any other Government in western Europe. Spending per pupil in the mainstream sector has risen by about 50 per cent. over and above inflation since 1979.

**Mr. Blunkett:** The true figure is 4 per cent.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), Labour's education spokesman, is shouting from a sedentary position. It is a novel relief for him to do so, rather than be undermined by the Labour leader in every single thing that he says about education.

On higher education, the hon. Gentleman would do better to refer to his party's policy document, which says that

"Labour is looking to raise funds from individuals using"—

*[Interruption.]* I apologise for my cold, Madam Speaker, but the reference to Labour's policy document stands. It reveals that

"Labour is looking to raise funds from individuals using and directly benefiting from higher education."

That is Labour's own policy document—I hope that it will not deny that policy.

Q4. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 January. [10401]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Thomason:** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that selective schools will remain a part of our education system? Did he hear the Leader of the Opposition yesterday ducking and diving on his party's schools policies?

**The Prime Minister:** Not only yesterday. I am not surprised that the right hon. Gentleman ducks and weaves. The hon. Member for Brightside says that he has no truck with middle-class, left-wing parents who preach one thing and do another. I cannot think who he might have had in mind. The hon. Gentleman tells us to watch his lips—there will be no more selection under a Labour Government. The party's education spokesman says one thing, while the leader says another. Labour is split on education from top to bottom.

Q5. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 January. [10402]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Tipping:** How would the Prime Minister describe someone who, before the general election, promised not to extend the scope of VAT, but after the election extended VAT and imposed it on fuel at 8 per cent.? Would he describe that person as a hypocrite or a liar?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman should look at the economic performance that has been achieved under this Government. If he does so, I defy him to find any western economy that can match the current performance of this economy under this Government.

**Mr. Hawksley:** Has my right hon. Friend had time today to read of the four children aged 11 in Handsworth in Birmingham, who have been put through the fast-track education system and who have received the praise of the Leader of the Opposition? Is my right hon. Friend aware that all four have won places at a grammar school, and will he reassure the parents of those children that, under this Government, their grammar school places will be safe?

**The Prime Minister:** I can certainly offer my hon. Friend that assurance. He highlights yet again the shambles of the Opposition's policy. They say that they support grammar schools, but they oppose selection. They say that they support special treatment for pupils, but they oppose streaming. They say that they support parental choice for the shadow Cabinet, but for no one else.

Q6. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit Saudi Arabia to discuss human rights. [10403]

**The Prime Minister:** I have no plans to do so.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Does not the Prime Minister think that it is time that the British Government put human rights before arms sales, sought an urgent meeting with the Saudi Government on the abuses of human rights there, explained why BBC broadcasts to Saudi Arabia have been censored and explained why the British Government, with their craven attitude towards that autocratic regime, are trying to deport Dr. al-Masari from this country?

**The Prime Minister:** We and our European partners regularly discuss human rights with the Saudi Arabian Government and with others. I seem to recall that the hon. Gentleman has a rather unusual version of human rights, because it was him who said:

"We assert the right of all people to follow their own conscientious beliefs even if it involves them in breaking the law."

## Points of Order

3.31 pm

**Mr. Michael J. Martin** (Glasgow, Springburn): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Just a moment—I have a point of order from the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton).

**Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek to raise an important point of principle and seek your advice and clarification. Is not it a breach of parliamentary privilege that matters decided upon by the courts, for example by an anonymity guaranteeing order, should be raised in the House by means of an early-day motion, thereby exploiting parliamentary privilege to undermine our courts?

**Madam Speaker:** I was asked early yesterday morning to consider the early-day motion to which I know the hon. Lady refers. I have considered it very carefully, and I am satisfied that it does not breach any existing rule of the House. Specifically, there is no rule of the House to prohibit reference to matters subject to injunction.

I have, however, made it clear on many occasions that all hon. Members must use the freedom of speech that we enjoy in the House, and the freedom of the notice paper, with the greatest care. I think that it might be appropriate for this issue, which has not been looked at by either the Privileges Committee or the Procedure Committee for about 10 years, now to be considered by the Procedure Committee and I am making a reference to that effect.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** I have given a ruling. There is now no further point of order on that issue.

**Mr. Michael J. Martin:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order relates to the conventions and traditions of the House. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, will be replying for the Opposition on the water debate. I also understand that the Secretary of State for Scotland will not be here in the House, because he is in another part of the country. I wonder whether you could give us a ruling on that matter, Madam Speaker, because I understand that it has long been the tradition of the House that, when a shadow Secretary of State is speaking in a debate, the Secretary of State is normally the person who replies.

**Madam Speaker:** I have no authority whatever to determine which hon. Members, which Ministers, or which Secretaries of State attend the House. That is for hon. Members and their parties to determine. The Speaker of the House has no authority in those matters.

**Mr. Tony Banks** (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This might seem an odd request—

**Madam Speaker:** It will be most unusual, if it is an odd request.

**Mr. Banks:** The next time that we have Environment Questions, could you remind the Secretary of State that he should address the House? I do not suppose that we Opposition Members missed much, but we could not hear what he was saying.

**Madam Speaker:** It is not such an odd request. Many Secretaries of State and Ministers tend to speak to the Member who has asked the question, which is not the way we proceed. All Ministers and all hon. Members speak to this House through the Speaker and they must refer to the Speaker the entire time. They must speak through the microphone at the Dispatch Box and not turn to any individual Member. To do so is a discourtesy to the Speaker and to the House and, moreover, the speech cannot be properly recorded by *Hansard.*

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

MERCHANT SHIPPING

That the Merchant Shipping (Port State Control) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 3128) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—[*Mr. Brandreth.*]

*Question agreed to.*

## Access to the Countryside

3.35 pm

**Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law of trespass and to enable members of the public to resort on foot to open country in England and Wales for their recreation; and for connected purposes.

The Bill's principal aim is to amend the law of trespass to enable members of the public to resort on foot to open country in England and Wales for their recreation.

There is a long parliamentary history of such legislation. The reforming Liberal Member of Parliament, James Bryce, introduced the first access Bill in 1884. Unfortunately, that Bill and many successors have been blocked or emasculated by landowning interests in Parliament. Despite that fact, the demand and need to protect and extend the freedom of the public to wander on foot over uncultivated land is greater than ever.

Walking is today's most popular leisure activity. This is a time of pressure and stress. People need space in which to walk, unwind and reflect. The Bill will benefit walkers throughout England and Wales, from the chalk downlands of Sussex to the Cheviot hills of Northumberland, from the Cumbrian mountains in Wales to the Sussex coastline. In the forest of Bowland in Lancashire, the Arran hills of Wales, parts of the Pennines and the Chiltern escarpment, local people have been pressing for many years for a right to roam over uncultivated land.

There and in other parts of the country, there has been a tradition of open access—a de facto right to roam. Those rights have gradually been eroded. The piecemeal disposal of Forestry Commission woodland has meant that in recent years the public have lost the right to roam over an area about the size of the Isle of Wight.

Some months ago, my family and I were asked to leave woodland called Cotgrave forest in Nottinghamshire. Those woods have been walked by local people for years. The sale of the woods by the Forestry Commission to landowners has put an end to that access. The Bill will tackle that.

Against that background, it is important to stake out the rights and responsibilities of both walkers and landowners. The Bill gives a right to roam in the remote places—mountain and moorland, commonland, woodland and beside rivers. It is not an unrestricted right to roam. Exclusions are to be granted to take into account shooting and conservation interests. I fully recognise that there are a wide variety of stakeholders in the countryside. The Bill attempts to balance those needs.

Rights and responsibilities are linked under the Bill. It sets out responsibilities and a new standard of behaviour for the public while walking on open country. The first schedule describes in detail the prescriptions and restrictions put on walkers. It includes, for example, control of animals, litter and fires. Walkers will be regarded as trespassers if they break the restrictions.

The Bill is not set in tablets of stone. I see it as a vehicle for debate about the way forward, as it is a subject that can be riddled with prejudice. These are hard issues, which need careful thought and analysis.

Consultation on the Bill will be wide and has, indeed, already started. Conservation groups have an interest in the Bill. Walkers, like conservationists, want to lift the landscape and enhance the environment. We need to protect animal, bird and plant life.

I am grateful for the time and interest that landowning organisations have already given to the Bill. Meetings have taken place with the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union. While there is a commonality of interest and both organisations accept that there is a need for even greater access to the countryside, there are differences of view about how that should be achieved. I understand that the Country Landowners Association will produce its proposals on access later this year. I look forward to seeing them and I know that they will receive careful consideration and close scrutiny.

Suffice it to say that negotiated access—the voluntary approach—has failed to deliver substantial new access. I am pleased to report that both farmers and landowners have shown a willingness to take such discussions forward. They have reservations about the Bill and I acknowledge that it may be possible to refine and improve it. At this stage, the Bill should be regarded as the first step on a route to allow greater public access to open countryside. I hope that when it crosses its first stile today, it will be viewed as offering a signpost to the future.

I look forward to the day, perhaps under a different Government, when the Bill will become law. I believe that it is practical, reasonable and follows English legal precedent. It is practical in the sense that it provides draft legislation, which can be implemented on the ground. It is reasonable in that is not a utopian demand for everything that the access lobby would wish for in an ideal world.

Opponents of the Bill should accept it at face value and in good faith. To characterise it, as some have, as allowing unrestricted access reveals prejudice and vested interest. It is an attempt to address all countryside interests without causing substantial harm to any. It is a balancing act. Consultation will reveal whether that balance is right.

The Bill offers nothing alien. There is already a long-standing tradition of freedom to roam in Britain. Unfortunately, in many places it is under threat or has already disappeared. The Bill follows legal precedent. I praise the Ramblers Association and its legal advisers for all the hard work that they have put into drafting it. Wherever possible, it draws on existing legislation, principally the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

I am conscious that I have concentrated on the restrictions and exemptions in the Bill. That reflects my desire to reassure the many differing interests involved. However, in essence the Bill is about lifting restrictions. Its principle is freedom. It offers the prospect of substantial new access to the general public.

I was born in an industrial community in the West Riding, a place where "dark satanic mills" really existed. I can still recall the joy and exhilaration of walking, as a boy, over the tops of the Yorkshire dales. I truly felt that I had discovered England's "green and pleasant land" and, to a small extent, I felt that I shared Blake's vision.

Thirty years ago I was ordered off the moors in Yorkshire by gamekeepers even though I was on a public footpath. Yesterday I was in the hills and snow in the

*[Mr. Paddy Tipping]*

south Pennines between Sheffield and Manchester. There was barely a building in sight, but we were not allowed to walk on open moorland. Large signs that said "Keep out" and "No public access" made progress impossible. I want those signs confined to the dustbin of history. They should be museum pieces.

People are looking forward to the year 2000 and the next millennium—a time of renewal, of hope and, perhaps, of increased spirituality. The Access to the Countryside Bill draws on the old, traditional rights to roam and puts them into a new legislative framework. Its passage would indeed be the way to celebrate the next millennium.

3.44 pm

**Mr. Tim Yeo** (South Suffolk): I rise to oppose the Bill.

The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) by his speech, and the Bill prepared by the Ramblers Association by its text, have demonstrated how little the hon. Gentleman and his party understand the countryside and the needs of those who live, work and seek to enjoy recreation there. In pursuit of an aim that is widely shared among Conservative Members and among those outside the House, of greater access to the countryside—an aim, incidentally, on which we are making substantial progress, although the hon. Gentleman did not acknowledge that in his speech—he has produced a legislative dinosaur, a monstrosity that is flawed in five serious respects.

The Bill would give local authorities massive and totally unnecessary new powers. It would create a vast new bureaucracy with almost unlimited scope for disputes between parties and for delays in decision making. It emphasises the rights of the public without mentioning corresponding responsibilities. It threatens to criminalise innocent citizens who seek only to protect their property. It also damages the cause of conservation.

Significantly, those are the proposals not just of the hon. Member for Sherwood; he has the express endorsement of the Opposition Front Bench in the form of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who was quoted yesterday as saying that she fully supports the Bill and hopes that it may lead to the passage of legislation. As the Bill's approach is based on old Labour's attitudes, it is surprising that it has slipped past the notice of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), but perhaps his attention has been diverted elsewhere recently as he agonises whether to preach the education policy that he and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) already practise.

The tragedy is that the Bill is totally unnecessary. The Government are already working towards greater public access. For example, in the past five years alone, land management schemes have produced agreement for managed access to more than 90,000 hectares of land. Under the countryside stewardship scheme, statutory bodies have made available another 13,000 hectares, and substantial progress has been made towards the target set in the 1990 environment White Paper to bring up to a good standard the 140,000 miles of rights of way and footpaths that already exist, much of which is under-utilised at present.

The target of improving access to the countryside was specifically re-endorsed in last October's White Paper, "Rural England". Against that background, I deeply regret that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to introduce the Bill now because, in so doing, he rejects the principle that better access to the countryside must be based on voluntary managed schemes. Overturning that principle, on which all recent advances have been made, is a recipe for dispute, delay, conflict and, ultimately, damage to the rural environment.

My first objection to the Bill is that it gives vast and completely unnecessary new powers to local authorities. Clause 6 places a duty on local authorities to secure access to any open country from the public highway if any person, regardless of whether he or she has local connections or not, considers that the existing access is somehow inadequate. Local authorities may require landowners to construct bridges, cut down ancient hedges or demolish stone walls, all at their own expense, to satisfy the whim of a council officer whose interest in the subject may have been aroused by a passing motorist or disgruntled neighbour. The mind boggles at the potential for local authorities hostile to local interests—as all too many, including the disgraceful Labour-Liberal Suffolk county council, now are—to intrude on private property and make mischief with valuable habitats and natural features.

My second objection to the Bill is that the extra bureaucracy involved and the inevitability of disputes about interpretation will cause countless problems. Clauses 2 and 3 purport to define what is and is not open country, but they raise more questions than they answer.

Years of argument will ensue before agreement is reached about specific areas of land. The onerous obligations placed on landowners—including, for that purpose, someone who may have only a quarter of an acre of rough grazing on the edge of a village—mean that there will be inevitable resistance to the designation of land as open country under the legislation.

The interminable delays already experienced when minor variations to existing footpaths are proposed, sometimes with universal local support, but objected to by some individual from a remote area, will be nothing compared with the delays that the Bill is likely to cause. The effect will be to halt, for a generation or longer, the steady current progress towards more access.

My third objection to the Bill concerns two new criminal offences that it creates; the first is obstructing access to open country, and the second is erecting notices that might deter the public from entering open country. Criminalising in that way landowners who may merely be innocently seeking to protect their property, or to keep people away from hazardous areas, may appeal to the hon. Member for Sherwood and his allies, but it is utterly irrelevant and deeply inimical to the needs of the countryside. Rural dwellers in Suffolk and other similar areas want help in protecting their property, not threats that may put them on the wrong side of the law.

My fourth objection to the Bill is that it imposes all those obligations on landowners, but—apart from references that the hon. Member for Sherwood made to not dropping litter or starting fires—it makes no mention of any corresponding duties on members of the public. That may well be what Labour means by a stakeholder society, and it reflects old Labour's tendency to emphasise rights while overlooking responsibilities, but the Bill even fails to acknowledge that the countryside is used for other recreations apart from walking. Activities such as riding

or bird watching are legitimate uses of the countryside, but they may sometimes come into conflict with unrestricted walking.

To curtail the right to roam over a specific piece of land, an application to the local authority would be required under the Bill. The Bill would thus involve, for example, a Riding for the Disabled group going on bended knee to a council lackey for permission to use rough grazing land made available for that purpose free of charge by the landowner. Similarly, a small tenant farmer hoping to enjoy a day's shooting with a few neighbours would have to apply to the local authority each time he wished to do so.

My final objection to the Bill is that nothing in it promotes the cause of conservation. Indeed, the strong probability is that conflicts will arise as the unrestricted right to roam affects areas that have hitherto enjoyed considerable protection and undisturbed peace. Even English Nature, the statutory body entrusted with great responsibilities by the House, will have to apply to the local council for land to be accepted for the right to roam, and such applications can be granted only temporarily and may subsequently be overruled at the whim of the local council.

Time does not permit a fuller explanation of the many other reasons for resisting the Bill. In conclusion, I return to the central issue of principle.

Good progress is currently being made towards improving access for everyone so that they may enjoy more of our countryside. That progress is achieved voluntarily, by agreement between the parties concerned, and generally involves landowners and others in the continuing management roles.

The Bill would bring all that progress to an immediate halt. Its consequences for everyone interested in the future of the countryside would be disastrous, and I urge the House to reject it by a huge majority.

*Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 144, Noes 60.

**Division No. 38]** **[3.53 pm**

**AYES**

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Faulds, Andrew
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Ms Rachel Squire and**
**Mr. Mike Hall.**

**NOES**

Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beggs, Roy
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Gill, Christopher
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Jessel, Toby
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
McCrea, The Reverend William
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mills, Iain
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Powell, William *(Corby)*

Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spring, Richard
Stephen, Michael
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Yeo, Tim

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. John Greenway and**
**Sir Kenneth Carlisle.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Paddy Tipping, Mr. John Battle, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Ms Ann Coffey, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mrs. Jane Kennedy, Mr. Gordon Prentice, Mr. Stephen Timms and Ms Joan Walley.

ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

Mr. Paddy Tipping accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law of trespass and to enable members of the public to resort on foot to open country in England and Wales for their recreation; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 March and to be printed. [Bill 49.]

# Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

## Privatised Water Companies

**Madam Speaker:** I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.5 pm

**Mr. Frank Dobson** (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move,

That this House notes the deplorable record of the privatised water companies in England and Wales who have been allowed to use their monopoly position to drive up prices, profits and the pay and perks of directors while reducing investment, wasting water and harming the environment; and calls upon the Government not to proceed with setting up water agencies in Scotland which are clearly precursors of the same things happening in Scotland and to abandon its secret agenda to force metering on every household.

Every week, 721 million gallons of water leak from the pipes owned and operated by Yorkshire Water, yet Yorkshire Water has been spending just £211,000 a week to identify and mend these leaks. Recently Yorkshire Water has been forced to spend about £3 million a week tankering water into West Yorkshire to make up for the water that is leaking away. It is spending 14 times as much on tankering as it is on stopping leaks. Nothing could better illustrate the wasteful short termism of Yorkshire Water. It is having to cough up £3 million a week for tankering because it did not spend enough on plugging leaks and did not have the forethought to prepare for the crisis that occurred in West Yorkshire last summer, which still continues.

It is not only in Yorkshire that the bosses of the privatised water monopolies have been mismanaging the country's water supplies and ripping off the public for the benefit of their shareholders and themselves. It has been happening everywhere. We could not expect anything better. Water privatisation has been a rip-off from start to finish.

Let us consider the basic facts. For a start, the Government gave the industry away to its new owners. When the Government sold the shares they obtained £5.2 billion for the taxpayer. But they gave the new owners much more than that in exchange. The new owners were given a debt write-off worth £5 billion and a green dowry worth £1.5 billion. In exchange for the £5.2 billion that they paid in, they received £6.5 billion of taxpayers' money plus the capital assets of the industry, a highly skilled and dedicated work force and a guaranteed income stream from being monopoly suppliers of water, something which none of their customers can do without.

What has happened since then? Prices have increased. The main reason for that has been charging customers more so that more and more can be paid out to shareholders. The average delivered cost of water—

**Mr. Robert Atkins** (South Ribble): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman provided that he asks a sensible question. If he does not, I shall not give way again.

**Mr. Atkins:** I wish to ask the hon. Gentleman a simple question. Does he expect that the charges for water will be less under a Labour Government?

**Mr. Dobson:** In real terms, yes.

The average delivered cost of water is made up of three factors: first, the cost of operations; secondly, the cost of capital maintenance; and, thirdly, the return on capital. The average delivered cost to customers of a cubic metre of water has risen by 14 per cent. from 55p to 62.8p in the past three years. That is not the result of massive increases in the cost of operations, which has increased by only 3.8 per cent. Nor is it the result of capital maintenance costs, which have increased by 8.3 per cent. The massive change is because the return on capital has shot up by 32 per cent. In other words, customers are paying extra because more of their money is being siphoned off to the shareholders.

That disgraceful situation does not seem to have been noticed by the regulator or the Government. If they have noticed, they must approve of it, because they have done nothing about it. But, of course, that is true about practically everything else to do with the water industry. The water companies have been allowed to get away with practically anything. Just look at the profits. The profits of the 10 privatised water companies have shot up to almost £2 billion a year. Average dividends to shareholders have shot up by no less than 55 per cent. There are some even more startling individual performances and pay-outs. Northumbrian Water's profits have almost doubled. They have increased by 91 per cent. No wonder it was targeted by the French, who wanted to buy it.

Just as startling is South West Water, where profits have fallen but dividends have shot up by 41 per cent.

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** How lucky for the shareholders that South West Water is not on performance-related pay-outs.

In view of Yorkshire Water's appalling performance, not just now but over several years, its customers will find it hard to stomach the 60 per cent. increase in dividend that it paid out.

**Mr. Nicholls** *rose—*

**Mr. Dobson:** I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Then, of course, there is the massive increase in pay and perks that water company directors have paid themselves. The best paid boss in each water company is now paid more than three times as much as when the companies were owned by the public. A really breathtaking example of boardroom greed is that of Thames Water. Before privatisation, the chief executive was paid £41,000 a year. The present chief executive, Mr. Mike Hoffman, is paid £371,000 a year—a cool 806 per cent. increase.

**The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer):** If it is such a terrible thing, why does the union that sponsors the hon. Gentleman have a large shareholding in Thames Water, take the profits and use it to pay for the hon. Gentleman's research and his agent?

**Mr. Dobson:** Will the right hon. Gentleman withdraw half of what he said? *[Laughter.]* I am in favour of accuracy when these accusations are being thrown around. The RMT, I am glad to say, pays part of the costs of my agent. The RMT makes no contribution to anyone doing research in my office, and I now expect the Secretary of State to get up and withdraw that allegation.

**Mr. Gummer:** I am happy to withdraw the second part if the hon. Gentleman will answer the main claim—that the RMT has money in a former nationalised industry called Thames Water, which, the hon. Gentleman said, was ripping off the public for the benefit of its shareholders. Its shareholders in this case are the RMT, which sponsors the hon. Gentleman. He says one thing and does another. It is hypocrisy again.

**Mr. Dobson:** I expect the RMT—and I say this without consulting anybody—if it is a direct shareholder to make representations at the next annual meeting to reduce the dividends and to reduce the pay of this overpaid chief executive, because that is what it should do.

**Sir Donald Thompson** (Calder Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** I shall give way to Donald in a minute, because he is a sensible person, but when we get to Yorkshire Water.

At North West Water, the chairman's pay shot up by 667 per cent. from £47,000 to £360,000, although the present chairman is always quick to point out that he is not the same man. He certainly would not have turned out for just £47,000 a year.

**Mr. Gummer:** If North West Water is as bad as that, why does Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council have very large shareholdings in North West Water? Why does it also have very large shareholdings in South West Water, which is nowhere near Derbyshire?

**Mr. Dobson:** I simply do not know the details of the case *[Interruption.]* Whatever the Secretary of State may do, for example flinging false accusations against me, I do not try to comment on matters about which I do not know the detail. What is fairly likely—although I do not know—is that Derbyshire county council has a pension scheme for its staff and its pensions advisers say, "You get a lot of money if you invest in these things," and that is what they have done.

Let us be quite clear about the position. Four things have shot up since privatisation: profits, dividends for shareholders, bosses' pay and bosses' perks. All those increases have been paid for by another increase—the rise in water prices that customers have been forced to pay. Last year, the water industry made the highest profits since privatisation, while investment fell to its lowest level since privatisation.

The Government claimed that investment had gone up, and it did at first, but it has fallen by 10 per cent. since 1990-91. That, of course, is the average; over that period, North West Water cut investment by 19 per cent., Thames Water by 29 per cent. and Northumbrian Water by 30 per cent. Almost inevitably, Yorkshire Water out-performed the rest, cutting its investment by 34 per cent. That is indefensible behaviour, but it is worse than that: it is a fraud on the customers.

**Sir Donald Thompson** *rose—*

**Mr. Dobson:** I will finish this paragraph, Donald, and then I will give way.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman has now addressed the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) as "Donald" on two occasions.

**Mr. Dobson:** I am sorry, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** I accept the hon. Gentleman's apology. I am sure that he will see that it does not happen again.

**Mr. Dobson:** I will indeed, Madam Speaker.

As I was saying, that cutting of investment is a fraud on the customers. Part of the price formula agreed by the regulator allowed the companies to charge customers more to fund investment in maintaining the system. Needless to say, they have been allowed to charge the customers, but have not got round to spending all the takings. Anyone else who did that would be open to the charge of obtaining money by false pretences, but the regulator and the Government do not seem to mind, so the companies have got away with it.

I will now give way to the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson).

**Sir Donald Thompson:** The hon. Gentleman is on a good point, and I thank him for his courtesy in giving way. He and I share a photocopying machine. As I passed it this afternoon, I saw a huge wodge of Labour water documents. Who will be paying for those? Will the hon. Gentleman be sending money to the Serjeant at Arms, or will he be writing to you, Madam Speaker, with an apology? We all use photocopiers for one or two documents, but, as the hon. Gentleman is highlighting the problem of fraud, may I ask who will pay for that huge wodge?

**Mr. Dobson:** I must tell the hon. Gentleman—if it is appropriate to say this to a former butcher—that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

**Sir Donald Thompson:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am a butcher, but the hon. Gentleman has the tripe. [*Laughter.*]

**Madam Speaker:** I see that that was enjoyed by Opposition Front Benchers, but it was not a point of order.

**Mr. Dobson:** It was funnier than most points of order, I must admit.

The Government also claim that the water industry is paying a lot of tax. That is not true either. The total mainstream corporation tax paid in the five years since privatisation is just £106 million; over the same period, the companies have made profits of more than £7,838 million. That is a tax rate of 1.3 per cent. The companies have paid another £580 million in advance corporation tax, but that can be set off against their future liabilities.

The cumulative effect is that the water companies are rolling in money. One sure sign of that is the takeovers, and the rumours of takeovers. The cash in the coffers of the water companies makes them both potential predators and potential victims. They are rolling in money, so they are worth taking over; alternatively, they are rolling in money and so can afford to mount a takeover.

Northumbrian Water fell into the first category. It was worth so much, both in terms of assets and as an "income stream", that Lyonnaise des Eaux took it over to combine it with North East Water, which it already owned. So what is happening now? More than 3,000 hard-working staff from two companies face losing their jobs, while the boss of Northumbrian Water receives a payoff in excess of £1 million.

Then there is North West Water. That is the company that managed to spend millions of pounds on a computerised billing system that did not work. It is the company that leaks most water—158 million gallons every day. It is the company that can only manage to find £8 million, spread over five years, to combat those leaks. Yet North West Water was so swilling in money that it could find no less than £1.7 billion to buy up Norweb. It has tried to tell me that none of that money comes from its water customer, but if you believe that you will believe anything. North West Water has water company assets, including real estate, that it got for nothing after privatisation, together with the guaranteed monopoly income stream from its water customers. Without that capital and guaranteed income behind it, every penny of which was paid for by people and businesses in the north-west, it would not have been able to afford the takeover.

One of the ways in which companies have saved money has been to get rid of staff, and it shows in the constituency of the hon. Member for Calder Valley, the tripe merchant. Some of Yorkshire's problems were caused by reservoirs silting up and the channels that feed the reservoirs getting blocked because the company had got rid of the maintenance staff who used to clean them out. After the freeze and the thaw in the north-east, water companies there could not respond quickly enough because they too had reduced staff numbers in the name of efficiency.

Talking of North West Water brings me back to the matter of leaks. As the National Rivers Authority stated:

"Leakage is an area where in expertise the UK is without doubt a world leader".

How true. No one is more expert than North West Water and Yorkshire Water, which waste about one third of their whole supply. Wessex Water, South West Water, Severn Trent and Thames Water lose one quarter of theirs.

**Sir Anthony Grant** (South-West Cambridgeshire): Not Anglian Water.

**Mr. Dobson:** No, not Anglian Water.

All that water has been collected and purified, ready for use by domestic customers and industry, so customers have paid for all that process—they are just not getting the water.

For a long time, the Government told the House that customers wasted more water than the companies. The only possible explanation for that was ignorance or lying. On average, companies are responsible for 78 per cent. of all the water that is leaked—on average, customers leak 22 per cent. If people are looking for a water waster, they need look no further than the nearest water company. Yorkshire Water, almost inevitably, is the worst, wasting 87 per cent. of its water supply, while careful Yorkshire customers lose only 13 per cent. Either Ministers did not know or they tried to mislead the House and the public.

We are entitled to know why from the Secretary of State, especially as Conservative Ministers have mocked both myself and several of my parliamentary colleagues when we have said, truthfully, that it was companies that wasted most water.

That suited the Government's secret policy agenda, which they share with the regulator. They want to push for everyone to have a meter. Apparently, again, either they do not know or do not want to know that it would cost between £4 billion and £5 billion to install meters in every home, and an extra £500 million a year to run the new billing system. Apparently, they do not care about the consequences of forcing meters on poor families and pensioners, and they cannot say that they know about that because it has never been studied, not even in the pilot scheme on the Isle of Wight. They are just obsessed with the idea of introducing metering.

The Government always try to blame customers. They gave the industry, when it was privatised, a code of practice for leaks. It refers only to customers' leaks. In the last Environment Bill, they slipped through a late amendment to require water companies to promote the efficient use of water, but not by the companies, only by their customers. It is all part of the push for compulsory metering.

**Mr. Robert Banks** (Harrogate): I thought I heard the hon. Gentleman say a minute ago that Yorkshire Water had reported that 87 per cent. of its water was wasted due to leakage. I do not believe I heard the right figure. Would he like to rephrase what he said? Secondly, he must understand that a number of water companies, such as the York Waterworks company in my constituency, have been private companies for many years. It has been a private company for 150 years and it has an excellent record to report.

**Mr. Dobson:** There are two points there. First, I think that the hon. Gentleman must have misheard me. I said that, of the water that is leaked in the Yorkshire Water region, 87 per cent. is leaked by the water company's pipes. As he would expect in Yorkshire, only 13 per cent. is leaked by folks who are rather careful and do not want leaks on their premises. Secondly, he is right: there are statutory water companies. They have existed for more than a century and they have provided a good service, generally speaking. They have proved to be infinitely more efficient at their jobs than were the privatised water companies, and, I must say, they pay their directors a hell of a lot less than do the privatised companies. Last summer, we revealed—for the first time in figures that people can understand—the scale of the leakage. The water companies leaked 826 million gallons a day, or 500,000 gallons a minute. We called for action to cut the leaks and to protect customers from the drought, but the industry's response was a statement by the Water Services Association which said:

"Frank Dobson is not treating customers seriously—customers want the facts."

The trouble for the water companies was that, for the first time, customers were getting the facts, and they did not like them.

The water industry and the Government then issued a briefing, off the record, to the effect that the industry was investing £4 billion to deal with leaks. That was simply not true, so we put out more facts which showed what the companies were really spending on leaks. They were based on figures that we received from each company apart from Southern Water and South West Water, which either could not or would not tell us. The total amount spent in England was £86 million, which is rather a long way short of the £4,000 million that the Government had originally claimed.

At that point, the Secretary of State organised a photo-opportunity, said that he was very impressed by what the water companies had done and told us all to stop moaning and say what wonderful weather we were having. After an interval that the *Daily Mail* described as "10 Days that shook John Selwyn Gummer",

the Secretary of State published a document that acknowledged the need to conserve water. As usual, however, he put the onus on the customers. A week later, he boldly stated that he might have to take action, but that he could not make up his mind until he had seen the National Rivers Authority report.

Two months later, the NRA published its report. It vindicated our campaign and said that cutting company leaks was twice as useful as installing meters, and that the water regulator was not doing enough to require the companies to reduce their own leaks. Soon afterwards, even the water companies admitted that leakage levels were unsatisfactory, but said that they would set their own targets for reducing the leaks. The hapless Secretary of State agreed and said that he would not set mandatory targets. On the instructions of the Tory chairman, he still did not dare criticise the companies because that would be to admit that the Tory sacred cow of water privatisation was suffering from its own version of mad cow disease.

Everyone now realises that the water companies are letting people down. Customers and businesses realise that they have been let down. The NRA has criticised them and, though a little late in the day, so has the water regulator.

**Sir Anthony Grant:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman wants to paint a fair picture of the industry. If so, is he aware that, as well as improving water quality by 34 per cent., Anglian Water has in the past five years spent no less than £1.715 billion on improving water and sewage services? That is why customers in the Anglian Water area are receiving a much better deal, a fact with which I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree.

**Mr. Dobson:** It has to be said that the average bill for people in the Anglian Water area is considerably more than that for other people. However, in fairness to Anglian Water, customers receive a fair bit in return. My only objection to Anglian Water is that it is absolutely obsessed with the idea of water metering and wants everyone forced on to a meter.

The chairman of Yorkshire Water has decided that he is giving up; the chief executive of South West Water has decided to give up; and the boss of Wessex Water, after his rather harrowing year as chairman of the Water Services Association, has taken his company out of that association because he no longer wants to be tarnished and tormented by the scandalous record of most of the other companies, in particular North West Water and Yorkshire Water. The boss of Northumbrian Water has, of course, disappeared altogether—which brings me back to Yorkshire Water.

*[Mr. Dobson]*

Yorkshire Water's record on leaks is the worst in the country, as is its record on practically everything else. Even before this year, it had 69,000 unplanned interruptions of supply compared with the next highest number of interruptions, which was the 32,000 imposed by Thames Water. However, those figures do not give the full flavour of Yorkshire Water's gross incompetence. It has shown that it is simply not up to the job. The people of Yorkshire know that, and so do the businesses in Yorkshire. I suspect that the bosses of Yorkshire Water know that it is not up to the job, hence the premature but unlamented departure of Gordon Jones, the chairman.

Yorkshire Water has been seeking drought orders to give it the right to abstract more water and cut off supplies to customers. After the most recent inquiry, the Government inspector said:

"I listened to many experienced and qualified people on the likely effects of confirming this . . . order. These embrace such topics as health, emergency services, education, tourism and leisure, the implementation and operation of the Order, the effect on individuals, and particularly vulnerable members of society, and the implications for other primary legislation. One thing became clear. No-one felt able to predict with confidence or even appreciate the extent of the damage to the fabric of life and society if rota cuts were imposed. That public health would be threatened, education lost, employment opportunities denied, the vulnerable and public placed at increased risk and emergency services unable to fill their obligations were not matters of particular dispute."

Everybody present accepted that

"the lack of quantities of potable water for even those uses such as hospitals, together with the individual needs of dialysis patients adds to the concern."

The Government inspector criticised Yorkshire Water not only for not knowing the answers to those questions, but for not having even addressed them before they were raised at the inquiry by the other people making representations. Having received the report, he eventually sent a letter to the Secretary of State on the matter. Despite that, the Secretary of State—ever complacent—has decided that because the drought order applications have been withdrawn for the winter,

"it would serve no useful purpose to go further into these questions."

The only person who does not seem to realise that Yorkshire Water is not up to the job is the Secretary of State. At the outset, he praised the company, saying that it was deploying its expertise in China and north America—not a popular line in my native county. Yorkshire people seem to think that to live up to its name, Yorkshire Water must first and foremost deploy its expertise in ensuring that Yorkshire people get the water that they need and have paid for.

**Mr. William O'Brien** (Normanton): May I advise my hon. Friend that there are still restrictions on the use of water in my constituency and the Yorkshire area even though the orders have been withdrawn? Those restrictions apply to all water users in certain areas, regardless of whether they have meters or not. So there is no advantage in this case of water metering.

**Mr. Dobson:** I certainly take note of that. In recent times anyway, the supply of water to people in Yorkshire has been restricted more often that it has not been restricted.

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): Before my hon. Friend leaves the point about the Secretary of State's complacency, may I ask him whether he is aware that the reservoirs supplying the Calder valley, Halifax and Kirklees are only one third full, even though they should be up to about 80 per cent. full at this time of year? Is he also aware that the £100 million that Yorkshire Water is belatedly going to spend on pipes is no long-term solution? We could be faced with exactly the same problem next summer. Nothing has changed, yet the Secretary of State does not seem to realise it.

**Mr. Dobson:** My hon. Friend, who together with my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) has campaigned a great deal on this issue to the great benefit of the people of Yorkshire, makes exactly the point that I was about to make. Before I do so, I return to the question of Yorkshire folks and money. They want the services that they have paid for. They would like all that water that has been cleaned and shifted around the county and that is leaking away, and they would like it without having to pay anything extra for it.

The other thing that Yorkshire people do not like is seeing the money that they have paid for water being invested abroad, or in shopping malls in Leeds or refuse tips in Doncaster. They think that the money they pay should be spent on ensuring that Yorkshire people get water. That may be a rather old-fashioned point of view, but I certainly share it.

I warn the Secretary of State today that Yorkshire Water's problems seem far from over. There are still restrictions and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) has said, the reservoirs in Halifax and Bradford should be almost full at this time of year. At the moment some contain less than 30 per cent. of their full capacity. Next summer there could be even more serious trouble than last year, unless Yorkshire Water is forced to act. Clearly it will not take adequate action voluntarily.

In view of what has been happening in Yorkshire, my right hon. Friend and hon. Friends from Scotland are right to try to resist water privatisation there. In England and Wales we need a new system, with a water industry regulated effectively in the interests both of customers and of the environment. But we shall not get that until there is a Labour Government.

4.34 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer):** I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the higher water quality, the improved standards of service to consumers, the increased availability of information and the increased exports which have been achieved as a result of substantially higher levels of investment and the removal from political control of the water industry through privatisation in England and Wales; looks forward to improved services in Scotland from the new public water authorities; and contrasts this with the arbitrary cuts from the investment plans of the nationalised water companies by the last Labour Government, including the six month moratorium on the letting of new construction contracts.".

We have now heard a great deal about Yorkshire Water, so it would be helpful to make some comparisons. We could look back to how the water industry was run before privatisation, and compare that with what happened afterwards.

Before privatisation, the water industry was starved of capital. It invested less than half the sum now being invested. When the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) talks about leakage in Yorkshire, he is talking about pipes and infrastructure that Yorkshire Water inherited from the many years when the water industry was starved of capital. That happened not after privatisation but before, especially when there was a Labour Government.

When Mr. Healey had to turn round in his taxi and come back because Britain was in such a mess, what did he do? He cut the already ludicrously low investment in the water industry so much that there had to be a six-month moratorium, during which nothing was spent on water infrastructure. That is the story of water in the public sector.

**Mr. Atkins:** My right hon. Friend will recall that for a time I was the Minister responsible for water in Northern Ireland, where water is still in state ownership. One of the problems that confronted me was exactly the one that my right hon. Friend mentioned. During the 1970s there had been a moratorium on investment for some time. As a result, great sums needed to be invested, and if water was not to be privatised in Northern Ireland, because some concern had been expressed there, that money had to be found from somewhere by the taxpayer. The difference is that the privatised water companies can invest private sector money, whereas in Scotland and Northern Ireland the money still comes from the taxpayer.

**Mr. Gummer:** My right hon. Friend is right. One must consider exactly what the sums would be. As the water companies are investing twice as much as before privatisation, if a Labour Government were to find that money somewhere else they would have to find £1.5 billion. Would it come from the schools programme, or from some other aspect of government?

The Labour party must decide what it really means. If it wants investment, that can come only from the private sector; otherwise the money would have to be taken from other areas, and if Labour were in power it would find that impossible. The first question that we must ask the Labour party is: if it were in government, would it renationalise the water industry? I notice that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras did not answer that question. He has not been able to say, "Yes, we would renationalise" or "No, we would not renationalise."

**Mr. Dobson** *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** Will the hon. Gentleman tell us which he would do?

**Mr. Dobson:** Since I took over this job I have said on innumerable occasions that, like most people in this country, I would rather like to take the water industry back into public ownership, but that the money to buy it back is not there, so we need a properly regulated system.

**Mr. Gummer** *rose—*

**Mr. Dobson:** While I am on my feet, I shall ask the Secretary of State a question, if I may. May I remind him that it was not the Labour party that nationalised the water industry in the first place? It was owned and operated successfully by our big cities and towns. The Tory party nationalised water in 1973—and the Secretary of State voted for that.

I have talked to my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Howell—then Denis Howell—about what happened next, and he tells me that he went to the Treasury—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I would have stopped him by now if he were a Back Bencher as his intervention has been too long. What is good enough for Back Benchers should be good enough for Front Benchers.

**Mr. Gummer:** We now know where we are. The water industry would not be nationalised under Labour, but it would be regulated in such a way as it to make it unable to raise the investment necessary to do the job. The hon. Gentleman says that he would politicise the water industry so that it would be under the control of a Labour Government, but what does the leader of the Labour party say? He says clearly that Governments cannot run companies. That is true of the water industry, too.

The hon. Gentleman is offering the worst of every world. The industry would not be nationalised, but it would not be in private ownership either. It would not be able to raise money, and it would not be able to invest. It would not be able to replace pipes or stop leaks. It would not be able to offer higher standards, or do any of the other things that the hon. Gentleman knows must be done. The industry would be in real trouble because the hon. Gentleman would not be able to read the balance sheet to understand what was going on. When he explains how the finances work, it is clear that he cannot read a balance sheet. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) is leaving because she cannot read a balance sheet either, but she does not like to be told about it. It is not surprising for someone who cannot read a balance sheet to get the figures wrong.

Let us consider investment.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall finish this point first.

In the years immediately after privatisation, investment was particularly high because it had been so low before privatisation. The rules of the European Union and the Government were such that they demanded immediate investment to meet bathing water directives—

**Mr. Jimmy Wray** (Glasgow, Provan): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier, Madam Speaker instructed hon. Members to speak into the microphone. The Secretary of State is not at the London Palladium, and we would like him to address the Opposition.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman is not quite right. The instruction was that all hon. Members should remember that they are addressing the occupant of the Chair.

**Mr. Gummer:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

*[Mr. Gummer]*

A considerable amount of investment was made to meet demands to improve water standards, some of which came from this Government and some from measures to which we had rightly agreed in the European Union. We have now met most of those demands, but a further £24 billion of investment is needed between now and 2005. Under the previous system, that investment would not have been made and we would not have been able to meet either our own requirements or those of the EU. We can meet them only because of the present high investment, which is twice as high in real terms as under Labour.

**Mr. Nicholls:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall continue my argument.

It is a question of not just investment but of what happens if there is no investment. Without investment, we will have dirty beaches. Labour Members object to dirty beaches, but when we say that we must pay to get rid of the muck they do two things: first, they suggest that we do not have to pay for it, and, secondly, they pretend that it is not their fault that the beaches are so dirty. Treating problems with beaches in the south-west is costing so much because, under Labour, there was no investment, and raw sewage went into the sea.

**Mr. John Gunnell** (Morley and Leeds, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State has had his back to you for quite a long time—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. This matter can be left in my hands. I have noted when the Secretary of State's back has been turned to me, but it has not been for a long time. The right hon. Gentleman has swung about a little bit, and I take this opportunity to remind him that he must address me as the Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Gummer:** I apologise for my natural athleticism, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I shall do my best to ensure that it is curbed.

The necessary investment would not occur under Labour, and it did not occur when the industry was in public ownership. Labour knows very well that it cannot suggest that the industry should be taken back into public ownership—not for the reason the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras advanced but for a wholly different reason. It is because it would result in dirty beaches, lower-quality water and a failure to improve the infrastructure and to repair all leaks.

**Mr. Nicholls:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall give way first to the hon. Lady, and then to my hon. Friend.

**Mrs. Jackson:** Is the Secretary of State really suggesting that there were no investment plans for the water and sewerage industry before 1990? What credit does he give the countless people who served on and chaired water boards for nothing in the years before privatisation? Those people planned investment, read the balance sheets and understood every figure.

**Mr. Gummer:** Before privatisation, investment was half its present level and, under a Labour Government, it would stop entirely. Some of the hon. Lady's friends may have sat on water boards, for which I honour them. They will have seen what the balance sheets said and will know that a Labour Government will not provide the money. They also know that, under Labour, the money will be stopped altogether.

**Mr. Nicholls:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, as I have already said that I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls).

**Mr. Nicholls:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that when the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was asked whether water charges would fall under Labour, he said, "Yes"? Therefore, the investment that is clearly still necessary will have to be raised from general taxation. The hon. Gentleman did not give me the opportunity to ask him by how much tax would have to go up under Labour, but perhaps he has already given that information to my right hon. Friend.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman has not yet given that information to me, but I was coming to precisely that point. Labour says that the industry would not be renationalised, but that it would be put under political control and that prices would fall. Therefore, none of the investment that we are debating would be made—certainly not at current levels. Labour would decide whether one beach or another was cleaned up, and whether there would be leakage controls or not. It would make those decisions by pushing down prices and investment. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has explained to us precisely why the Leader of the Opposition said that Governments cannot run companies; I would add only that Labour Governments cannot run anything.

**Mr. George Robertson** (Hamilton): Why must the Government privatise the water industry in England to get private investment, but not in Scotland, where the industry—which is not being privatised—is to raise private money? Why is it impossible to cap price increases in England, when the Secretary of State for Scotland has just capped the increase in water prices for next year at 6 per cent.?

**Mr. Gummer:** I am interested to hear that, because the price increase cap in England has been reduced from 4 per cent. to 1.4 per cent. The hon. Gentleman is wrong: it is perfectly possible for the regulator to reduce the cap for the privatised water companies. Labour is in favour of devolution, which evidently means that Scotland can do

something that England does not and vice versa. It seems perfectly reasonable for Scots to make their own decisions. All I can say is that in England, before privatisation, investment was half what it has been since. The sadness is that Labour thinks that there is something odd about that, although it will not pledge itself to renationalise the industry.

**Mr. Burden:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Dobson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman as he always puts his foot in it.

**Mr. Dobson:** Will the Secretary of State confirm figures from his Department and from Ofwat showing that, taking public and private ownership together, average investment in the five years of the previous Labour Government was the same as the average investment since this Government have been in power? Will he further confirm that investment under Labour during those five years was higher on average than when the industry was in public ownership under this Government? If he says no, he will be misleading the House. I wish to help him not to do so.

**Mr. Gummer:** I am interested that the hon. Gentlemen has to mix a period of public ownership with a period of private ownership to make his figures stand up. We are making a clear statement that, under Labour and Conservative Governments, public ownership meant lower investment than private ownership, and that, under a Labour Government, for six months public ownership meant no investment whatever. The Opposition cannot take that; they always have to find a situation in which privatisation can be blamed.

I noticed, for example, that recently the Opposition rushed to say that the privatised water companies in the north-east were responsible for the fact that between 50,000 and 75,000 people were without water because of burst pipes. They did not mention that many more people in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where there are no private water companies, suffered in that way. I am not blaming that on public ownership; I am merely saying that the Opposition will blame everything, including the cold weather, on privatisation.

**Sir Michael Grylls** (North-West Surrey): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I must move on, but I will come back to my hon. Friend in a moment.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras spoke an awful lot about the water companies, but he did not answer the real questions. Those companies are now not only much more able to obtain investment but are much more efficient than they were. They are not efficient enough, but they are much more efficient than they were—those of us who are Members of Parliament in the Anglian Water region can see that from our postbags. Since privatisation, the number of complaints about Anglian Water has fallen dramatically. The service is immensely better, and investment is considerably higher.

My constituency waited year after year under Labour and Conservative Governments to have sewage in Felixstowe properly treated. Felixstowe is a major holiday resort and we wanted to do something about our beaches. We now have a major sewage scheme because of privatisation, and we recognise that we pay the cost of that in our bills. We are prepared to do so because we want the quality. In fact, the scheme will not just reach the quality asked of us by the European Union—although we enthusiastically accept that—but that which we need to cater for holiday makers in our area.

We are also pleased that privatisation has been a success story abroad. Britain is now earning considerable wealth throughout the world because of the expertise of our water companies. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras obviously thinks that that is very funny as he has given one of his inimitable giggles, but I am talking about hundreds of millions of pounds of money coming back and bringing wealth to this country.

We are now using our expertise in Malaysia, Mexico, Adelaide and Shanghai. Why? Because those countries see that our water companies are doing the job so much better than any others. There are only two countries in the world of which that can be said. The British and French are the only two countries whose water companies can command universal support for the work that they are doing at home, and therefore win contracts abroad. That must be good for the United Kingdom, but as usual the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras and his friends attack the United Kingdom and try to destroy our major companies that are winning orders throughout the world.

It is surprising that the Opposition do that when one sees just how many of their friends invest in those companies. I have mentioned, although I know that it makes them uncomfortable, the position of the sponsoring union of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

**Mr. Dobson:** It does not make me uncomfortable.

**Mr. Gummer:** It may not, but it jolly well should. The hypocrisy of the hon. Gentleman would make me very uncomfortable. He says one thing and belongs to a union that is doing the opposite. If I was a Labour Member in Derbyshire, I would want to know what Derbyshire county council is doing and defending.

**Mr. Dobson:** Derbyshire county council's pensions board.

**Mr. Gummer:** Oh! The hon. Gentleman says that it is merely its pensions board. The chairman of the pensions board, a Labour councillor, explained that he did it because he thought it was best for the pensioners, and so it was. But the hon. Gentleman said that the company was ripping off the public for the benefit of its shareholders. That is hypocrisy—saying one thing and doing the other.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No, I will not give way to the hon. Lady, and I will tell her why. I dissociate her from

*[Mr. Gummer]*

the hypocrisy of her Front-Bench colleagues. She is an honourable woman on this matter. I disagree with her, but I have never found her to say one thing and do something else. That is the difference.

**Mr. Dobson:** Resign.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman says that she ought to resign. Evidently, members of the Labour party must resign if they are not hypocritical. Now we understand. The hon. Gentleman has called on the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) to resign for lack of hypocrisy.

**Mrs. Jackson:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Secretary of State to make comparisons of that nature in the House in a debate on such an important issue? He said that I am in some way more honourable that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. That is an extraordinary thing to say.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The occupant of the Chair is not responsible for the utterances of hon. Members. All I would suggest is that the best standards prevail.

**Mr. Gummer:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am that sorry the hon. Member for Hillsborough took my comments amiss, because I have genuinely accepted—

**Mrs. Jackson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No. I wish to dissociate her from what I have just said and I will give way to her later when we have moved well away from this subject.

**Sir Michael Grylls:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No, I must move on, but I will come back to my hon. Friend, as I have promised.

Privatisation has a number of great advantages for the public. For a start, it ensures that the people who control and police the companies and set targets do not own the companies. When the water companies were nationalised, that is precisely what happened. The Government owned the companies and set the standards, so of course they did not set high standards because they did not have the money to meet them. The Government set the standards that they thought they could meet. Under privatisation, we set up an independent regulator to set standards.

During Environment questions earlier, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) was very concerned about drinking water and he highlighted the need for very strict standards. I think that he was surprised to learn that there were no such standards before privatisation. When the companies were privatised, we set those standards and gave powers to the drinking water inspectorate to ensure that the standards were met. We also ensured that the National Rivers Authority had both the expertise and the duty to control those aspects of water production that were in its remit.

**Mr. Dobson:** The Secretary of State waited for the report.

**Mr. Gummer:** Yes, I waited for the NRA to produce its report. I would have looked rather silly if I had acted before an independent advisory committee produced its report. I can guess who would have been the first person to demand why I had acted without the information from the NRA. The hon. Gentleman must be more sensible about the issues of control and setting standards.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made comments—rather surprisingly, I thought—about the independent regulator which would be very difficult to make outside the House without clearly bringing the regulator's reputation and independence into discussion. There is no doubt that the whole industry, and those outside it, know that the regulator seeks to do his job as effectively as possible. As a result, he has been able to reduce significantly the amounts by which the companies have been able to raise bills.

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No, when I give way, I shall do so to my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls). I wish to move on to the subject of profits.

**Mr. Dobson:** To the best of my knowledge, I have never said anything in this Chamber that I was not prepared to say outside. I do criticise the regulator. He has not done a good job on behalf of the customer—I will say so publicly and privately and I will continue to say so.

**Mr. Gummer:** I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would be prepared to say outside what he clearly said in the House, which was that the regulator did not understand the figures. The hon. Gentleman said that he could not have understood them; otherwise, he would have done something different. That is a serious thing to say to a professional man who understands the figures, particularly when it comes from a man who does not understand them and never has, which leads me to the subject of profits.

The Labour party has been saying that the City would be safe with a Labour Government because the Labour party is new and has changed—it is not the same. Yet, when the Opposition talk about profit, we discover that they are precisely the same and have not changed at all. First, profits are bad. Secondly, the Opposition appear to have no idea that 40 per cent. of what they call profits are invested in the very infrastructure that they want to improve. They do not appear to understand that the profits also pay for investment. It is also true that, because of the profits, the companies are worth more and are able to borrow, so that the cost of present investment can be spread over the people who will benefit from those investments.

All those things are possible only if the companies make profits, but the Opposition do not like profits. They would regulate the industry so that there would not be any. If there were no profits, there would not be any investment.

As always, that brings us back to the fact that the Opposition want the investment but will never be prepared to pay the price. They know that investment is valuable and that is why their friends invest in the companies, but in the end they go back to the old Labour view of hating profits, and I will tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, why. It is because the hon. Member for Holborn

and St. Pancras has never made a profit in his life. He has never created a job and has never been able to make the kind of wealth that is possible for people in Britain because of what the water industry has been able to achieve throughout the world. All he can do is cavil and complain.

Not every water company is good. Anglian is extremely good and has done very well indeed. Much of the work done by Thames Water is particularly good. That is why I am so pleased that the RMT has invested in it. As I drink Thames Water's product here, I am pleased with its quality. Some other water companies have done many extremely good things, but I would not have shared a public relations agency with Yorkshire Water in the past year. One or two things could have been put much better and I know that they will be because the water industry is in private hands.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock** (Batley and Spen): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Yorkshire Water has invested and is investing a huge amount of money to rectify the difficult situation of the summer? It has also stated that it will not pass those costs to the consumer next year. Will he encourage the company not to pass the cost to the consumer the following year, as that is not clear?

**Mr. Gummer:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I shall certainly be keeping a close eye on Yorkshire Water. Although it has not starred as some other water companies, such as Anglian, have starred, there is no doubt that Yorkshire has been much better served by that company than by the nationalised industry. The company has invested and is investing and it is now subject to public control. Privatisation subjects companies to public control. If a company is owned by the public, they expect both the rate of investment and the rules.

**Sir Michael Grylls:** My right hon. Friend is doing the House a great service in unravelling the extraordinary tangled web of Labour's policy on the water industry. The more the Opposition try to explain it and my right hon. Friend unravels it, the clearer it becomes that orderly regulation, which is what we have, would be replaced, under Labour, with disorderly interference by ministerial fiat, which is what ruined so many of the nationalised industries and made them such failures.

**Mr. Gummer:** We should give some credit where it is due. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, who speaks for the Labour party on these matters, once led Camden council, so he has experience of disorderly organisation. If there were someone who could run something with political abandon, the hon. Gentleman is that man. I just do not want my water to be in his hands. We will do much better with water in the hands of the professionals and with standards set independently by those who are able to set them without being concerned about the costs of implementation, apart from cost-effectiveness.

**Mr. Burden:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I will not give way again as I want to get to the end of my speech. This is a short debate and I must say one or two more things that will help the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) when he speaks.

First, I must thank the Opposition for this opportunity. Last year, not one of their Supply days was on the environment. They have no environmental policies and they did not raise a single environmental policy on the Floor of the House. That chimes with something else. I was pleased to answer Environment questions today, but we used to have an hour of questions—Environment is almost the largest Department in the Government and it had an hour for 25 years. To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Department of the Environment, the Labour party asked whether we could have a shorter Question Time and whether it could be cut to 40 minutes. I wonder why. It is because the Opposition lose every time. Every time they ask a question, they get an answer and they do not like the answers. Every time they ask a question, they discover that they have got it wrong.

That is what the Opposition discovered today. They have had to admit, first, that they would not nationalise the water companies; secondly, that they would go in for political interference; thirdly, that they would not be able to provide the necessary investment; fourthly, that they would have water companies in which their friends would no longer want to invest; and, fifthly, that they do not understand the balance sheets of the water companies or of any other company. That is what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has had to explain, and it is good that he has come to the House to give us this opportunity.

I ask the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to help us again. I hope that we can have a debate on housing on the next Opposition Supply day. I would like him to outline Labour policy on housing because we did not hear it yesterday. I also hope that we can debate environmental matters. I look forward to hearing his views of the ozone layer and how he would deal, were he ever in a position to do so, with the big international environmental issues.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I hope that we can return to the subject in hand.

**Mr. Gummer:** Today, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have been allowed to speak only about water and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has failed completely. He has shown that, under privatisation, we are investing twice as much in infrastructure and we have higher standards than ever before. This country has become the country to which other nations turn for advice on water and pay for the advice, which brings wealth to this nation. Under privatisation, water standards have risen as they never did before. We have been able to set standards, which never happened before. The hon. Gentleman shows that he is not fit to be part of a Government and that his party could not form a Government at any time.

5.7 pm

**Mr. Doug Hoyle** (Warrington, North): We have just seen a performance that would have been better at the Palladium than in the House of Commons. It is a great pity that the Secretary of State did not address himself to the motion.

I shall be brief, as many of my colleagues want to outline what has been happening with water in their areas. North West Water has its headquarters in Warrington, and my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman,

*[Mr. Doug Hoyle]*

was right to say that North West Water loses more water between the reservoir and the tap than any other company in Britain. I believe it to be the most inefficient water company, although it has to compete with Yorkshire Water. Each day, just over 158 million gallons of water leak away, or 109,871 gallons a minute. If that leakage was stopped, 5,528,077 consumers could be supplied. That is the scale of the company's inefficiency.

Despite the company's inefficiency, profits and dividends have gone through the roof since privatisation. Annual profits in 1990-91 were £215 million; in 1994-95, they were up by 32 per cent. to £284 million—or £540 per minute. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras mentioned that over the past five years, it has spent only £8 million on trying to reduce leaks. It is boasting that it will do something about them, yet even now it will spend only £65 million a year on reducing leaks. The modest target that it has set itself is to reduce leaks by the year 2000 from 30 to 24 per cent. By the year 2000, 24 per cent. of the north-west's water will still be flowing away in leaks.

The cost of delivering water in the north-west has gone up by 21 per cent. since 1992. One would think that the people responsible for that sad state of affairs would be sacked. Not a bit of it. Instead of being sacked, they have been feathering their nests. The company has been a seat of power for the fat cats.

Let us examine what has happened to the chairman of North West Water. In 1989-90, when the company was in public hands, he was paid £47,000 a year, and that is far too much. The same chairman, Dennis Grove, in the year before privatisation pushed up his salary to £97,000 a year, again far too much for the job that he was doing. It contrasts with the people who, when the industry was in public hands, gave their services for nothing. However, that is nothing compared with Sir Desmond Pitcher, who has pushed his salary up in 1994-95 to £360,000 a year—an increase of more than 300 per cent.—at the same time as the company is being run so inefficiently.

There is also the case of the former chief executive, Bob Thian, who was paid £1 million to leave the company. I see that the Secretary of State has left the Chamber.

**Mr. Gummer** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Hoyle:** I had not noticed the right hon. Gentleman. I apologise.

The right hon. Gentleman boasts that the water companies are going for contracts all over the world—in Argentina and Australia. That was certainly true of North West Water. However, those companies are doing nothing about the sad state of affairs in which water is leaking away at home and there is nothing for the benefit of people in the north-west.

The same chief executive not only initiated that mistaken policy, but was the person responsible for the installation in the new head offices in Warrington of a computer that has cost millions of pounds and been difficult to get right. What did he get when he left the company? He got £1 million in compensation for all the mistakes that he had made. We never heard any condemnation of those people from the Secretary of State. All we had was the knockabout stand-up comic act that we have had from him before.

We can contrast the £1 million that was paid to Mr. Thian with the redundancy money paid to the thousands of staff who lost their jobs to keep up profits and pay the salaries of the fat cats at the top. Because of their inefficiency and the way in which they have allowed water to leak away in the north-west—we admit that last summer was a dry one, but it followed one of the wettest winters that we have ever had—we had a hosepipe ban last summer in most of the region. They also decided, at the height of the driest summer for many years and despite the drought, to empty three reservoirs in the north of the region. When there was a public outcry about that, they emptied only one reservoir—Poaka Beck in Cumbria. How stupid to empty a reservoir at the height of a drought to undertake maintenance. That is the sort crazy thing that happened.

Even worse, the highly inefficient North West Water was allowed to take over Norweb, the region's electricity company, against advice from even the weak regulators in the electricity and water industries. Their advice was ignored. I was one among many who wrote to the President of the Board of Trade to ask him to refer that to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. He did nothing about it and the merger was allowed. We in the region are paying a high price for that.

The company is now called United Utilities, but it is really North West Water because most of the directors of Norweb left. I need not say that they did not leave empty-handed but with handsome pay-offs. A subsidiary called Vertex was set up to run telesales, customer services, meter reading and billing. Again, thousands of jobs will be lost.

To push the job losses through, the company is going to derecognise the trade unions, when industrial relations in both the water and electricity industries have been very good. Recognition will be removed, so that thousands of people can lose their jobs. When they lose their jobs—and those employees have served both companies faithfully and well for many years—they will not get the £1 million that was paid to Mr. Thian or the handsome pay-offs given to the directors of Norweb. That shows the stupidity of not referring the matter to the MMC. It has put at risk not only the jobs of employees but the interests of consumers. It was a great blunder to put an inefficient company, with its present chairman, Sir Desmond Pitcher, in charge not only of water, but of electricity.

A monopoly is being created in the north-west. Consumers cannot move from using North West Water or the electricity that is now supplied by the same company. It is an inadequately regulated monopoly. When we come to power, we must give attention to that and ensure that both those industries are properly regulated, in the interests of consumers and of the people who work in them.

5.18 pm

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): I also welcome the fact that the Opposition have been kind enough, and, perhaps, candid enough, to have a debate on this subject. I look forward to other Opposition Supply days when we can debate education, defence and taxation, so that we can explore across the range the difference between what the Labour party says and what it does.

Ministers will not be surprised to hear me talking about water again. As a west country Member, I must have talked more about that subject than about any other since 1990. I shall look back at what has caused some of the water problems in the west country over the past six years or so and suggest one or two amendments.

I have sometimes heard it said that South West Water has invested millions, if not billions, of pounds on cleaning up the waters around the west country. That is somewhat loose language. Millions, if not billions, have certainly been invested, but that investment has been made by the water charge payers in the south-west. It is the fault of nobody in the House that the European Community decided to identify 455 sub-standard beaches in the United Kingdom and that 30 per cent. of those were in south-west England. The south-west has a relatively small population, many of whom are of retirement or near-retirement age, so it is bizarre that a relatively small number of relatively impoverished people found themselves responsible for cleaning up 30 per cent. of the nation's coastline. That clean-up was done and financed—painfully—by the people of the south-west. The fact that it had to be done is neither here nor there.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro): Unlike the Secretary of State, the hon. Gentleman has attempted to blame the European Union for the directives on cleaning up our beaches, yet the British Government had adopted the regulations of the urban waste water directive before they were adopted by the European Community.

**Mr. Nicholls:** The hon. Gentleman speaks as a representative of the most "federast" party in the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Taylor** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Nicholls:** The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. He should go away and read some of his party's literature. The Liberal party does not have a firm policy on much, but it has a very firm policy on complete and total integration into the European Community. I agree that, at times, the Government have found themselves being moved at a pace and in a manner that I would not choose, but it is a direct consequence of having to play our part in the European Community. The only party in the House that has always been consistently pro-European, and is therefore not in a position to make that point, is the Liberal Democrat party. If it were ever to play a part in the government of this country, there would be no question of trying to negotiate with our European partners on directives and other such matters. It would simply be told when to jump and the only question that it could ask would be, "How high?"

South West Water plc has sometimes been criticised, not because it has had to clean up the coastline in that way, but because of the thoroughly insensitive way in which it has been done. There was a time when my postbag was full of letters complaining about the hike in water charges in the south-west. I pay tribute to South West Water for the courtesy and attention with which it has always dealt with my queries, but it was insensitive to how people in the west country felt about price rises. On one glorious occasion, the chairman of South West Water gave an interview in the *Western Morning News* to the effect that people in the west country were well off and therefore able to pay. That judgment must have been framed by the fact that he had been looking in the mirror at the time. Some people in the south-west are paid a great deal of money and can therefore take that attitude to water charges.

If hon. Members think that I am being slightly unfair to South West Water, I shall make a further point. As a result of efforts made by west country Members of Parliament and Ministers—I pay full tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins)—the regulator imposed a regime on South West Water, which meant that charges were capped at approximately the rate of inflation. That should have been the subject of great rejoicing in the west country, but South West Water immediately announced that it could not fulfil its statutory functions if its charges were pegged in that way, and it appealed. It took a whole year for the appeals procedure to go through.

I have never been able to get to the bottom of the fact that South West Water paid about £1 million to present a case to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission showing that it simply could not manage on the moneys that it had. In a sense, that was correct and, ultimately, the MMC varied its position slightly. It said that, on some relatively minor aspects, the regulator had been too generous to South West Water and it imposed a slightly tighter regime on South West Water. There is no longer talk of South West Water being unable to carry out its statutory functions.

People in the south-west are still faced with extremely high combined water and sewerage payments, but at least when they look into the future, they no longer see stretching before them extremely high year-on-year increases. That has been brought about not by the efforts of South West Water, but by the combined pressure of west country Members of Parliament and Ministers.

That is the recent history of why this subject matters so much to people in the west country. Another reason why this debate is so important is that politics is about choices. When deciding which party to vote for, most people make the decision not because they think that one party is perfect and another is not, but on the balance of choice. They compare the parties' policies. Some people are probably saying, "We know what the Conservatives' position is on this; let us see what the Labour party has to offer us." They could do worse than look at the motion that the Labour party has tabled today. It is splendid stuff, with marvellously volcanic phrases about

"the deplorable record of the privatised water companies".

It goes on to talk about

"prices, profits . . . pay and perks".

If those marvellous alliterations do not get one salivating sufficiently, one can look at today's press wire, where the Labour party makes a great attack on water companies. One might reasonably think that, if the Labour party were to get into office, it would immediately put those fat cats to the sword and do away with all the profits. The difficulty is that one must always compare what the Labour party says with what it does.

It is interesting to see what the Labour party does when it is in power. Labour local authorities, such as Islington in north London, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, have all acquired substantial shareholdings in water companies and other privatised utilities. The leader of the Labour

*[Mr. Nicholls]*

party lives in Islington, although he does not send his children to school there. Islington council has shares in 17 privatised firms and last year it bought £240 million-worth of pension funds and 24,700 shares in R. J. Budge (Mining). That name should make Labour Members shudder as if someone had trodden on their graves, because last year that company took over most of Britain's coal mines. That is the sort of company that Labour councillors are more than happy to invest in.

Not all Labour Members are happy about that. Some realise that there may be a slight contradiction between their principles and their practices. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson)—I am sorry that he is not here today—who said:

"The party is skewered if we buy shares, having attacked privatisation, and then just sit back and accept the cash."

That is a marvellous thing to have said, although the hon. Gentleman will not say it here today as he will have been sandbagged outside.

Let us see what has happened at Labour party conferences when the utilities have been debated. In 1994, a splendid motion was put down by the Labour party in Amber Valley, where people know a bit about privatisation and the iniquity of water supplies, because Derbyshire county council has a £700 million pension fund with 800,000 shares in water firms.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was kind enough to mention the plight of the south-west. He might have drawn to the House's attention the fact that Derbyshire county council owns 500,000 shares in North West Water and 300,000 in South West Water.

**Mr. Jack Thompson** (Wansbeck): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Nicholls:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but he must be patient.

We need not fear or doubt that the next Labour Government will keep the water companies privatised. You must be joking—the Labour party nearly owns the water industry already.

**Mr. Thompson:** I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has had any experience in local government; I assume that he has at some time in his career. He may be aware—I certainly am—that local government investment in pension funds is strictly controlled. I was chairman of the investment panel of Northumberland county council in 1981, at a time when I did not want pension fund money to be invested in South Africa. We were not permitted to refuse to invest there; we were obliged to invest in South Africa. Similarly, now, local authorities must invest in companies that they are advised give the best return. They have no choice.

**Mr. Nicholls:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for putting it in that way. I do have experience in local government and I am also a lawyer. If the hon. Gentleman is seriously suggesting that those poor Labour-controlled authorities were bullied, or pressurised by law, into investing in companies that they describe as indulging in excess profits, rip-offs and so on, I reply that those Labour, left-wing-controlled authorities were able to exercise a choice. They did exercise a choice and, as is so often the case with the Labour party, they exercised a choice in one direction and then preached an entirely different message.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would be interested to know of the way in which Yorkshire Water—I believe, on the advice and suggestion of the regulator and possibly the Government—treated local authority pension fund shareholders and individual shareholders. When those shareholders went to an annual general meeting to express their point of view, which was their right as shareholders, they were treated with the utmost contempt. Their points of view were not even allowed to be heard and considered properly by that meeting. That is the way in which water companies treat shareholders when they do not agree with the policy of the water company.

**Mr. Nicholls:** I accept that, if the hon. Lady or I were to buy a share in a water company and attend an annual general meeting to try to make an argument or gather people on our side, it would be extremely difficult—even with the combined megaphone diplomacy of the hon. Lady and me—to argue our point.

However, we are not discussing poor, humble little hon. Members with one share apiece. Large, Labour-controlled local authorities do not buy only the occasional share. They buy 300,000 shares in South West Water or 500,000 shares in North West Water, or are prepared to invest in a company such as R. J. Budge (Mining), which has committed what one would suppose to be the ultimate heresy for the Labour party, of buying up the privatised coal industry. If the hon. Lady wants to consider that, she should have a word with the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, who said:

"The party is skewered if we buy shares, having attacked privatisation, and then just sit back and accept the cash."

I had hoped that the debate would enable my constituents to make a choice. I had hoped that they would be able to listen to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras and suddenly understand that an alternative might exist. What alternative was mentioned? None at all. Did we hear from the hon. Gentleman whether, under a Labour Government, the water industry would contribute less to environmental protection? Not a word. Would water charges be less? Oh yes, you bet they would, Madam Deputy Speaker, but where was the money coming from? The hon. Gentleman did not know.

Judging by the number of people in the Gallery and the number of people in the Chamber, it might be supposed that the subject of the debate is not desperately exciting. It might be supposed that the debate will not yield facts that would be useful for a hypocrisy watch. It might be supposed that the debate is uninteresting compared with some of our recent debates about education matters.

But as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are universal principles. One of them is that one must be tough on cant and tough on the causes of cant. The debate is worth listening to, if only for one reason. If the Government ever decided to introduce a new charter mark, they might do a great deal worse than to introduce a charter mark on hypocrisy; and in deciding who would be a worthy recipient of that award, they might take a look at the Opposition Benches.

5.33 pm

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro): The contributions to the debate bear out my suspicion that there is not much agreement across the Floor of the House. I hope that, in spite of that, there can be general agreement on the principle that access to an affordable, available and adequate source of water is one of the bases of a civilised society. I believe that the Conservative Government's privatisation of the water industry, and the way in which they have failed to regulate it adequately, have placed that in jeopardy. Water privatisation and the regulatory system have failed to provide an equitable and affordable deal for consumers in terms of costs, water provision and the environment.

I shall discuss three aspects; first, the rosy picture painted by Conservative Ministers at the time of water privatisation; secondly, the way in which the regulatory system has placed private interests before the interests of the consumer, creating a huge and unaffordable burden for domestic water users and for the environment; finally, the ways in which the Government can start to tackle the problems caused by water privatisation.

At the time of privatisation—as now—Conservative Ministers emphasised that they believed that privatisation was the best way to proceed. They argued that privatisation would give water companies a chance to raise capital in the market place, which the companies would invest in revitalising the water system and improving the environment while providing an affordable service. In reality, the monster that the Government created was what the National Consumer Council has described as

"a monopoly supplier of an essential service to a captive market."

I expressed that anxiety during the debate on privatisation, when I argued:

"I do not believe that privatisation is best for the water industry. Also, one must consider whether, in privatising, one is giving adequate power to consumers and meeting environmental concerns. In any privatisation, the first consideration should be the ordinary men and women of this country, whereas the Government's primary consideration has been maximising the return to the Treasury"—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1988; Vol. 143, c. 534.].

The Government cannot argue, therefore, that the problems could not be predicted. On the contrary, Liberal Democrat anxieties have proved well founded. The regulatory system has shown itself to be incapable of adequately protecting the consumer. In practice, water privatisation has meant that the consumer has suffered while the private water companies, their bosses and their shareholders have flourished.

Instead of raising capital for investment in the marketplace, the water companies have raised prices, forcing the consumer to pay a large proportion of the costs of investment in infrastructure and the environment. According to the National Consumer Council, domestic water bills have increased on average by two-thirds since privatisation, while profits accumulated by the water companies have increased by 20 per cent. a year from 1989-90 to 1992-93, and shareholders have made huge and increasing returns.

That is obviously inequitable, and it is one of the fundamental factors that the Secretary of State failed to address in his claim that privatisation gave the water companies access to what he described as private finance, but which the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) more accurately described as consumers' pockets. The water companies have not primarily relied on raising capital by means of, for example, further share issues, which would have diluted the return to the owners and managers of those companies; they have primarily relied on raising money from the revenue stream—direct from their captive consumers. The Government cannot argue that those problems could not have been predicted.

The regulatory system has obviously failed in that regard. If the industry had been priced and regulated properly, those problems might have been kept under greater control. Indeed, water prices could and should have been kept significantly lower if the Government and the regulator had demanded that capital should be raised for investment, instead of customers being used as a source of direct revenue.

Why did Ministers not ensure that stronger action was taken on that? Presumably, they failed to do so in order to protect the returns of the large institutional shareholders who, when they bought into the privatisation, were given assurances on rates of return.

The result of that weak regulatory system has been an increasing and unaffordable burden on water consumers—a burden that Conservative Ministers have failed to cut even if the rate of increase has been reduced in the past couple of years from what it was previously under privatisation.

The burden of paying for water has fallen particularly heavily on low-income families, pensioners and those who live alone. Using Ofwat figures, the National Consumer Council calculated that a household on income support would spend 3.2 per cent. of its disposable income on water in 1994-95, compared with 2.5 per cent. in 1989-90. The burden has increased for those who are least able to afford it.

In my part of the south-west, the burden is even more apparent. People in Cornwall and Devon are paying the highest water bills in the country. The average bill is more than £300 and many are paying bills of £600 or more. A pensioner living alone in the south-west may spend more than 9 per cent. of his or her income on water bills. Bill Fraser, the managing director of South West Water, announced his retirement yesterday. I hope that, with a change in leadership, the company will also take a change in direction and step up the pressure on Government to tackle the problem rather than relying on consumer payments.

**Mr. Nicholls:** The hon. Gentleman is a fair man, so I hope that he will make it clear in his speech that there was no painless way of raising money to do what had to be done. Whatever we may think about the way in which it was done, it is misleading to suggest that there was a painless way of doing it.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not seriously trying to suggest that it was not the combined efforts of west country Members of Parliament and Ministers who were prepared to take our side that persuaded the regulator that charges should be pegged. That was no mean achievement, bearing in mind that many of the hon. Gentleman's supporters did not believe that charges could be pegged, let alone reduced.

**Mr. Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman is correct in one respect: political pressure counts. The Government are

*[Mr. Taylor]*

aware of the pressure that they are under in the west country as a result of the increasing water bills and they expect to lose seats as a consequence. That political pressure—which is echoed in Conservative Members' concern that they will lose their seats at the same time as the pressure is intensified by Liberal Democrats who expect to gain those seats—clearly had an impact on the Minister.

Prior to the preparations for privatisation, the cost of cleaning up our coastline was spread across the country—however inadequately—through an equalisation scheme, which relates to the point that the hon. Member for Teignbridge raised. Privatisation imposed a huge extra burden on the people of the south-west who were required to pay for a greatly expanded clean-up without any proper system to distribute the costs—some 3 per cent. of the population were left to pay for cleaning up 33 per cent. of the nation's beaches. A national asset became a regional burden.

That cost was emphasised last year by the chair of the South West Water consumers committee, who said that if the cost of environmental improvements—they are future improvements which are not yet in the pipeline—continues to fall solely on South West Water consumers, it will add £150 per year to their average bill. However, if the cost of the same clean-up were spread nationally and if everyone paid a fair portion of the cost of the national clean-up programme, it would add just £15 to the average bill.

**Mr. Atkins:** The hon. Gentleman advanced that argument in debate on the Environment Bill in Committee. I asked him then—and I do so again now—how his right hon. and hon. Friends who represent seats in other parts of the country, such as the erstwhile Treasury spokesman, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), would feel about inviting their constituents to pay more in order to clean up the beaches in the hon. Gentleman's constituency?

**Mr. Taylor:** The short answer is that it is party policy. It is not difficult to argue that we should have clean beaches and clean water if it adds £15 to people's bills across the nation. It is more difficult to say the same thing to consumers in the south-west while adding £150 to their water bills. I would find it easier to argue the case for a £15 increase in Yorkshire than the hon. Gentleman would to argue the case for a £150 increase in the south-west. *[Interruption.]* If that is what the hon. Member for Teignbridge believes, that message will be relayed to all of his constituents come the general election.

The Government cannot argue that there is no precedent for sharing the burdens. Indeed, the green dowry explicitly recognised the need to spread the cost of the clean-up. However, the levels were set far too low before the environment regulations were finally agreed, and they were never increased in response to the Government's decision to raise environmental standards. As I said earlier, the decision on environmental standards was taken by the British Government in advance of the European Community determination.

The burden that the decisions have placed on the consumer is highlighted by the number of water disconnections. Higher water charges increase the likelihood of disconnection for low income families. With that in mind, at the time of privatisation I sought a guarantee from the Minister that the 9,000 disconnections of the previous year would not be increased after privatisation. Unfortunately, the number of disconnections has increased. According to a study by the British Medical Association, there was a 48 per cent. increase in the number of domestic water disconnections between 1989 and 1994—little wonder, in view of the increasing bills that I have outlined.

More worrying still is the fact that the number of disconnections may rise if plans to encourage budget metering go ahead. Low-income families with cards or keys for meters who cannot afford to charge them up will effectively disconnect themselves. Those disconnections will not show up in the official figures, and therefore will remain unaddressed. There will certainly be no room for the existing customer protection measures. I cannot accept that there is a need for those disconnections, when it was shown that there was no need for them in Scotland.

I cannot forgive the fact that, in full knowledge of the burden on consumers that I have described, the Government have failed to reassess the charging system for water—despite having an opportunity to do so only six months ago. In an extraordinary decision last Easter, Ministers announced that charging for water would continue to be based on the outdated rates system. That system was abandoned for local government in the 1980s as it was considered outmoded and unfair and based on valuations made in the 1970s. If it was considered unfair and outdated for use by councils in the 1980s, it cannot be acceptable for water charging by private companies in the 1990s. How can Ministers justify charges in the next century based on valuations from the 1970s?

In addition, the valuations bring with them a system which, despite the rising prices that I have mentioned, gives no relief to those on the lowest incomes or those who live alone. That means that in high charging areas such as the south-west there is no help for people who are literally unable to pay their water bills. I remind the House that pensioners in my region may spend 9 per cent. of their annual pension paying their water bills.

Despite that situation, Conservative Ministers have continued to disclaim any responsibility. In a letter to south-west Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament, the Secretary of State argued:

"responsibility for water charges rests with the Director General of Water Services".

Yet Mr. Byatt confirmed in the *Western Morning News* that price limits were based on environmental obligations laid down by the Government and that he had little room to manoeuvre.

In addition to announcing that water bills would continue to be based on the rates system for the time being, Ministers argue in favour of introducing compulsory water metering as a new system of charging. I shall turn briefly to that issue. Metering creates huge problems for families on low incomes, as revealed by a recent Save the Children report entitled, "Water tight. The impact of water metering on low income families". Families with children are most likely to use more water for basic needs, and therefore have higher water bills. According to the report, under metering, families face huge pressure to cut their water bills and they try to save money by

"sharing baths, taking fewer baths or showers, washing clothes less often and flushing the toilet less".

We have reached a worrying situation when a respondent to the Save the Children survey can say:

"You have to bath the kids, but some people are afraid to bath them as it costs too much".

Imagine what it will mean in the south-west, where families face higher than average bills under compulsory metering. Extra environmental burdens are to be imposed upon them and the water companies continue to take their ever-increasing cut. The risks posed to those families by cutting water use is not imagined or exaggerated. The British Medical Association has said that families who economise on water over a long period are at risk from a number of diseases.

Water metering has its advantages, but Ministers must not contemplate it without the Government's first addressing the needs of the poor and the huge extra cost of introducing a compulsory system for every household. The Government do not answer those questions; they simply hope to blame the privatised companies for problems which they cannot bring themselves even to acknowledge. Meanwhile, the Government continue with the existing out-of-date, unfair rating system.

Having set out my concerns about the charging system for water and the need for more effective regulation, let me consider for a moment last summer's drought and its environmental implications. The water companies emphasise the need for domestic water users to cut consumption. Although that is desirable, it is not the main issue. A report by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology points out that leakage from water company distribution pipes remains more than four times higher than that from customers' supply pipes. That backs up figures from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds that 500,000 gallons of water are lost through leakage every minute of the day. The combination of rising demand and leakage is putting huge pressure on our rivers and wildlife. Before we discuss cutting the amount of water that families use, let us cut the amount that water companies waste.

Since the summer, water companies have committed themselves to an accelerated leakage control programme which will double the current rate of improvement, but as the current rate is only 1.2 per cent. per year it will be too little and too slow. The Secretary of State for the Environment has simply accepted the water companies' argument that that is the most efficient approach, leaving the water companies to take measures to minimise their total costs, including those of leakage, under the regulatory system. That may well be the best answer for shareholders, but it is unlikely to be the best answer for customers suffering water shortages or for an environment that is literally drying up.

I come now to the measures that the Liberal Democrats believe would solve the problems facing water consumers and the environment. We have repeatedly proposed long-term and transitional solutions to cut bills and help consumers.

It is widely understood that Environment Ministers accepted that the burden fell too hard on the south-west and asked the Treasury for more resources, but the Treasury turned them down. Frankly, the only reasonable solution is fairer national distribution of the burden of the clean-up. It is not viable for the present system to continue. It is certainly not viable to seek continuing increases in the context of the present charging system, which offers no help to the poor or those living alone.

Increased national investment would ensure that environmental improvements could be made without the burden falling unfairly on people in particular parts of the country. Our coastline is a national asset. It must be part of a national policy, not neglected as a regional problem.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): Does my hon. Friend accept that if that were the case, there would also be an opportunity to draw down funds from the European Union as other countries do?

**Mr. Taylor:** That is right. When the industry was privatised, I said that privatisation would block much of the potential European funding that is available to the public sector, but not to private companies.

It is significant that neither Conservative Members nor Labour Front Bench spokesmen are willing to take action for my region. They all want to protect their voters outside the south-west. Let me remind the House that if the burden of the next round of environmental clean-up is distributed unfairly, as at present, it will add £150 to the average bill in the south-west. Yet if it is distributed evenly across the country, it will add just £15. That change will have to be made. Conservative and Labour must recognise that people in the south-west cannot afford to pay their bills.

In addition, we could help poorer customers right away by replacing the old rateable value system as the basis for charging for water with the up-to-date council tax system. That more modern system would allow the Government to help low-income families and those living alone who are faced with unaffordable water bills. Disconnections from water supplies should be illegal, as they are in Scotland. There are many ways to get money out of people. We do not need to deny their children water.

Both those moves should be combined with a tougher regulatory system. At present there is no way of penalising water companies for failing to meet agreed standards of service. Such penalties would encourage companies to raise their standards. Water companies must be encouraged to raise more funds for investment through private sector capital finance rather than directly from customers. Finally, to address the problem of future droughts and leakages, the Government must bite the bullet and introduce mandatory leakage targets.

It is time that the Government put a fair deal for consumers above protecting the water bosses and their shareholders. If not, in the south-west in particular, the Government's time will soon be up.

5.53 pm

**Sir Donald Thompson** (Calder Valley): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) to the south-west, where he expects my constituents to pay £15 a head to re-elect him. We have to look after our own beaches in Yorkshire.

I have received more correspondence on this subject than I have on the community charge and the Child Support Agency put together. All summer, correspondence about Yorkshire Water rolled into my office. The Calder Valley, Halifax, Bradford and the old

*[Sir Donald Thompson]*

woollen areas were always self-sufficient in water. The waterways, the reservoirs and people's houses were supplied by the system that was established by the woollen manufacturers. Consequently, we have no national grid and no way of fetching water into my constituency other than its falling from heaven. Yorkshire Water's predecessors must have known that for generations; yet they did nothing about it.

I am convinced that, had there still been a nationalised industry or a water board industry, we would have been in the same position as 15 or 20 years ago, when we relied on standpipes. It did not come to that; none the less, Yorkshire Water was slow to spot the difficulties and abysmally slow with its public relations. It did not even attempt to bring water to west Yorkshire by other methods. At one time there was a call for Yorkshire Water to use the Army. It could also have asked the oil companies and other corporations that are accustomed to moving liquids for assistance. Ultimately, it had to resort to tankering and I am grateful for that.

The response to people who objected to the tankers roaring past their homes was as insensitive as it was to my constituents, to industry, and to various parts of the community throughout the crisis. Dentists, for instance, faced special difficulties. Their premises are often in residential streets where the water was cut off. They found the prospect of rota cuts on alternate days terrifying, not simply because there would not be water on alternate days, but because on those days when water could be delivered, it would have to be boiled. That possibility was averted, but not without having the effect of terrifying firms which were encouraged, not very subtly, to manufacture elsewhere, or old people, who were worried.

Yorkshire Water put up the backs of the people who wanted to help. My constituents are renowned for their common sense. They sent me here, so they must have common sense. They knew that it had not rained all summer and they would have helped Yorkshire Water. Eventually, they must have been tempted to leave the taps running on purpose, although they did not do so because they had too much common sense. Yorkshire Water threw away every chance of good public relations time after time.

The only time the chairman of Yorkshire Water wrote directly and unprompted to me was when I asked a question in the House and it was reported in the *Financial Times* the following day. That put a rocket under the chairman, but letters from my constituents seemed not to stir Yorkshire Water. The chairman of Yorkshire Water and I had clashed before. In years gone by, he had an untidy site at a place that my constituents know as Lowfields, which is now an industrial estate. I had to use the procedures of the House to make him relinquish Lowfields and bring it back into proper use.

Yorkshire people know that they can get nothing for nothing. They want Yorkshire Water to make a profit, but they are disgusted that the company should retreat first into the unregulated areas of its business before putting right all the damage and neglect that had occurred before privatisation.

The Government could not at first believe that Yorkshire Water could be so slow or so insensitive and pedantic towards its customers. We must help Yorkshire Water to regain the confidence of consumers, including my constituents and business generally. If we are to have the investment that has been urged, Yorkshire Water must regain the confidence of the City. As things stand, I do not believe that anyone in the City would say, "It is a good bet to put your money on Yorkshire Water." Unless it attracts investors, my constituents will be badly served.

The problem will be back with us next year. It is not Yorkshire Water's fault, of course, that it has not rained. Similarly, it is not the Government's fault that the reservoirs are not filling at the usual rate. But that means that the problem will return next year. Accordingly, the Government must maintain pressure on Yorkshire Water. They must keep pushing. On behalf of our constituents, we must nag the Government as well as Yorkshire Water and its directors. We must ensure that the company recognises that the mistakes of last year are not repeated this year.

6.1 pm

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): Last year, when it became obvious to everyone in West Yorkshire, apart from those holed up at Yorkshire Water's headquarters and perhaps Ministers, that we were faced with almost certain cut-offs if appropriate action was not taken, I wrote to the Prime Minister. I did so in August. I wrote also to the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Health. I asked for intervention and help.

The Prime Minister took five weeks to reply. When the Secretary of State for the Environment replied, he tried to defend the indefensible. The Secretary of State for Health adopted a similar approach. It was left to the people—I concede what the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) said—and to local Members, local authorities and interested bodies to do all the shouting and pressurising. The Government abandoned us.

The water industry should never have been privatised. We know that water is vital to life. The privatisation of the industry has been a spectacular failure by any measure, especially in Yorkshire.

We hear much about hypocrisy these days. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) has been chided by some of my hon. Friends for being two-faced, but I think that he has 10 faces. He was one of the many Tory Members who wandered enthusiastically into the Government Lobby to support the Government throughout consideration of the privatisation Bill. At that stage, Labour Members were warning of disasters. If we are talking about hypocrisy and double standards, the hon. Gentleman provides a classic example.

On 9 January, Yorkshire Water announced that tankering would cease. No one was more pleased than hundreds of my constituents who lives had been seriously disrupted by the 24-hour operation. Janet Parsons, the secretary of the pensioners' association in Halifax, has been a doughty campaigner to keep the taps flowing. Janet told me that when she saw the tankers driving through narrow roads, up hills and in difficult areas in Halifax with "Water for Halifax" written on them, she thought that that was not life in a first-world country; she told me that it was like being in the third world, somewhere in the middle of the Sahara or in some other desert-like country.

It could be argued, however, that the tankering should not have been stopped. It was costing the water company £3 million a week, but I am still not sure that the operation should have ended. We were glad, of course, when we

were told that 24-hour cut-offs would be withdrawn for the time being. We were pleased also when Yorkshire Water announced that it would spend another £100 million on new pipes and pumps. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the crisis is over. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The *Halifax Courier*, a newspaper which is read by the hon. Member for Calder Valley and by me, made it clear last night through its "Water Watch" that reservoir stocks in Calderdale stand at only a third of capacity. They should be about 80 per cent., but they are only 27.4 per cent. We are halfway through the winter and our reservoirs are only a third full. It does not take a genius to work out that we shall be in trouble unless there is massive rainfall or unless Yorkshire Water commits itself to doing something to take account of the long-term problem.

The Minister should know that the people of Halifax and the surrounding areas, after the way in which they have been treated, despise Yorkshire Water. If he wants to do anything to help to improve the Government's poor electoral chances, he should stop digging when in a hole. The people all blame Yorkshire Water's mismanagement, but they know that at the root of the problem is the disastrous privatisation of a precious utility. There is no doubt that, if further cut-offs take place, there will be a disaster. It seems that even the Minister accepts that now. It took some time for the message to sink in.

At the beginning of the crisis, Dr. Chris Worth, the public health director for West Yorkshire health authority, spelt out the consequences. He drew the attention of the Dewsbury inquiry to them, when he said that

"the health of thousands of Calderdale and Kirklees elderly, frail and mentally ill people would be threatened, and I can foresee a situation regrettably where lives may be lost."

The Minister should try to get that message through to the Prime Minister. The people of West Yorkshire demand that the Government concentrate on the health and well-being of those in the area. They should concentrate also on their jobs.

The Government must abandon the stupid diversionary tactics in which they have been engaged over the past few weeks. The silly stunt of the chairman of the Conservative party will not bring a drop of water through taps in Halifax or anywhere else. The Deputy Prime Minister's manic outbursts will not move Yorkshire Water into action. Only the Government can ensure that action is taken, and that is the Government's responsibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) should be congratulated on playing a superb role in monitoring the privatised water companies. She has drawn attention to their pathetic and awful actions. She had the support of hundreds of Members when she called on the Secretary of State, through an early-day motion, to use his emergency powers to take over the running of Yorkshire Water. I challenge the right hon. Gentleman to do so. If he cannot or if he will not, let him give the House a copper-bottomed guarantee that no authority or household will run short of water because of Yorkshire Water's mismanagement.

It is not only Labour Members who are criticising Yorkshire Water. Local Tory Members, who voted for privatisation, are now taking it to task. In addition, local chambers of commerce have been active, both in Calderdale and in Kirklees. They have warned that, even if there are limited cut-offs, 3,000 jobs could be put at risk. They have warned that businesses would close. Indeed, much damage has already been done by the antics and bizarre public relations of Yorkshire Water.

What business man or woman in his or her right mind would want to invest in an area where the water supply cannot be guaranteed? I cannot think of a greater disincentive. The Government have no idea—if they have, they do not care—of the long-term consequences. They do not appreciate the damage that a privatised company has done to business confidence in west Yorkshire. They have put ideology and dogma before people.

The Government's policy has not been supported by the majority of people. There was an excellent article in *The Guardian* this week on the privatised utilities, and on Yorkshire Water in particular. It is worth quoting Brian Rhodes, a Keighley business man, who said that

"when water was privatised they"—

his company—

"installed a bore hole to supply their own water needs".

He explained that

"we knew a private-water monopoly would create havoc. But still they sent us that silly letter telling us to save water"

and to relocate. "Silly sods", he concludes. Although I am quoting, I must agree with that. He went on:

"We've just got £19m out of the Government to promote manufacturing industry in this area—but Yorkshire Water's done more in one summer to destroy any chance of bringing jobs here".

We all know about the scandal of leakages. I shall not repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough said, but it is worth noting that, out of the massive profits that Yorkshire Water made, just £11 million was set aside—

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

**Mrs. Mahon:** Certainly.

**Mrs. Jackson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Before she leaves the question of leakages, does she agree that a 10 per cent. reduction in the leakage of 100 million gallons a day would have prevented the problems that were experienced in Yorkshire this summer?

**Mrs. Mahon:** Absolutely. My hon. Friend is right, but because of time I shall not repeat the points that she made earlier. That is a good point. The truth is that Yorkshire Water is at the top of the national league for wasting water supplies—103 million gallons a day are lost through leaks. That is gross incompetence and mismanagement.

Yorkshire Water sacked half its work force—the people who understand about managing the industry. It is not accountable to anybody. It still has a leakage detection team, but only just. Before the crisis, Yorkshire Water had proposed bringing in a scheme called Operation 2000, which was to be implemented in October, which would have abolished the leakage detection teams. Yorkshire Water was going to sack the people who do all the valuable work up on the moors. Those people find out where the leaks are occurring and then gangs of locally employed people go along to mend them. Now we have wastage on the moors. Reservoirs are silted up from 30 ft to 100 ft. Often, the reservoir keepers are now

*[Mrs. Mahon]*

responsible not just for one reservoir but for 10. Two years ago, Yorkshire Water also considered replacing all its skilled workers with Securicor employees. That is the level of neglect that we have had from Yorkshire Water. Never again should it be allowed to bring the health and well-being of people in my constituency and in West Yorkshire to the point that it did. Sir Gordon Jones is going, but others should follow him.

As for Labour councils and the RMT buying shares, I wish that they could buy the lot and then we would have some public accountability. I do not think that the Government really appreciate the anger in West Yorkshire. If we have cut-offs, I think that there would be a public order problem, because people blame Yorkshire Water and detest it for its actions. The fact that it is funding and setting up its own inquiry will not do; we want an independent public inquiry, as my hon. Friend said.

Yorkshire Water said that it will invest another £100 million in pipes. We should look carefully at what that investment means. It means going to the already depleted rivers and taking even more water out of them. That will lead to a disaster in the environment. There should be a massive investment programme now, perhaps to get water from Kielder water. It is possible to go across deserts, so I do not want any nonsense about having to go up hills and down dales; it should not be beyond comprehension to do that now.

What Yorkshire Water says that it will invest is too little too late. We do not trust it. We do not trust the Government with this precious resource which we all need. We want a general election, and then the people of West Yorkshire can show the Government exactly what they think about them and their privatisation.

6.13 pm

**Sir Giles Shaw** (Pudsey): I am grateful for the fact that the Opposition included the privatised water industries as a subject for debate. I must declare that I was, until March 1995, a non-executive director of Yorkshire Water. Since then, I have been a consultant on corporate and marketing affairs. I have lodged details in the Register of Members' Interests. I must also take great care that I do not operate in the debate as an advocate for Yorkshire Water, as that is clearly against the spirit of the debate. Having heard the generality of comments, including those of the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), I suspect that even my courage will fail in the task of advocacy, because clearly Yorkshire Water is the spectre at this feast that the Opposition are quite enjoying.

If ever there were an annus horribilis for Yorkshire Water, it was 1995. When I left in March, the reservoirs were full, it was a bright spring and there was not a cloud in the sky—but the falling percentage of rainfall led to an exceptional drought. It is not for me to go through the history of the matter, as that has been well established. I understand and most deeply regret the way in which Yorkshire Water managed to achieve, through a range of public relations propositions, letters to industry or other public observations, a series of gaffes which thoroughly damaged its credibility with its customers and, indeed, with others.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Giles Shaw:** Forgive me, but, because of the time, I must press on.

Added to that was the increasing public backlash against private utilities as a whole—which the Opposition have so well developed—aided and abetted by the media campaign about fat cats. I note that the media are somewhat shy about their own salary structures. No doubt they are seeking to protect their own sources, as is their wont. Yorkshire Water was vilified or satirised in the press—despised by some of its public and ostracised by most. That is not a welcome position for a public limited company to be in only six years after privatisation.

Nevertheless, as my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) said, and as the hon. Member for Halifax just recognised, the fact is that, after all the trauma, not a house, hospital, retirement home, school, small firm or large firm was disconnected from supply or suffered a serious shortage of water. One of the reasons was that the area that was affected was extremely small, although the Yorkshire region is vast and the company has responsibility for distribution in the whole region. The area is crucial but very small in relation to total Yorkshire demand and provision.

As my hon. Friend made clear, it was geographically and historically separated from the rest of the arrangements. Yorkshire has had grids for many years. The main grid, which runs from rivers in the north and east of Yorkshire, particularly the River Derwent, and across to Sheffield, was put in subsequently. Sheffield takes water from Ladybower reservoir. With a massive effort, the staff ensured, by working night and day, that everything was finally put in place. It moved resources by pipe transfer or road tanker and managed to maintain supply.

The trauma was substantial for the company, for the people who were affected and, indeed, for the people in Yorkshire as a whole. It is very important that lessons are learned and not just in Yorkshire itself. I am happy to be able to reassure the hon. Lady that the emergency investment that is now taking place, where some £100 million is being spent to connect 10 pumping stations so that the grid can deliver 300,000 cu m of water a day into Leeds, Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees, will make a huge difference to the problem. That is a short-term arrangement. Arrangements for the longer term depends on a review of resources and on longer-term decisions which have yet to be made.

I now come to the lessons for the industry as a whole, as that is equally important. If the water industry is no longer to plan for events that are expected to occur once in 100 years, and ignores events that are expected to occur only once in 200 or 250 years, as occurred in relation to the extreme water shortage in the portion of the Pennine catchment to which the hon. Member for Halifax and my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley referred, there will be a very major shift in what water companies must do to maintain supply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—who, unfortunately, is not present now—has said that no eventuality, however rare, should result in a shortage of public water supply, and certain other hon. Members have said the same. The structure of water resource management must therefore shift markedly. The present industry—as defined in relation to what may occur once in 100 years—is not structured to meet such change.

There must be a public debate about whether we should create more water resources. For instance, should we construct further reservoirs? That might involve problems in a beautiful region such as Yorkshire. Should there be more reservoirs in the dales, or in the Lake district? Should there be more reservoirs on Dartmoor? None of those propositions seems feasible, but they must be considered.

Alternatively, should we take more powers to abstract from rivers or to move volumes of water through the river system? The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) was anxious about abstraction, but we currently waste huge amounts of water through our river system. If we are to ensure that the public have priority in terms of supply, we ought to be able to act at certain times of the year. We should never go beyond the permitted amount of abstraction, and never infringe low levels of supply, but there is a case for saying that, with Yorkshire's massive rivers—largely located in the east of the region—abstraction could serve as a useful way of saving water.

Another option is to require less control on the maintaining of river flows by releasing reservoir waters. Yorkshire Water already has to take such action in drought conditions. Again—this idea is no doubt dear to the hearts of Opposition Members—we could try to reduce leakage rates. I feel that that should definitely be tried during what ought to be an attempt to recover economic costs. In fact, the reason why leakage has never posed a serious threat to the viability of water supply is the astronomical cost of recovery, which has been estimated at approximately £400 million for a 1 per cent. leakage reduction. If such a figure must be contemplated, there will be major repercussions in the industry.

Leakages are prevalent in areas containing many miles of piping. Yorkshire contains more than 30,000 km, going in and out of huge Pennine ranges, distributed up hill and down dale; heavy pumping is used in an attempt to enable the water to reach its destination.

Finally, perhaps we should accept that 1995 is symptomatic of a pattern of climate change that will permanently alter the rainfall conditions that we may expect in the future. It may be a little early to take that view, but it must be taken into account.

All those are big issues, affecting not just the structure of the industry but the terms under which it was privatised, and the terms under which the regulator ensures that certain standards of supply, abstraction and discharge are imposed on the 10 water companies. Water supply currently costs an average of 29p or 30p a day in my area, perhaps a little more; but, quite apart from that cost, we may have to look again at the general question of how the supply is to be costed and paid for. That will lead to numerous questions. Essential fuels such as gas and electricity carry an understandably high price when delivered to the consumer, as opposed to the cost of water, which can be measured in pence. The high price of energy, and the fact that fuels carry a safety hazard, make it essential for closed systems to supply households by means of meters.

Water metering, however, is a vexed issue among the public, although it is the regulator's preferred option. I believe that Yorkshire Water conducted a substantial public consultation exercise, as a result of which it accepted the public's view that imposed metering was not acceptable but that metering should remain an alternative. It must be accepted that the industry should have proper regard for consumer wishes, and the lessons of 1995 clearly suggest that the idea of wholesale metering should be abandoned. I do not think that it is acceptable to consumers.

Unlike gas and electricity, the water industry is responsible for the maintenance of a huge slice of our natural environment—hence the heavy legislative load on discharges from sewage works, and the gradual improvement of rivers under the obligations laid down by the National Rivers Authority as well as the EU. I am delighted to learn that, during the past week, a salmon was found way up the River Don, having apparently succeeded not only in travelling so far upstream but in spawning. There have been genuine improvements in our aquatic environment.

Supporting access to reservoirs and catchment areas imposes an entirely different responsibility, which does not relate to the commercial supply of potable water. Water companies must recognise such obligations, which play an important part in establishing relationships with the public in the regions.

All those issues are raised by the spectre of continuing water shortage, and of permanent damage to the cycle of replenishment through autumn, winter and spring. I do not feel that that is likely to happen as a result of events in 1995. In Yorkshire, although the eastern slopes of the Pennines were severely affected, many other parts of the region suffered less; even the aquifers that are so important to Hull and Humberside were able to continue unimpaired.

Nevertheless, I suggest to Ministers that the problems of 1995 should be assessed, given the possibility that they will occur elsewhere, even in the near future. It would surely be wise to conduct the fullest possible analysis of the recent past. There should also be better forecasts of whether the current conditions represent a trend, or whether—in economic parlance—we are merely experiencing a blip on the meteorological graphs. Given the availability of such evidence, industry, regulators and Government should reach a consensus on the extent to which the lessons learned in 1995 should fashion their policies for the future.

6.26 pm

**Mr. Jack Thompson** (Wansbeck): May I try to correct some misapprehensions that were created earlier? The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) spoke of Labour authorities' investments in water authorities. As I tried to make clear to him, there was no choice. A local authority with an investment panel must take the advice of pension fund advisers; if it does not, and makes a mistake, it can be surcharged.

The water industry was never nationalised; it was regionalised. That was one of the problems. I was a member of a water authority in my region when Kielder was built—when, incidentally, it was under regional control rather than privatised. One of the country's main problems is the fact that we do not have a proper water system. We have grids for electricity and gas, but no grid for water. It makes no difference whether the industry is nationalised or privatised: both electricity and gas have been privatised, but they have grids. We should aim to create such a system for water in the future. Yorkshire

*[Mr. Jack Thompson]*

would not have experienced the problems that it experienced this year if the water from Kielder had been piped through rather than carried by tankers. That could easily have been done.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** It was suggested in 1973 that a lake should be built from Kielder to Yorkshire, because Yorkshire would need the water by the early 1990s. The lake was never built, however.

**Mr. Thompson:** A pipeline already takes water from Kielder down to the Tees; it is halfway there.

I want to concentrate on the effect of privatisation on my constituency, and on events that took place early in January, when 50,000 of my constituents had their water cut off for four days. Briefly, the problem arose because, apparently—the water authority there has just discovered this—the reservoir that feeds my constituency is the highest in the region. During a series of bursts and leaks, in the Tyneside area in particular, all the water drained out of the system and the reservoir feeding my constituency was left, one may say, high and dry. We had no water for four days. The water authority story's was that that was necessary because it had to maintain the water supply to Tyneside.

We had two water authorities in my constituency then: Northumbrian Water and North East Water, which is owned by the French company Lyonnaise des Eaux. Northumbrian Water was a free-standing company at that time. The pipeline feeding my constituency was owned by North East Water but operated jointly by Northumbrian Water. The water was maintained on Tyneside—I have no criticism of that—at the expense of my constituency and, I think, because North East Water was the dominant partner in the arrangement. It maintained the supply to Tyneside at the expense of my constituents.

The real problem is the weakness in the system, which has now been identified but which, apparently, could not be identified before. If one has to live for a prolonged period without water, or at least with a limited supply provided by tankers at street corners, one quickly begins to appreciate the value of this basic need which is often taken for granted. I personally must declare an interest as my home was one of those affected.

From the water companies' own information, it was apparent that a potentially serious situation was developing between Christmas and new year's day. The companies claimed that the deep frost, followed by a thaw, and their staff being on holiday, contributed to the position. It seems that they were unaware that it turns colder in the winter and that the risk of water mains bursting increases during these months.

Even when those companies were aware of the emergency, little information was given to consumers. Householders, commercial premises and some industrial units learned of the loss of their supply when they tried to turn on their taps. Hot water and central heating systems, and commercial and industrial operators were seriously affected.

Total confusion reigned. People were not made aware of the emergency or informed adequately of the emergency provisions, limited though they were. Although Northumbrian Water admitted that it had mobile loudspeaker equipment, it was not used. After people had been obtaining from tankers and bowsers for some days, they were advised by postcard to boil the water. The whole exercise was an example of incompetence or, possibly, a lack of interest in consumer welfare.

After the emergency and pressure from me and from other community representatives, the companies decided to offer £40 to each householder, £80,000 to Wansbeck district council and a belated £13,000 to Castle Morpeth borough council, both of which are in my constituency. Commercial premises, however, such as shops, pubs and the numerous social clubs in my constituency were advised by the water companies to claim from the insurers. Some insurers are refusing to pay out, claiming that the loss of the water supply was a deliberate act by the water companies—an argument with which I agree. Business was lost because of the actions of the water companies.

Coincidentally, as the massive problems were arising, Northumbrian Water, in this free market system, was taken over by Lyonnaise des Eaux, making all the water and sewerage industry in north-east England a monopoly. Last week, it announced the inevitable reorganisation of management, with probable job losses associated with the takeover on the agenda.

The most significant happening was the decision of Northumbrian Water's chief executive, David Cranston, to quit. He leaves after receiving a salary of £189,000 a year for 1994-95—I understand that that is to be paid for the next two years as well. That has increased by 232 per cent. since privatisation. He realised between £800,000 and £1.2 million from shares and share options after the sale of Northumbrian Water.

Last October, Mr. Cranston sought and obtained a meeting with a northern group of Labour Members to plead for our support against the takeover. That was a nice pay-back for his efforts in giving financial advice to the Government on how to process the privatisation of the industry. His reward is greater than the total sum paid to my constituents and the local authorities put together.

When the industry was privatised, Labour Members often warned that the consumer would suffer. My constituents paid a high price. Capital investment by Northumbrian Water fell from £110 million in 1990-91 to £77 million in 1994-95—a 30 per cent. reduction. Sustained investment could have been used to correct the fundamental fault in the supply system to my constituency. That is a prime example of profit before people.

6.34 pm

**Mr. George Robertson** (Hamilton): This has been an interesting and lively debate. It could almost have been completely about Yorkshire Water had it not been for the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made sure that the inequities in other parts of the privatised water industry were also drawn to the House's attention.

It is remarkable that, contrary to custom and practice, the Cabinet member who is responsible for the matter raised in the Opposition motion—the Secretary of State

for Scotland—is away from the House in some other part of the country. There was a day when that convention and courtesy mattered.

**Mr. Michael Bates (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury):** He is in Scotland.

**Mr. Robertson:** The Secretary of State may be in Scotland—so could I be—but some of us believe that the House comes first and that, if there is a debate on a subject that is in his province, he should be here, and he knows that. In Stirling yesterday, at the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee, a great song and dance was made about the fact that I did not speak from the Dispatch Box, but I was there—as I have been at all that Committee's meetings. The Secretary of State chooses not to be here tonight, and for two and a half hours or more no one from the Scottish National party was here either.

We have now been left in charge. The Minister dubbed by the Scottish *Daily Record* the "big drip" will—appropriately—answer on behalf of Her Majesty's Government on the subject of the water industry. He has been landed with a real problem. The animated little Secretary of State for the Environment is not sitting beside him, and no wonder because he left a sizeable grenade in the Minister's pocket.

During his leaping around at the Dispatch Box, the Secretary of State told the House à propos the water industry that, in England and Wales, the investment would not be forthcoming in the public sector, but the hapless Scottish Office Minister with responsibility for the water industry will have to come to the Dispatch Box and tell us that Scottish water will remain in the public sector. He, presumably, is going to find all the investment that the Secretary of State for the Environment said would be absent if a different model had been chosen for England.

Many of my hon. Friends have made much of Yorkshire Water's performance during the summer, and I am not surprised. A level of anger built up in that part of the world about the lamentable performance of that privatised water company. My hon. Friends the Members for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) have put their finger on a saga of incompetence, failure and waste which will go down in the history of the water industry as unsurpassed.

The Minister, if he dares move across the border and into English territory, will have a job putting up a defence, although the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), who told us that he was not going to act as an advocate for Yorkshire Water, managed to read out what was preciously close to a press release for that beleaguered company.

The debate has highlighted what has happened in England and Wales since privatisation. It is a salutary warning for those of us in Scotland who see the prospect of privatisation looming on the horizon. It is a tale of waste, fat cats, inefficiency, bloated profits, personal aggrandisement and of course, at times, pure farce—all occurring simultaneously at a time of declining investment in a vital industry.

The Government's intention has always been to privatise the Scottish water industry. That ambition lives on in the hearts of many people, including the new Secretary of State for Scotland. The Government were prevented from privatising it only by the sheer force of public opinion in Scotland. A Labour-led campaign and a violent upsurge in public opinion stopped the Government in their tracks and prevented them from doing in Scotland what they have already done in England.

In eight weeks' time, Scotland's water and sewerage services will leave locally elected control for the first time in 150 years and be handed over to three super-quangos staffed by handpicked people who are ready to do the Government's bidding and who are accountable only in the loosest possible sense to the public.

In 15 months' time, however, there will be a general election. I have no doubt, and the people of Scotland have no doubt, that if the Tories were somehow to get back into power, their secret agenda to privatise the Scottish water industry would remain.

The Government's private agenda is already under way. Privatisation is happening, drip by drip, in the unique form of the private financing package that the Government have carefully designed to get the private sector into the water industry with minimum risk and maximum profit—it is feather-bedding of the private sector in a crucial sphere.

**Sir Hector Monro** (Dumfries): Before the hon. Gentleman makes any more thoroughly irresponsible statements about water privatisation, I have to ask whether his conscience does not prick him a little because his campaign began on a totally incorrect basis. The decision to go to a public water authority was made long before he started his campaign against privatisation.

**Mr. Robertson:** I should like to pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman, who has come into the Chamber at the end of the debate specifically to hear my speech. I believe that he does not want Scotland's water to be in the private sector. It was he who agreed, under pressure, that a ban on disconnections should be included in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994, for which I pay him due tribute. I do not think that he has any intention of seeing Scotland's water industry in the private sector because he knows the dangers that would follow.

The right hon. Member for Dumfries is retiring at the next election, and there will not be a Conservative Member of Parliament for Dumfries after that. He cannot trust Ministers any more than we can. If he trusts the Secretary of State for Scotland with Scotland's water, it will probably be the first time in his life that he has trusted him. The right hon. Gentleman should take his plaudits and go away into happy retirement, but he should certainly not leave the NHS and the water industry in the hands of people who might conceivably still be here after the next election.

The Government have designed this type of private financing specifically to ensure that their friends do well out of it. However, it is hard to think of a better way for the Government to reduce their public standing than by threatening the water industry. It is small wonder that they now have an 11 per cent. approval rating in the opinion polls, which I believe is 8 per cent. less than the Canadian Tories received in the general election when they were reduced to two seats in the federal Parliament.

The emperors in the Scottish Office arrogantly dismiss public opinion with a flick of their wrists, ignoring and rejecting the fine, long history of locally elected water authorities in Scotland, which have been efficient,

*[Mr. Robertson]*

reliable, safe and cheap. The Government reject the logic of keeping a direct line of accountability to the people who use and depend on public water supplies. They reject even the revolutionary public health record that, a century ago, was the justification for municipal control of water and sewerage services. They reject it all in the name of a purely ideological obsession with centralisation and the hoarding of control.

The Government's secret agenda is still to put Scotland's water industry into the same fat cat system that the Government have inflicted on water consumers in England and Wales. However, the emperors of the Scottish Office have been found to have no clothes. Isolated, remote and doomed, they sit wasting their last few days in office.

The contention that people have in relation to what the Government are doing with the Scottish water industry has not been invented by the Opposition. In March 1994, Strathclyde regional council, having taken all the legal advice that was available, put the question to the people of Strathclyde—half the population of Scotland—in a referendum. The council took its courage in its hands and issued ballot papers throughout the region. The turnout for the referendum was 71.5 per cent., which exceeded everyone's expectations—it was certainly more than I had warned the council that it might expect—and 97 per cent. of those who voted said no to the quangoisation of the water industry. Those are the facts; that is the truth and the evidence.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch):** Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the publicity put out by the Labour party in Strathclyde did not merely say no to water quangos, but said no to privatisation? Is not that a total distortion of the facts as that is not what we have done in Scotland?

**Mr. Robertson:** It was open to the Tory party to put out its own propaganda. The ballot paper, which was read and understood by the people who answered, asked whether people agreed with the Government's proposal for the future of water and sewerage services in Scotland. The ballot paper was legally drawn up, and people understood it. Even in the Tory heartland—in Eastwood, in the west of Scotland—95 per cent. of the people voted no in the referendum. I suppose the Minister is saying that all those people read the leaflet and were confused, taken in and mystified by it—that that can be the only explanation for 95 per cent. of the people voting no. The people spoke in that referendum, but the Government chose to ignore the popular view.

I see that the unacceptable face of the Scottish Office, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) has joined us in the Chamber. I can assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the noise level will rise, but the quality of the contributions to the debate will decline markedly.

Why should we suspect that the Government want to privatise the water industry? We have only to look to what the Prime Minister said in March 1993. He said:

"Privatisation means a better, more efficient service for the consumer and no more subsidies from the taxpayer. I have no reason to doubt that water privatisation in Scotland will be effective and efficient, as elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. 783.]

Those are the words of the Prime Minister, blundering into something that he did not understand, but giving away the underlying case.

In the consultative document on water, 15 lines were devoted to describing the scheme which the Government ultimately chose, but 216 lines were devoted to describing the privatisation option. Anyone who believes that the new Secretary of State for Scotland, who was on television only a few weeks ago saying that Thatcherism has a lot to offer Scotland, is going to stand back and say, like the right hon. Member for Dumfries, "I won't touch the water industry. It can remain in public hands", must be living in a dream world.

The Government have chosen a completely new system to finance new investment in Scotland's water industry. The Chemical bank, in an independent report, said that the system did not pass

"any reasonable value for money test",

and that the "build, own and operate" schemes will privatise Scotland's water industry "drip by drip". The schemes are little more than sweetheart deals to get the private sector into the water industry with minimum risk and maximum profit.

The Chemical bank report went on to say:

"The guidelines are misconceived. Their use imposes an excessive and unnecessary burden on ratepayers. There are other ways in which the private sector can finance public projects at a cost comparable with the use of the public funds."

Labour would not hesitate to use the private sector in schemes to help with new investment in the water industry, but we will not choose schemes that mean privatisation by stealth or privatisation by the back door. Scotland's water industry has an impeccable record in public hands. Investment in the water industry is possible in the public sector, and it can be done well. There is no need, no rationale, no justification for going ahead with the quangoisation and, ultimately, privatisation of water in Scotland. At the next election—the sooner it comes, the better—the people of Scotland will teach the Government a lesson for what they have done so far.

6.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch):** This has been an exceedingly interesting debate. I have learnt a lot about Labour policy on water. I have learnt a lot that confirms that the Labour party does not understand the slightest thing about running business. *[Interruption.]*

Opening the debate, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) gave many figures relating to the privatised water companies. He talked about everything and nothing. The one thing that he did not really talk about, however, was investment. We all know that the water industry requires significant investment. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment described very clearly the remarkable success that has been achieved south of the border through the privatisation of water companies.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to Yorkshire Water. I have also learnt that, although Yorkshire Water is clearly not one of the stars of the privatisation process, many of its problems, as I understand them, have been brought about by the extremely severe drought in the summer. It would be

unreasonable of any hon. Member not to accept that there was exceedingly severe weather and that lessons must be learnt from the experience. I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends have taken steps to obtain independent reports to confirm that the actions of Yorkshire Water are indeed all there—*[Interruption.]*—and that it is taking sensible measures to ensure that the problems do not arise again.

Many hon. Members have referred to leaks. The Government obviously take the problem of water leaks extremely seriously and we have made it perfectly clear that losses from pipes in some water company areas are too high. We expect water companies to set and fulfil demanding targets for reducing leaks. Indeed, water service companies have given a commitment to achieve within 10 years the lowest levels that best international practice suggests. Some companies have already announced their plans. Others will do so in the next few months. The Director General of Water Services will consider whether the targets are sufficiently rigorous. If they are not, legislation is already in place to set mandatory levels where necessary.

Many hon. Members, especially Labour Members, were unreasonable about the conditions that Yorkshire Water had—and still has—to face, and their observations were in contrast to the very thoughtful and responsible comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw).

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) made points about European support for privatised companies. I can confirm that, as I understand it, provided the relevant criteria are met, privatised and publicly owned water companies have exactly the same access to European support. He also referred to methods of charging. We think that charging by volume is important to ensure sustainable use of water in the long term. The Government—certainly south of the border—encourage companies and customers to switch to meters, but are not forcing them to do so.

Since I was able to obtain a press release issued by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) before he stood up, his speech was nothing short of what I expected—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. I am having great difficulty hearing what the Minister is saying. He has the right to a fair hearing, as was given to the Opposition spokesman.

**Mr. Kynoch:** I was referring to the press release on the speech of the hon. Member for Hamilton which I managed to obtain. In it, he persisted with scare stories and distortion, which he is more than capable of, as he has shown throughout the discussion of the future of water in Scotland. Unfortunately, like his hon. Friend the Member for—*[Interruption.]* I cannot remember his constituency, which goes to show I have been attending too many Scottish Grand Committees and have become better on Scottish constituencies than those south of the border.

That leads me comfortably to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is in Shetland with the leader of the Liberal Democrats in Scotland on official engagements. At least my right hon. Friend has deigned to lead the debates on law and order and education in the Scottish Grand Committee. The hon. Member for Hamilton seems to put those matters below water privatisation south of the border.

During the debate, the hon. Member for Hamilton referred to several issues concerning whether the Government intend to privatise water north of the border. I repeat quite clearly once and for all that the Government have no intention of privatising water north of the border.

The reorganisation of water in Scotland became necessary for several reasons. First, as south of the border, we faced the problem of having to achieve significant investment in the industry over the next 10 to 15 years. Secondly, we have reorganised local government, and it would be ridiculous to put water into the hands of the 32 new authorities. Doing that would have resulted in very small water authorities which would not have had the benefits of economies of scale necessary to attract investment.

I therefore regard the creation of three new water authorities as the most sensible way forward, having recognised the very strong feelings of the people of Scotland. There were about 5,000 responses to the consultation document that was put out in 1992. The Government paid attention to those responses and went for a route that kept water in the public sector in Scotland.

**Mr. Phil Gallie** (Ayr): Is it not the case that some of the criticism that applied to Yorkshire Water, especially recently after the cold spell, applied to an even greater extent in Scotland, where many people's supplies were cut off? Was not water in the hands of local authorities?

**Mr. Kynoch:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point.

The hon. Member for Hamilton referred to the Chemical bank report, but that is of course—unfortunately—not the whole story. The hon. Gentleman fails to understand that the private finance initiative is much more than simply getting funding from either the private sector or the public sector. It is about trying to get the innovation and design skills of the private sector into public sector projects.

In the Chemical bank report, there was indeed a capital project, which—I think—in public sector terms was valued at about £145 million. At the last count, I understand that the private sector had quoted a value of about £60 million for it. Significantly reduced capital costs put a totally different complexion on the arguments in that report.

The hon. Member for Hamilton has clearly stated that he does not believe that he should not be using the private sector; he simply believes that he should be using it for funding rather than for bringing in private sector skills. I strongly dispute his assertion and argue that he will not find cheaper finance by that route. Indeed, he will have a problem in Scotland. Not only will he have to fund his new local government structure with a tartan tax, he will have to introduce a special tax to fund the future of the water industry.

The one thing that we have learnt in this debate is that the Labour party south of border has committed itself to a very distinct policy on water in England and Wales. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras clearly stated that he would not renationalise the privatised companies, but that he foresaw their being brought back under political control. He also said that he would bring about a reduction in prices in real terms south of the border, but he did not say how he would fund that policy. Even at this

*[Mr. Kynoch]*

late stage in the debate, I challenge him to say whether he would put taxes up, or whether he would reduce services in the NHS or in education. If not, how would he fund it?

**Mr. Dobson:** We shall reduce the outrageous profits that those companies make, and the outrageous pay that the bosses give themselves.

**Mr. Kynoch:** The hon. Gentleman does not recognise the basic facts of financial life—that those profits were made in order to invest in the water industry. The sooner he looks at the investment figures and realises that investment is now more than double what it was when the Labour party was in power, the better for him. If his financial policies ever have to be put into practice, God help the country. I strongly urge the House to support the amendment.

*Question put,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 275, Noes 303.

**Division No. 39]** **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McCrea, The Reverend William
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel

Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Ms Ann Coffey and**
**Mr. Eric Martlew.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S.
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter

Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Mr. Gary Streeter.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question,* That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House welcomes the higher water quality, the improved standards of service to consumers, the increased availability of information and the increased exports which have been achieved as a result of substantially higher levels of investment and the removal from political control of the water industry through privatisation in England and Wales; looks forward to improved services in Scotland from the new public water authorities; and contrasts this with the arbitrary cuts from the investment plans of the nationalised water companies by the last Labour Government, including the six month moratorium on the letting of new construction contracts.

# Overseas Aid

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** I must inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

**Miss Joan Lestor** (Eccles): I beg to move,

That this House fully recognises and accepts the United Kingdom's share of global responsibility towards the elimination of poverty and calls on the Government to make steady and measurable progress towards honouring its pledge of the United Nations overseas aid target of 0.7 per cent. GNP; deplores the Government's failure to play a more central role in the delivery of multilateral aid, both within the EU and other multilateral organisations, and the damaging effects of its policy on the bilateral programme at a time when global poverty is increasing; and calls on the Government to establish an aid programme which is better equipped to meet the needs of the world's poor.

Some people may wonder why we have chosen overseas development as the subject for debate this evening. There has been no obvious recent Government announcement or policy change on which to peg this debate. No major international conference is being held this week that is directly relevant to the United Kingdom's aid budget. It is increasingly clear, however, to those of us who care about the UK's role in global development that the Tory Government are selling the British people and the world's poor short.

In a nutshell, the Government are prepared to trade short-term electoral bribes in the form of tax cuts at home against the development of an effective and sustainable aid programme throughout the world. That strategy, fed into the Chancellor's autumn statement last year, permeated two Government documents—the ODA's fundamental expenditure review and its senior management review, which I hope to address later.

I do not doubt for a moment that the Minister will mount a robust defence of the Government's track record. He will, no doubt, talk about quality as opposed to quantity; about supporting programmes that are recognisably British, as opposed to multilateral, in origin; and about the high regard afforded to British aid throughout the world. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been reading the Minister's ODA press releases.

For all his claims, however, the Minister cannot disguise the fact that the Tory Government have demonstrated, and continue to demonstrate by their actions, that their overseas aid policy is morally, politically and intellectually bankrupt: morally, because by cutting aid—and the Government are cutting aid, make no mistake—they are demonstrating that they attach a low priority to the alleviation of poverty in developing countries; and, politically, because the cuts announced in the Budget were a crass response by erstwhile Tory liberals to the demands of the right. I am sure that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury found the world's poor to be a soft target.

Such actions grossly misjudge the mood of the British people, who have an admirable record of enthusiastically supporting appeals for help to the developing world. A Harris poll conducted last autumn revealed that 79 per cent. of those interviewed wanted the aid budget to stay the same or to be increased.

**Mr. Nigel Forman** (Carshalton and Wallington): From what the hon. Lady is saying and from the Opposition

motion, it is clear that she will be focusing on official development assistance, and it is right that she should do so, but does she accept that that is a slightly monocular view? Are not private flows from this country to developing countries of great assistance to the development process?

**Miss Lestor:** I accept that there are private flows and they are very welcome, but I am talking about the Government's record, not other people's record. It cannot be right to say, as I presume the hon. Gentleman meant, that although the Government are failing in their responsibilities, other people are making up the deficiency. That is not the subject of the debate.

The Government's intellectual bankruptcy is striking. Their figures, in response to my recent parliamentary question, show that a mere 10.5 per cent. of British bilateral aid in 1994-95 was spent on basic needs. That is well short of the commitment to 20:20, to which the British Government signed at the social summit in Copenhagen in 1995. So much for focus on poverty.

I have no doubt that the Minister will claim that the Government's overseas development programme aims to reduce poverty, but such a claim simply does not tally with their economic and social agenda at home. In short, a poverty focused programme of investment and assistance abroad would be a very uncomfortable mismatch with the Government's approach to the alleviation of poverty in the United Kingdom.

The Opposition believe that the values of social justice and human solidarity are as relevant abroad as they are at home and that Britain has a clear moral obligation to help to combat poverty and alleviate suffering, wherever they occur. Unlike the Government, the Labour party has a vision of development that is coherent with its domestic policy, and which is rooted in traditional Labour ideals about fairness, rights and participation in society. We believe in the rights of people everywhere to a decent livelihood and the ideal of an international society in which we all benefit culturally and economically from development.

Nor is that a narrow vision of self-interest. Development can be about improving the global environment, reducing enforced economic migration, creating new export opportunities and reducing the threat of war. Those aims are to be welcomed, but the vision must be wider. It must be a vision of global inclusion, not exclusion, and of interdependence, partnership and mutual learning.

Visions need a practical anchor. What does our vision mean for the hard choices that face British development policy and especially British aid? How do we ensure that the ODA's claimed poverty focus is paramount? What does the ODA mean by poverty? Which forms of aid—project aid, programme aid, and aid delivered with the assistance of NGOs—are best suited to achieving significant and lasting reductions in global poverty? What are the implications of increased aid contributions to eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and the Mediterranean for aid programmes in Africa and the Indian sub-continent? Have the Government decided that there should be a sharp geographical focus to the delivery of aid?

What should be Britain's role, as an active participant in the European Union and the United Nations, in the development of aid policy and aid delivery? Those are the questions that people are asking and they demand thoughtful answers. If we do not receive such answers tonight, it will show that the Government have chosen to pursue a policy of cuts—to the bilateral programme and to the multilateral programme—as a result of which Britain's standing and influence in the world and its role as a leading provider of aid will take a hammering.

The Opposition are not prepared to stand by without comment to watch British Ministers abdicate their responsibility to the world's poor and cause lasting damage to them and to Britain's reputation. May we have an agreement that aid resources must be focused on the poorest people and the poorest countries? There must be no more Pergaus, for example. Will the Minister assure us that the channels for delivery of aid will be chosen specifically for their real impact on poverty? What evidence does the Minister have that different channels do better or worse at poverty reduction?

In recent years, we have seen a dramatic shift in the proportion of aid allocated away from project aid and towards emergency programmes. What efforts are being made to ensure that emergency aid is linked to and consistent with longer-term development objectives?

The main report on the fundamental expenditure review, which was published in December 1995, raises profound issues about the future role and work of the ODA. I was pleased to hear that the Minister proposes to make a statement to Parliament in the near future. I do not intend to discuss the report at great length today, but there should be no misunderstanding about the process. It is not, as the remit of the FER suggested, merely a search to improve the effectiveness of the ODA: the report is fundamentally about reducing what the ODA does. It is about cutting the aid budget still further, cutting aid projects and programmes and cutting British contributions to various UN agencies.

We support some proposals in the report, but they cannot be allowed to conceal the true nature of the exercise. It has been accurately described by leading NGOs as a "rationalisation of decline", and was described today by Christian Aid as

"a mean policy to take us into the 21st century".

One of the issues raised in the FER report is the future of multilateral aid. Britain is, of course, a partner in several multilateral programmes. The search is in the EU for a new vision after Lomé. Following the Government's deplorable 23 per cent. cut to the European development fund in 1995, how does the Minister propose that Britain will be able to play a constructive role in the future of EU development programmes?

The Opposition want real improvements to EU aid and development programmes, especially in relation to poverty focus, participation and accountability. We endorse the recommendations of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee that the role for the British Government is

"to engage with fellow member states and the Commission in seeking to develop a realistic framework for delivery of EU aid".

How can a Cabinet that contains the Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), and the Secretary of State for Social Security, the right hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley), possibly play the constructive role in European development policy that the Foreign Affairs Select Committee suggests?

*[Miss Lestor]*

Is the Minister seriously suggesting cuts to the United Nations Children's Fund and to the United Nations development programme? As the Minister will know, both programmes have recently undertaken reform and are among the most efficient in the UN system. I recently met the new executive director of UNICEF, Carol Bellamy. She is clearly someone of drive and enthusiasm who will continue to build on UNICEF's outstanding work on behalf of children worldwide. I know, too, that Ms Bellamy met the Prime Minister, who I understand was also impressed.

I fail to understand how Ministers can endorse the work of UN agencies, such as UNICEF, and at the same time undermine them by proposing to reduce their funding. That is the height of hypocrisy and the world's children will suffer as a result.

I understand that in my absence yesterday—I was speaking at a conference in Dunblane organised by the excellent Scottish Education and Action for Development organisation—the Minister made some interesting claims during parliamentary questions, which were so ably handled by my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] Well, do not praise him too much. The Minister's claims bear revisiting tonight because I have no doubt that they will form the nub of his response.

The Minister stated:

"Britain's aid programme is the fifth largest in the world."

That may be true in money terms, but not as a percentage of gross national product. The Minister further admitted that the Government have an on-going commitment

"to maintaining a large and effective aid programme".

The obvious implication is that he anticipates a slide down the league table. Given current expenditure plans, perhaps he is only being realistic.

In addition, my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley rightly pointed out that Britain is in

"13th place in the real terms of gross national product."

We share that position with Italy. That GNP figure is based on the latest available figure—1993—supplied by the British aid statistics annual report.

The current and future picture, however, is less clear. The fundamental expenditure review predicts a further reduction to 0.26 per cent. in 1997-98. As that was drafted before last year's budget cuts were announced, a more realistic figure would appear to be 0.25 per cent. Perhaps the Minister will deal with that when he speaks.

How far down that list is the Minister prepared to see us fall? Under the last Labour Government, the figure stood at 0.52 per cent. and was rising towards the UN target of 0.7 per cent. The longer the Conservative Government are in power, the steeper is the climb back to that target. In their first year of office, a Labour Government will start to reverse that decline.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton): How much?

**Miss Lestor:** I will repeat the commitment.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** Amazing.

**Miss Lestor:** There is nothing amazing about it. A Labour Government will start to reverse that decline in their first year of office.—[Hon. Members: "Don't give way".] No one is trying to stand up. They are on their bottoms, mumbling, but they are not standing.

**Mr. Forman** *rose—*

**Miss Lestor:** I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already—[Hon. Members: "Ah!"] All right, I will give way.

**Mr. Forman:** Is the hon. Lady aware that any ratio that is a proportion of gross national product can be increased, if that is the Labour party's commitment, either by reducing GNP or increasing the aid budget? Which does she intend to do when she is in office?

**Miss Lestor:** The trouble with me is that as I get older I get kinder. Perhaps I should not have given way. I made it perfectly clear. We can be judged on our record. When we left office the figure stood at 0.52 per cent. and was rising towards target. The longer that the Government are in power, the steeper is the climb back to the target, but a Labour Government would start to reverse that decline in their first year in office.

I hope that I may now continue. Yesterday, I was rather taken aback by the Minister's bold admission that

"There is no doubt that the bilateral programme will face reductions . . . we have admitted that—as we switch to multilateral aid."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 637-38.]

Did I miss something, or was that the first time that a Minister has come clean about a deliberate policy to switch resources from the bilateral programme, which the Government claim to hold dear, to the multilateral programme? Only last autumn, the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave the bilateral programme a ringing endorsement, saying that

"in a tight public spending round . . . the planned allocation for bilateral aid is likely to be little changed from that set out in last year's departmental report. British bilateral aid is internationally recognised for its high quality and for the substantial share going to the poorest countries in Africa and Asia, and that will continue."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1060-61.]

We welcome that statement.

The Prime Minister, no less, told us:

"I intend to ensure that multilateral contributions do not swallow up bilateral aid."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. 262.]

Resources are to be switched, we are now told, from bilateral to multilateral programmes. Which statement is correct? I would be grateful for clarification. According to last year's ODA report, in any case, bilateral aid to Africa was set to fall by £17 million or 5 per cent. in real terms, bilateral aid to Asia and the Pacific by £25 million or 10.9 per cent., and the total bilateral budget by £102 million or 9.6 per cent. If that is what the Chancellor calls "little change", I would hate to see his idea of a substantial cut.

It is worth reminding the Minister that those are the very countries—our "traditional partners" as he called them yesterday—that he claimed Britain would not neglect.

One further matter puzzles me about the Minister's comments yesterday. If resources are to be "switched" from bilateral to multilateral programmes, how does that square with the

"lower forecasts for this multilateral aid"

to which the ODA budget press release last November referred? Is the Minister talking about a switch and a cut at the same time?

This country's contributions to the World bank, the European Union and the UN agencies are undoubtedly significant and it is important that Britain maintains its influence in the delivery of aid. How does the Minister justify our position among the G7 countries, or in the EU, on the basis of cuts to the overseas aid multilateral programmes—the 23 per cent. cut in the UK contribution to the European development fund, for example, and the threatened cuts to UN agencies and the United Nations development programme?

Taken with cuts at home to institutions with internationally recognised reputations, such as the BBC World Service and the British Council—the latter is due to suffer a 28 per cent. cut in its development grant in aid in the next three years—it is easy to see how an impartial observer could conclude that Britain is undertaking a structured withdrawal from its global responsibilities.

The British Council's dilemma bears closer study. The Government have gone on record, quite rightly, to support its work, describing it as the principal agency for cultural relations, yet, by cutting support funding without saying where future activities should be concentrated, Ministers are showing a cavalier attitude to the scope and focus of its activities.

Of course, aid is only one way, although a most significant one, in which poverty can be alleviated. The Government amendment refers to the debt burden, which shackles so many of the poor countries. We welcome the lead that the Government have taken on debt relief, but surely the Minister must acknowledge that the debt problem remains acute in a substantial number of countries. Opposition Members believe that the intolerable burden of debt that continues to be borne by many of the world's poorest countries is morally unacceptable and a serious barrier to their prospects of sustainable economic development.

The accounting costs of debt in regions such as Africa is the diversion of financial resources from capital investment, health care, education, sanitation and other essential services into the coffers of external creditors. The real cost, however, is paid by ordinary Africans in the form of higher infant mortality, poorer standards of nutrition, shorter life expectancy and increased illiteracy. I was glad to learn that a series of seminars have been arranged next week by the Debt Crisis Network to highlight that problem. I shall meet the people involved. Kenneth Kaunda, the ex-president of Zambia, is among those who will speak about the debt burden in parts of Africa.

There is an urgent need for a new international initiative to relieve the burden of debt, both bilateral and multilateral. We need to press for international agreement on an 80 per cent. write-off of official bilateral debt owed by the poorest countries, which is crippling them and their development. We must also consider the low-income countries, with more debt relief in that direction and, perhaps more important, talk to the World bank and to the IMF—as I hope to when I visit Washington shortly—about more resources to fund debt relief. Those actions would be of real help to countries that find themselves in an impossible position.

Responding to the needs of the world's poor requires not only intellectual vision but the moral and political courage to put it into action. The Government have demonstrated that they have neither. Labour has that vision. A Labour Government will have that moral and political courage.

7.27 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley):** I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"acknowledges the United Kingdom's important role in helping reduce poverty and suffering in poorer countries and commends the Government for maintaining a substantial and effective aid programme which is the fifth largest in the world; applauds the Government's intention to maintain a bilateral aid programme next year which will be as large as that which had been previously planned; welcomes the central role the United Kingdom plays in seeking to make multilateral aid more effective; and commends the Government for the increasing poverty focus of the aid programme and for the leading role it has played in seeking a comprehensive solution to the debt burden of the poorest countries.".

The United Kingdom's official aid programme is one of our greatest national assets. It is one of the main links that we have with many countries in the developing world and one of our main means of securing the principal goal of our foreign policy, which is a more prosperous and stable world. Together with the huge contribution made by British trade and investment and our notable efforts in relieving the debt burden of many developing countries, the aid programme plays a highly significant role in reducing poverty and suffering throughout the world.

The Government are fully committed to maintaining a substantial and effective aid programme. We are the sixth largest economy in the world in absolute terms, yet we have the fifth largest aid programme. The hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) kindly admitted that. Three of our G7 partners—the world's biggest economies—give more as a percentage of gross national product than we do, and three give less. Those figures ignore the crucial role played by the British private sector, which the hon. Lady was pleased to dismiss. When our aid flows are combined with private sector flows, our total contribution to the developing world exceeds the 1 per cent. target that the United Nations set as a benchmark. That is a significant achievement and one that we can be proud of.

At the same time, a responsible Government must balance the many and growing public expenditure priorities and demands. Our overriding goal is a more prosperous Britain with sound public finances. Hard choices have to be made.

Hon. Members are well aware that the total amount available for aid was reduced in the autumn statement by £124 million in 1996-97 compared with our previous plans. The aid budget will still be £2,154 million in 1996-97 and will grow to £2,201 million in 1997-98 and to £2,270 million in 1998-99. In that total, we expect bilateral aid in aggregate to be no less than we announced in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental report last March. That is because a number of multilateral institutions are expected to spend less money in the immediate future than we had anticipated a year ago.

For example, the replenishment of the European bank now under discussion seems likely to involve a lower paid-in element and a longer period for disbursement than

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we had forecast. The Asian and African Development banks have advised us of a slower rate of drawdown of existing pledges than they had forecast earlier. The reduction was made in the knowledge of those lower requirements. The European development fund has also advised us of reduced forecasts.

The new spending level represents a significant transfer of resources and shows that the Government have resisted the major cutbacks in aid that have affected so many other donors. The United States programme faces deep cuts; the Italians cut aid by 35 per cent. last year and the Canadians are cutting aid by 20 per cent. this year.

As the hon. Member for Eccles said earlier, volume is not everything; more important is impact. We have maintained a strong aid programme because aid works and because it is something that Britain does supremely well. Our Overseas Development Administration is internationally recognised as one of the most effective Government aid agencies in the world. Our bilateral programmes are among the most successful in bringing about a real transformation in the lives of the poor in the world's poorest countries. Britain's intellectual leadership in the institutions through which we spend our multilateral aid has been significant in ensuring that the British taxpayer's money is used efficiently and effectively.

However, the ODA could be even more effective. We have recently carried out a fundamental expenditure review, or FER, of its activities and organisation, to which the hon. Member for Eccles referred. That review was thorough and wide ranging. It involved consultations with non-governmental organisations, recipients of aid and others. Copies were sent before Christmas to the Libraries of both Houses. We are encouraging a debate about its findings. I suppose that the contribution of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) at Question Time yesterday could be said to add to that debate.

I am pleased to be able to explain some of the errors that people have made about the review. I shall explain what the review found and what the Government propose to do about the findings. The review concluded that there is a continuing need for the UK to provide substantial flows of concessional aid. It also recommended that we should clarify the purpose of the ODA's work by better defining the aid programme's basic goal and aims. The Government have accepted both those conclusions. We shall define the ODA's purpose as improving the quality of life of people in poorer countries by contributing to sustainable development and reducing poverty and suffering.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If that is the aim, could special attention be paid to what is happening in one of the poorest countries, Nepal? A delegation led by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) visited the research station at Lumle, where there may be cuts, about which the right hon. Gentleman and I met the Minister, Lady Chalker. Could special attention be paid to the issues involved in that?

**Mr. Hanley:** Yes, certainly. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development referred the matter to me when I met our high commissioner from Nepal only last week. I shall consider the matter and reply, if I can, by the end of the debate.

We accepted the main conclusions of the FER. We shall support the four principal aims that relate to the FER: good government and economic reforms; human resource development; the productive sector and the environment; and our stewardship of multilateral development institutions and the development aspects of wider economic policies.

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Mid-Kent): Within those aims, will my right hon. Friend do his best to ensure that fair distribution methods are adopted for the aid? For example, a high proportion of aid-assisted students in Britain come from a tiny elite that uses the aid as a sort of patronage that bears little relationship to fair distribution. That is just one example of the difficulties—which I realise that any aid programme will have.

**Mr. Hanley:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. We are proud of the fact that some 9,500 students and trainees were supported under the aid programme in 1994-95. Other training schemes exist. We have special schemes not only for the Commonwealth but for all overseas students in the United Kingdom. The number of overseas students in higher and further education in the UK has more than doubled in the past decade, from 50,000 to 123,000. I realise that my hon. Friend is talking about the distribution of the benefits of that programme. I shall certainly examine that matter, with reference to what he said.

The hon. Member for Eccles also referred to where we shall spend bilateral aid in future. The FER recommended that we concentrate further our country programmes. That policy has been evolving for some time, has the full support of many NGOs and is being pursued by other advanced donors.

The starting point for any debate has to be that the ODA is working in more countries than ever before and undertaking more complex activities. New demands have arisen because of the collapse of communism and the need to help the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as they move towards market economies and full democracy.

It does not make sense in the long term to retain such a widespread network of aid activities, because the world is changing. Many countries are graduating out of aid. Some of the countries of east Asia are becoming donors themselves. We expect that in the medium term, many of the countries of central Europe will simply not need aid programmes as such. Concentrating a greater share of country programmes on a limited number of recipients that both need aid and can put it to good use will help to raise the quality of bilateral aid. It will also help to increase the poverty focus of the programmes, which is our most important goal.

The development indicators for need are worst for sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia. They contain the vast majority of the world's very poor countries. We also have much influence in those regions, which is why our aim is to concentrate aid increasingly on them. That does not mean that we shall abandon countries where our support is still needed. There is still much to be done, for example, in helping eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and the countries of the Caribbean. We have a strong commitment to the dependent territories that still need our aid.

As I said, some countries will graduate from aid when conditions are right, just as Korea and Singapore have. We shall continue small programmes in most cases through British partnership schemes and scholarships. Many countries will continue to benefit from the substantial contributions that we give multilaterally.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Will the review result in cuts in aid to the Caribbean?

**Mr. Hanley:** We have still to decide on the amounts to be given to various countries. We must also see whether, in the regions that I described, the amount of aid needed can be used effectively and efficiently. The Caribbean will certainly put its case to us with its usual enthusiasm. Although I cannot make commitments at this point because matters are still being discussed, we shall not abandon countries that definitely need our support.

A greater concentration of substantial bilateral programmes will be progressively achieved. Last year, 70 per cent. of bilateral aid went to the 20 largest recipients. We aim to increase that concentration ratio gradually over the years. We shall do so very gradually, not radically as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley suggested yesterday. Although concentration countries will not necessarily be the same from year to year, the key is how effective our partnership is in ensuring that the aid is used effectively. I hope that my explanation of that important aspect of the FER will dispel fears generated by the media that aid will be limited to only 20 countries. That is simply not true. While we shall target better a limited number of large programmes, many other countries will continue to receive aid, too.

**Mr. Forman:** I applaud the policy of concentrating and focusing aid. Will there be a degree of what I might describe as "Commonwealth preference" in that policy? Many countries with the greatest concentrations of poor people happen to be in the Commonwealth.

**Mr. Hanley:** My hon. Friend is right to say that we have a continuing interest in and commitment to the other countries within the Commonwealth. I shall discuss the matter with my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, but I believe that the case for aid will be on a country-by-country basis, and I would not expect an overt preference for Commonwealth countries. Preference will be given to countries in need. However, I shall look at the issue and write to my hon. Friend with the answer, which my right hon. and noble Friend might be able to give when she returns from Africa.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams** (Carmarthen): The Minister keeps saying that countries will graduate out of aid and that the Government will be increasingly selective about which countries should receive aid. Does that mean that, looking to the future, the Government have abandoned the 0.7 per cent. target that was restated in the 1992 Rio summit as being desperately needed by the world's poor countries?

**Mr. Hanley:** No, we have not abandoned our goal of 0.7 per cent. We continue to hold that objective when funds allow. We are at 0.31 per cent. and diminishing by a small amount because we are ensuring that our economy is strong enough for us to achieve the 0.7 per cent. in time.

I have been explaining how our bilateral aid will be better targeted in the future. The FER also had important things to say about the growing contribution that we make through multilateral aid. This year, multilateral contributions are set to exceed bilateral programmes for the first time, almost entirely because of rising contributions to the European Commission's aid programme. More of our multilateral aid goes through the EC than through any other channel—about £600 million last year.

The multilateral share of our aid is set to increase further, although, as I explained, the rate of increase is less than previously forecast. The ODA will need to put more of its effort into improving the quality of multilateral aid and exploiting opportunities to use it to support UK interests and priorities.

The FER is also clear about that. It recommends that the ODA adopt a high-level aim that relates directly to its multilateral aid work. The objective is to make multilateral aid more explicitly subject to the same strategic disciplines as bilateral aid. For example, we shall strengthen the ODA's capability to influence the European Community's development operations.

Strategies for the main areas of multilateral aid will be produced regularly, to ensure that the ODA's control over the uses to which multilateral aid is put is reinforced. There is no question of the UK being less committed to the multilateral aid system. We have been at the forefront of attempts to make multilateral aid more effective. In the European Union, we have pressed for closer co-ordination among member states; in the United Nations, we have contributed valuable ideas on management reform; and we are beginning to make headway in promoting reform in a number of agencies.

But the World bank group of institutions is at the centre of the global development effort. The World bank group's objectives and the ODA's aims are closely linked. The institutions' quality is reflected in the richness of their collective experience and their record of success. The UK will continue to give them our full support. In particular, we want to see a substantial eleventh replenishment of the International Development Association.

The hon. Member for Eccles seemed to be surprised that we were shifting from bilateral to multilateral aid. On the contrary, it is well known and will continue for some time. As I have said in the House before, a high proportion of our multilateral aid spending is determined by negotiated or assessed international commitments. The size of the EC aid budget is decided by all member states acting together, and by the European Parliament. The UK does not have sole control, but the ceilings were set at the 1992 European Council in Edinburgh. We are in the middle of that shift, although the ratio of bilateral to multilateral aid is currently approximately 50:50. Last year the ratio was 60:40. The shift should be seen within the total aid that we can produce.

We can also be proud of our record on developing country debt. We have taken the leading international role in seeking a comprehensive solution to the official bilateral and multilateral debt burdens of the poorest, most heavily indebted countries and have written off more than £1.2 billion of their aid debts. Twelve countries have now benefited from the higher rates of debt relief—67 per cent. in some cases—available at the Paris Club of Government

*[Mr. Hanley]*

creditors under the Naples terms first proposed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor. Since December 1994, more than £2.5 billion of bilateral official debt has been restructured on Naples terms. We have gained widespread recognition that additional measures must be taken to deal with the multilateral debt burden of a number of the poorest countries. In response, the International Monetary Fund and the World bank have agreed to submit such proposals at their spring meetings in April 1996.

The UK will continue to be at the forefront of international thinking, policy and action on development. We shall maintain strong programmes of research, which underpin our capacity to influence others and promote effective development. We have announced a further increase next year in our joint funding scheme for non-governmental organisations, and we shall continue to support the societies that send British volunteers abroad at a substantial level. The Commonwealth Development Corporation expects to expand its annual level of commitments by some 12 per cent.

We shall continue to respond to humanitarian emergencies, building on the outstandingly successful work of British experts and non-governmental organisations, which we have supported to great effect in Bosnia, Rwanda and elsewhere. We are putting increased effort into the role of aid, both in conflict prevention and in promoting a long-term approach to complex emergencies. The aim is to encourage the return to development, and we are beginning to see the fruits of that approach in several parts of Africa.

Opposition noise about public expenditure reductions obscures the fact that we expect to deliver a bilateral aid programme no less substantial in aggregate than we had planned before the reductions. That programme will be increasingly concentrated on those who need it most and can use it most effectively. I am proud of our aid programme; the Government are proud of their aid programme; and I commend the Government's amendment to the House.

7.58 pm

**Mr. Robert Hughes** (Aberdeen, North): Cuts in the overseas aid budget are to be deplored, and it does the debate no good when people say that other countries, such as the United States or even Canada, have cut their aid budgets even more than we have. Such comparisons are odious, and no answer to the problem.

Ministers talk about the great advantages of the flow of private capital in development. Private capital can be an aid to development, but I have never known it to be altruistic. Private capital goes overseas and to the underdeveloped world because it believes that it can obtain a good return. It is bogus, therefore, to include private capital inflows to developing countries in the category of aid.

I accept that overseas aid policy must have clear objectives and must be geared to countries in greater need. Of course we want aid to be directed to sustainable development and of course we want to lead countries out of need for aid, although I have never subscribed to the opinion which is held in some parts of the House, especially on the Conservative Benches, that there is an aid-dependency culture in some countries. No country wants its development to be held back simply to obtain aid.

I do not subscribe to the theory that a good aid policy depends on our self-interest. We benefit from overseas aid, but that should not be the primary reason to provide development aid. We have a responsibility to ensure that aid policy, whether multilateral or bilateral, helps the people in the greatest need and is directed to countries in whose future we have a direct interest and influence. The Minister conceded that one of the Government's aims would be to give aid where there is a possibility of influencing development.

Aid is desperately needed in Angola. I understand that in the next couple of weeks Baroness Chalker is to go to Angola. When she does so, she should remember that the United Kingdom was involved in the peace process which sought to bring to an end two decades of civil war and culminated in the Lusaka protocol in November 1994. Yet after all that time, more than a year later, the peace process is in serious danger. It hangs in the balance.

The United Nations Security Council will meet on 8 February 1996 to decide the future of the UN mission in Angola. The United States is making noises to the effect that it is fed up with the situation and wants to walk away from the problem. We know, however, that one of the reasons for the difficulty in the peace process is the behaviour of the United States' surrogate, Jonas Savimbi of UNITA.

At the donor conference in September 1995, attention was drawn to the fact that, according to estimates by the United Nations children's fund, almost one in three children in Angola dies before reaching the age of five; 280,000 Angolans live as refugees in neighbouring states; only 41 per cent. of the population has access to safe drinking water; the urban population has increased from 15 per cent. in 1970 to about 50 per cent. in 1995 as people have fled the country because of the war; life expectancy for Angolans is 45 years.

Having heard those statements, anyone would say, "That country needs assistance." Yet at the round table donor conference in September last year, although the United States pledged $190 million to the reconstruction fund, France pledged $140 million and the Netherlands pledged $60 million, Britain fail to donate a single dollar, a single penny. The reason was that at the time the Government were busily involved in the argument about the further expenditure review. It is disgraceful that the Government of a country so closely interlinked and involved in the peace process, and in the pressure on the Angolan Government to concede massively to UNITA, should stand back and refuse to give any money. If Angola is to have a real future, Baroness Chalker—one of whose responsibilities is to participate in that type of argument—must tell the United States to make it clear that Savimbi must keep to the agreements that have been signed. There is a massive wish in Angola for peace. The peace process needs to be confirmed and money needs to be given.

Governments influence overseas aid and overseas development policy in many ways. Cash is important—I do not deny that—but giving cash makes no sense if the Government's negotiations on trade matters can negate the entire development policy. I draw the Government's attention to the trade negotiations between South Africa and the European Union. Things are at a crucial stage.

For years, every hon. Member said, with equal sincerity—I would not want to recall the past and quarrel with people who held a different view from me at the time—that we wanted the end of apartheid. We all said that we wanted a democratic Government in place in South Africa. We wanted that, not only because it was a theoretical democratic exercise, but because we wanted significant development for the people in southern Africa. None the less, the negotiations have stalled as a result of the way in which the European Union is approaching them.

Detailed discussions finally started in December 1995, after a long period of pre-negotiations. It is almost two years since the Berlin conference to discuss the relationship between South Africa and the European Union. Negotiations are in danger of stalling because France, supported by Germany and some southern European countries, is drawing up a list of "sensitive" products to be excluded from the negotiations. A list is accumulating, and circulating among member states, of products amounting to 58 per cent. of South Africa's agricultural exports to the European Union. What is more, it has now been suggested that before negotiations can be completed, "impact assessments" should be made of the impact on the European market, not only of potential South African produce, but of free trade agreements in general. Those may cause enormous delays.

The Italians, who currently hold the presidency of the European Union, believe that they can achieve a deal that can be signed during their presidency. If that is to happen, it is imperative that the United Kingdom pulls out all the stops to urge the other EU member states to allow a speedy start to the detailed talks and to resist a growing protectionist momentum against South Africa.

Although some minor trade concessions were made last year, the European Union gives South Africa a worse deal than most countries outside the western world, including many with a higher per capita income. South Africa is often said to be a rich country, but it has an extremely low per capita income. About 58 per cent. of its population is illiterate. There is desperate unemployment.

Those things must be considered in the round. Development policy is not a simple matter of bandying around figures to say that this will work this way and that will work that way. It is about real people in real situations. I hope that in discussing overseas aid policy the Minister and Baroness Chalker will not take a monocular view, as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) eloquently put it. I hope that they will not adopt tunnel vision and seek to defend their policy, or to make progress with their policy only in the narrow sense of percentages of gross domestic product. Those are important, but they are not the whole story.

It is not good enough for the Government to say, "We aim eventually to reach the UN target figure, but in the meantime we shall go backwards until we can afford it." This country can certainly afford it, and I believe that the vast majority of people in the country would be willing to contemplate an increase in our monetary programme. I hope that the Department is not isolated but is able to influence wider foreign policy. Otherwise, the whole mess will collapse like a pack of cards. It will not matter from the point of view of our influence, but the most desperately needy—the men, women and children who depend on the sensible progress of our aid policy—will be the ones who suffer.

8.9 pm

**Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd** (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), who made several comments with which I agree. I shall refer to the issue of national self-interest, which he touched upon, in my short remarks.

I had the great privilege to be a Foreign Office Minister for four years, and for two of those years I answered for the Overseas Development Administration in this place. I was enormously impressed by the quality of the British aid programme and by the quality of advice that I received as Minister defending the Government's policies. I am pleased that some of those who advised me are present today and I note from the tabulations attached to my right hon. Friend's brief that he receives the same fulsome advice. Although I worked extremely hard, I must confess that sometimes it was rather like boxing with one's eyes blindfolded. I hope that my right hon. Friend does not feel the same way.

I welcome the aid programme because I see it as an extension of the British diplomatic initiative—the British interest. Those who criticise the aid programme because they do not believe in aid or because they believe in charity more than the British national interest should consider the Japanese position. Japan's aid programme is about four times as large as ours in money terms.

**Mr. George Foulkes** (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Hear, hear.

**Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd:** Japan's aid programme is smaller than ours as a percentage of gross national product, so perhaps the hon. Gentleman should temper his enthusiasm to support his hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), who opened for the Opposition.

When the Japanese give aid, the four-wheel drive vehicles and other manifestations of Japanese commercial clout arrive shortly afterwards. I believe that the attitude of most decent people in Britain to aid is a reflection of their attitude to the conduct of their lives: they are mindful of their own self-interest while doing what they can afford to help others. When it comes to aid, I sometimes wish that the Opposition would recognise that self-interest is no bad thing. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North touched on that issue in his speech. Of course it is not a primary objective of our aid programme, but I believe that it must be given greater emphasis.

Opposition spokesmen often seem to be in the grip of non-governmental organisations, such as those involved in the World Development Movement, which deny the national self-interest. On occasion, I feel that Opposition speeches are not directed to the House and to the nation, but to the NGOs to which I have referred.

The British aid programme is a good programme because it is targeted largely at the poorest countries; I do not wish to see that change. However, I am a strong supporter of the aid and trade provision and I believe that everything about that concept should be encouraged. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend Baroness Chalker and her colleagues in another place found it necessary to cut the ATP this year in their fundamental expenditure review

*[Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd]*

and that it will be cut further. I am greatly disquieted by Labour party proposals, which lack any substance or detail, to reform the provision still further if Labour were elected to Government.

There can be nothing wrong in principle with development projects which are proposed by British companies. I cannot accept the view expressed by the World Development Movement that the aid for trade provision should be abolished. I think that that would be insane. In that context, I shall comment about the Pergau experience because I believe that my criticisms of the Opposition were characterised by Labour Members behaviour on that occasion. When it was all over, the Foreign Secretary said:

"We must ensure that British companies are not disadvantaged in bidding for worthwhile development projects against competitors who can afford soft finance".

I wholly agree with that. Whatever mistakes were made during the Pergau episode were made in good faith by Ministers acting in the national self-interest. However, we heard only howls of indignation from Opposition Members, which showed that they were more concerned about pleasing those who get at them in the Lobbies than about supporting our national self-interest.

**Ms Abbott:** No Labour Member would argue against the Government providing soft finance for private companies bidding for projects, but we do not regard it as an appropriate use of money that the British public believe is being spent on aid.

**Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd:** I hope that the hon. Lady will provide more details, if she intends to make a contribution to the debate, about what she wants to be done about aid and trade provision. I shall be interested in what she says because I believe that arguments in favour of aid provision which do not also favour national self-interest are unlikely to enjoy public support. Anyone who wants the aid budget to increase—I include in that category the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Mrs. Abbott) and the World Development Movement—must realise that my constituents will be easily persuaded that aid provision should be increased only if the argument for increased aid is combined with national self-interest.

Because I believe that the national commercial and diplomatic self-interest must be served by the aid programme where possible and reasonable, I shall comment on multilateral aid provision and the European Union.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North referred to trade relations between South Africa and the European Union and I heartily agree with what he said. It is absurd that the European Union should make selfish provisions of the kind to which he referred and I found his contribution most helpful and illuminating. It is a cause of great irritation to many of us that so much of our aid is diverted from our bilateral programme to multilateral aid, particularly into the European Union, where we contribute about one sixth of its expenditure from our bilateral aid. I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister say that negotiations will be hastened in an effort to improve the European multilateral programme.

It has always seemed curious to me that the European Union should have an aid programme. I cannot see why it should in principle, but nonetheless I recognise that it is a matter of history and that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues have more important arguments to pursue within the European Union. However, as a former Foreign Office Minister, I recall one incident involving the chief minister of a Caribbean dependent territory who was anxious to build an education college in his country—which undoubtedly would have been named after him and boosted his ego. I received advice, which I was happy to accept, that it was an extravagant and not particularly worthwhile initiative in aid terms and we refused to grant aid. The chief minister in question—the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) knows to whom I refer—then went to the local European Union representative and his request was approved.

Although I am aware of my irritation regarding many aspects of the European aid programme, I know that Britain is more successful than many other countries in obtaining contracts for our non-governmental organisations and consultants out of multilateral programmes. We benefit from spending multilateral aid on organisations originating in Britain. That is very good news indeed. Here I declare an interest as I was an observer at the recent Palestinian elections, under the auspices of the monitoring exercise organised by the European Union. The hon. Member for Eccles declared in her opening remarks that British influence is taking a hammering. If she had observed the Palestinian elections, she would have found that to be profoundly untrue. I have some reservations about the size of the European operation and other matters, but I shall not dwell on that aspect today as I wish to congratulate the British people involved.

Four of the 30 European Union administrators were British and they were in a position of great influence; we had six long-term observers and our effort—especially that of one British administrator, who is an expert in organising elections throughout the world—helped the Palestinians to design their electoral system. British officials spent several months with leading Palestinians, who were deeply grateful for their advice. That involvement was a great success for the European Union and for the United Kingdom at little cost to ourselves, and as Palestine emerges as a nation we shall certainly benefit from our participation.

We shall also benefit from our aid programme to the Palestinians. Over the next three years, the British contribution, which is substantially but not exclusively funded through the European Union, will be about £80 million. It is quite a large programme for a small emerging country and that initiative will do our standing with the Palestinian people even more good.

There are several small programmes such as those in sewerage and public health; there is a mini know-how programme and a Bank of England initiative to help the Palestinians set up a monetary authority. They are small schemes and, once again, they are extremely well targeted, fashioned and constructed and they will put our officials in contact with leading Palestinians. I believe that those initiatives will follow the principle that I have enunciated in that they will be good for the Palestinian people and the British self-interest.

8.22 pm

**Miss Emma Nicholson** (Torridge and West Devon): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd). I well remember his fine work when he was a Minister. I am sad, however, that the chance to speak on Britain's overseas aid programme has been provided by budget cuts. I support the retention and expansion of the current budget which was so well managed for so long by Baroness Chalker.

On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I thank the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen for their recognition in the motion of the value of British aid, and the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) for her fine and moving speech. My colleagues and I share their dismay at the Government's continual reduction in targeted assistance to the poorest of the poor. I consider that part and parcel of the Government's deliberate ignorance of the plight of the most needy people, domestically and overseas.

**Mr. David Faber** (Westbury): Does the hon. Lady recall what she said on 19 June last year in response to the speech of the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), who is now her hon. Friend? She said:

"Despite the passionate commitment of those hon. Members, they were just rotating old and outdated statements that bore little relationship to the reality of today's overseas aid programme".—[*Official Report*, 19 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. 109.]

Does she still agree with her words then?

**Miss Nicholson:** Yes. That was before the current budget cuts. I supported the Government on this and many other matters last summer and last autumn and I am desperately sad that my loyalty and my belief in the value of statements by Ministers and supporters have been rubbished by their actions. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman raised that point.

My personal experience of the effectiveness of British official aid spans three decades: first, as a volunteer in India and Africa; secondly, as a salaried member of staff of the Save the Children Fund and other organisations such as Plan International; and, thirdly, since I entered Parliament, as a volunteer again. I have considerable experience in these matters.

What is the purpose of government aid? We all know the Government's main stated aims. They are to support economic reform, to enhance productive capacity, to help achieve good government, to finance activities directly benefiting poor people, to promote human development, to promote the status of women and to help to tackle environmental problems. We all agree with those aims, but are the Government giving the Department the tools to do its job?

Until last autumn, Britain's performance was not brilliant, but at least there were small increases in aid spending in 1994. Plans were also approved for further small increases for 1997-98. We were the fifth largest aid donor, but our contribution was less than half that of No. 4 on the list—Germany. In 1994, we spent 0.31 per cent. of our GNP on aid. We were 12th equal with Finland and below such countries as Luxembourg, Switzerland and Portugal. Neither the scale of our aid nor our aid-GNP ranking reflected our strong and special bilateral links with many of the world' poorest countries, unlike donors such as Sweden and Luxembourg.

The stated objective of the former Foreign Secretary was to punch above our weight. To do that, we need to concentrate on our strengths. Our bilateral experience and long expertise give British aid its quality and make our voice on development matters universally respected and more important than those of many other countries.

Even with the planned increases in 1994, our bilateral aid was set to shrink from £1.1 billion to £945 million by 1997-98. Bilateral aid to Africa alone was to fall from £318 million to £280 million in only two years. Yet much of that money is still needed to support economic reform and good governance—two of the Government's main aims.

The aid cuts announced last November, far from modestly increasing the aid budget for 1996-97 and 1997-98, will cut spending to significantly below even this year's spending. In each year, more than £120 million has been axed from previous years' spending, representing a cut of about 9 per cent. in the amount expected to be spent in the last financial year. At 1994-95 prices, the cost will be at least £200 million in each of the next two years, compared with the total for 1994-95. That is more than two thirds of total private United Kingdom aid flows.

First, is it true that nearly all that money will have to come from bilateral aid? Secondly, as fast-spending aid to support economic reform and good governance is the easiest to cut, what impact will those cuts have on our leverage in pursuit of those aims, especially in Africa? How much will go to Africa in 1997-98?

The Government's aim to help the poor—especially women—has wide public support. It is carried out in partnership with excellent British voluntary agencies such as Oxfam, Plan International and the Save the Children Fund. Plan International has Ian Buist, a former ODA eminence, as a director. Can the Minister assure us that previous plans for the joint funding scheme and other partnerships with such agencies will not be affected by the cuts? What about our contributions to the United Nations Children's Fund—UNICEF—whose concerns loom large?

The Minister stated this evening that he wishes to improve the quality of multilateral aid, but how do the Government expect to maintain Britain's influence in the multilateral aid agencies, including the European Union, if they take the axe to our bilateral programmes? Who will listen to us if we do not put our money where our mouth is?

During the previous financial year, the Government said that when many major donors face difficult decisions about the size of their aid programmes, the increase in the United Kingdom's aid programme reconfirms the Government's commitment to international developments. I deeply regret the fact that, by this year's decisions, so soon afterwards, they have trampled that commitment into the dust.

The fundamental expenditure review, the FER, changes ODA priorities. It drops the unique focus on women, yet women and their children make up 80 per cent. of all refugees and displaced people. Is the Minister content that that should happen, given that in the poorest societies women and girls bear the heaviest burdens of illiteracy and hunger, as well as child labour?

The review focuses a higher proportion of expenditure—85 per cent.—on only 20 countries. Is the Minister comfortable with the fact that in many mid-level

*[Miss Nicholson]*

economies, and even in wealthy nations, where millions of refugees eke out their lives, sometimes for 30 years, the official British attitude will now be survival of the fittest? Surely he must know that no GNP statistic allows for vicious or ignorant social policies and that high national wealth does not lead to automatic redistribution or to tolerance towards minorities. Aid is about people, not about classroom economics. The Government have turned their face against asylum seekers coming into the United Kingdom. Surely the Minister knows that funds spent preventively in difficult regions help people to stay at home.

Given the fundamental changes of focus that the FER recommends, will the Minister refer proposals to the House for debate rather than take decisions within the Department? That would restore a sense of political balance that is sorely missing. Opposition Members have always taken overseas aid more seriously than the Government. In 1979, the Labour Government were spending 0.5 per cent. of GNP on aid. The forecast within the FER, before budgetary cuts were known, was that the percentage would fall to 0.26 per cent. The percentage must now be lower still.

The first ODA Minister, Barbara Castle, went into the Cabinet on 18 October 1964. Lynda Chalker still waits outside the door.

Recently, there was comment on Japan. It spends 0.29 per cent. of its GNP on aid. That is a higher percentage than was forecast for the United Kingdom before the budgetary cuts. That is not good.

Sadly, UNESCO has been badly weakened because it lost more than one third of its financial resources after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom and the United States 11 or 12 years ago. They have denied it their full co-operation. Its director-general, Dr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, made that very point to one of the Minister's colleagues when he came here last December for the 50th anniversary of both UNESCO and the United Nations. It is clear that multilateral co-operation between rich and poor countries is not one of the Government's top priorities.

At the same time, we need a global perspective of participatory knowledge about a changing planet, co-operation in the advance of scientific understanding, the selection of appropriate uses of technology and the social and economic implications of the information-communications revolution, which are critical. We must take account of all those factors and their effect on cultural creativity and development, which will be denied to poorer nations unless the United Kingdom and the United States participate.

If the Minister does not know the facts, let him say so. The World Service debate recently revealed Government ignorance. The Foreign Secretary claimed credit for the Government in introducing the Rwanda service, the Kinyarwanda-Kirundi lifeline. In answer to a question from the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), the right hon. and learned Gentleman said:

"I am informed that it is funded through the BBC World Service, which is funded by the Government."—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 558.]

That is just not true.

The current cost of the project is £124,000 a year. Since April 1995, it has been funded entirely externally, with £85,000 provided by six British non-governmental organisations: Save the Children, Christian Aid, HelpAge International, Action Aid, the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development and the British Red Cross. It is appropriate to raise the matter in this debate because £39,000 comes from the ODA. That is a very different picture from the one painted by the Foreign Secretary.

I keenly regret the planned cuts, but I am relieved that their effect is at least partly alleviated by our membership of the European Community. Through a network of multilateral and bilateral agreements with developing nations—many of them are members of the Commonwealth—development assistance and trade advantages are given and administered by the Commission's external services. Non-governmental organisations—many of them British—receive financial support for their vital work, which is now to be at least partly ignored by the Government.

I draw special attention to the work of the European Community humanitarian office, under Commissioner Emma Bonino, whom I had the pleasure to meet recently in London at the ODA. I wish also to mention the fine work of her director, Santiago Gomez Reino; her deputy director, Donato Chiarini; and senior official, Richard Lewar-Towski. The office ensures that urgent humanitarian aid reaches the most dangerous parts where others may well fear to tread, not only throughout former Yugoslavia but in northern Iraq and its southern marshes, as well as Chechnya and other parts of the Russian Federation that are caught up in a bloody civil war.

Will the Minister think again about his response yesterday to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who is in his place? The hon. Member for Salisbury described the European Union's aid as being "of inferior quality" and said that it

"dilutes our traditional aid effort into parts of the world with which we have . . . little in common".—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 638.]

The Minister did not reject that, perhaps, ignorant view out of hand. After all, Iraq is a former colony or protectorate of the United Kingdom. He said that he understood what the hon. Gentleman had said. Will he now support the EU aid package, against his colleague, as he holds ministerial responsibility for it? Who is right—the Minister or the poor who benefit from EU aid? May I say that "little in common" is not a criterion that I have heard before in terms of aid distribution, save one of the lowest sort? It is surely need combined with value for Britain, not shared interests between donor and recipient, that mark out proper development aid. I hope that the Minister will agree with me and not with the comment of yesterday that he appeared to endorse.

This year, 1996, is the United Nations year for the eradication of poverty. I am ashamed that the British Government have started the year in such a desperate fashion. I beg the Government to reconsider the cuts. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I support the motion.

8.37 pm

**Sir Jim Lester** (Broxtowe): This is the first time that I have been able to take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) since

she crossed the Floor. It is my experience of the hon. Lady that she has a good heart even if she is misguided in the way in which she seeks to view the future.

There are Conservative Members who do not approve of any reduction in aid. Many of us made that clear before negotiations took place. That may be why we have maintained the bilateral aid programme at the same level despite the other reductions.

Despite the pledge made from the Opposition Front Bench this evening, a Labour Government would face exactly the same pressure. There is the problem of holding public expenditure. That has been tackled for as long as I can remember by means of equal pay for all Departments, with the exception of those responsible for education, law and order and health. That means that no attempt is made to evaluate the value and success of individual Departments and what they achieve in terms of money spent.

The World Service and the British Council have already been mentioned. In public expenditure terms, they have exceptionally small budgets, yet any reduction in what they spend has a greater effect than elsewhere. The left-wing newspaper the *Financial Times* has an excellent editorial today that explains the position rather better than I have. I have always felt—perhaps because I have always had an interest in international affairs and overseas development—that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is a Cinderella department. It has a small budget in public expenditure terms, yet it goes through the same process year on year of review and reduction.

Having said that, I believe that the reduction in the ODA's budget this year is enough to sadden people like me, but it is not enough to cause me to despair or revolt, and it was nothing like the scare tactics that were used by some who should know better. We can handle the reduction. It is within manageable terms, and it is in the whole concept of the FER. It is a time of significant change anyway in the delivery of aid and the bilateral aid programme relative to our European multilateral programme, which I support. Intellectually, I have never understood why we cannot conceive of 15 nations working together and being able to do far more in the fundamental provision of essential elements in other countries—I am thinking of my recent visit to Uganda. Fifteen nations working together could provide the infrastructure that President Museveni recognised is needed first and foremost before he is able to start to look at poverty reduction. Bilateral aid programmes cannot do that.

We can look at ways of easing aid to the countries whose overall income is increasing and target aid to the countries that are in poverty, and the poorer countries. I welcome the statement that was made by my right hon. Friend about the increase in the pound-for-pound scheme, because NGOs overall face real problems in terms of the reduction of their direct contributions from the public. They are increasingly valued by Governments, yet they want to maintain a degree of independence and not be seen as arms of Government. The pound-for-pound scheme is an excellent example where that co-operation can be carried forward. My advice to the NGOs with which I am involved is that, if they concentrate on the sheer professionalism that we have, no one could accuse them of being an arm of Government; they would simply be the best vehicle of ideal grassroots aid in whatever country they work.

We also need to watch the prevailing mood in the decline in aid flows at a time of increasing need. It is not acceptable as an excuse that others are doing worse, although one should be conscious of that. I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about the 11th replenishment of the International Development Association, as it is critical. The United States let down the international community and itself because of the way in which it dealt with that replenishment. I was distressed when I was on Capitol hill, speaking in Congress, to find the degree of isolation that currently permeates those two bodies.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon mentioned economic migration. That has been a growing issue over the years which we have discussed in the House in terms of domestic legislation. Some of us are less than happy about it. Unless all the developed countries recognise that the transfer of resources, from whatever source, to the least developed countries takes place and the people are made more comfortable and given hope in their own countries, economic migration will grow and grow.

I welcome the fact that, increasingly, we are beginning to look more objectively at the total needs of the least developed countries. The aid flows, from whatever source, are vital, but just as important is investment from the private sector, which has worked so dramatically in the east, and, of course, the halfway house of the Commonwealth Development Corporation, which is able to bridge the gap between direct investment, where a return is expected immediately, and investments that can take longer to develop the countries that need it most. We are also looking at the reduction in debt. We are looking objectively at the report of the all-party group, which I chair, on the objective analysis of debt, be it bilateral, commercial or multilateral. We must make urgent progress in resolving the outstanding debt over and above the Paris Club negotiations.

I welcome the work that has been done by the working party within the World bank and very much hope that the untimely leap will not prevent progress in moving towards writing off on a case-by-case basis debt that can never be repaid.

A great deal of work has gone into the report. I hope that we shall be able to see the results and that it liberates domestic funds that are currently paid to the bank for investment in areas of the world that face the greatest problems.

The hon. Lady said she was going to Washington soon. I saw the president of the World bank in December. He very much welcomes parliamentary interest in the House in the World bank and its responsibilities. He is prepared to come to the House and address the all-party group or any other forum that we can arrange. I hope to do that in the near future and to talk about the debt situation and about being accountable to parliamentarians, many of whom write regularly to him or his predecessors about the changes in structural adjustment and about using it objectively, not to create further poverty. There are good signs that comprehensive progress is being made, and that is the only way in which the gap can be closed between the developed and the developing world.

One is wary of suggested reductions to multilateral aid unless it is, as the Minister explained, for humanitarian work which is no longer necessary. Many of us are concerned about the United Nations and its future. It has

*[Sir Jim Lester]*

many problems. One of the principal problems is that the majority of its members are not interested in international affairs. They are members of the club because they feel that they should be. They pay their dues and demands at the last possible moment, and when asked to do anything, many of them, unless it directly affects them, are reluctant to do so. Britain's support for the United Nations is vital as its goes through its reorganisation phase.

Britain, unlike the nations that I have described, has a different history. I am sure that every hon. Member present is proud of that history. We are one of the most international countries in the world, with an outlook, influence and trade that reflect that. The former Foreign Secretary said that Britain punches above its weight in every genuine sense. The amount that we spend on foreign service aid and the various organisations that we support is very small, but the gain is almost impossible to calculate. Many of us are concerned that the constant chipping of relatively small sums from organisations, from his budget and the ODA budget, are contrary to our long-term interest in every sense. I hope that these words are listened to with great care as we approach the next round of negotiations.

8.47 pm

**Mrs. Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): As always, it is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester). He and I see eye to eye on many of these issues. I notice that even he is saddened by the cuts in overseas aid. Those are strong words for him. I wonder just how saddened he must be before he leaves the Conservative Benches and joins his former hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) somewhere on the Opposition Benches. I can assure him that there will always be a very warm welcome for him.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) demonstrated eagerly and ably, overseas aid expenditure is to be cut by an amount that would be enough to fund this year's combined programme to Africa—of Action Aid, the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children and the Worldwide Fund for Nature.

It is a fair bet that one country will not be affected by the Government's cuts. It has been named as one of the world's most corrupt. Its people have suffered at the hands of their Government from some of the worst human rights violations this century. Its Government systematically uses military force to underpin its harsh authoritarian rule. It is not one of the world's poorest countries. Despite all that, however, British aid to it has doubled in the past six years, and is due to increase again this year. The country is, of course, Indonesia.

My concern about Britain's relations with Indonesia arises in part from my visit to the territory of East Timor in 1989 as a member of an Inter-Parliamentary Union group. Indonesia illegally annexed East Timor in July 1976, following a bloody invasion of the territory in the previous year; about 200,000 people were slaughtered as a result of that invasion. Since then, I have closely followed developments in Indonesia and East Timor, and recently conducted research into the bilateral aid programme. The main findings of my report have been submitted to the National Audit Office, which is now carrying out a detailed investigation.

Britain's commitment to Indonesia's ruling regime strikes me as remarkable, but not surprising in view of the Government's amoral and highly selective approach to overseas aid and development. Last year, the Minister for Overseas Development, Lady Chalker, said that

"where a Government turns its back on democracy, ignores accountability, flouts human rights and allows corruption to flourish, our aid will only be of a humanitarian nature to help the people in real need."

When she visited Kenya last year, Lady Chalker said:

"We have concern about treatment of opposition parties, about the treatment of the press. We have heard very disturbing reports about some legal cases. We know the horrors of ethnic tensions that this country went through. And we know the evils of corruption."

Strangely, however, when Lady Chalker visited Indonesia a few weeks earlier, she was conspicuously silent on the issues of human rights and corruption. Rather than expressing her views, she put her signature to an aid-related loan for £80 million.

It is not as if British aid were helping to alleviate poverty in Indonesia. Only a tiny proportion of it is spent on the vital purposes of poverty reduction and human development; much of the rest is focused on high-cost, prestigious transport, power and communications projects, many of which are of dubious developmental value.

At present, about two thirds of aid to Indonesia is accounted for by aid and trade provision and Commonwealth Development Corporation expenditure. It is clear that the aid programme is part of an overall strategy that gives priority to the promotion of British business and the sale of British arms. Indeed, as everyone knows, Britain is a major supplier of arms to Indonesia. It is therefore not surprising that aid to that country has increased from £33 million in 1992-93 to £51 million in 1994-95. I should be interested to hear from the Minister whether it will be one of the countries of which he talked that would graduate from aid. Perhaps there will be other considerations.

The Government's attitude to East Timor illustrates the point only too well. Despite persistent statements to the effect that they do not recognise Indonesia's annexation of East Timor, they have provided funds and personnel for projects that include East Timor as well as Indonesia. They have also approved export licences for military equipment that has been used against the defenceless East Timorese people.

Aid money has been used to provide maps and other land data concerning East Timor for Indonesia's Ministry of Transmigration. That is a particularly disturbing example of the misuse of British aid. The Indonesian Government have used transmigration to control the population. Officially, the objective is to reduce overpopulation in densely populated parts of the country, and to settle the transmigrants in underpopulated parts such as East Timor. An essential part of the programme, however, is the colonisation of outlying regions with Javanese peasants who are more loyal to President Suharto. The deliberate aim is to undermine non-Javanese societies and cultures.

Britain's assistance has made a real contribution to the integration of East Timor within Indonesia. In practice, the Government have not only recognised Indonesia's annexation but aided it. Furthermore, it appears that the Secretary of State may have acted unlawfully in approving the project under the Overseas Development

and Cooperation Act 1980. It is generally known that Britain has contributed militarily to the subjugation and oppression of East Timor. Everyone knows about the highly controversial £500 million deal for the sale of more Hawk aircraft to Indonesia. Foreign Office officials have dismissed eyewitness accounts of the sighting of the aircraft in East Timor; assurances given by President Suharto that the aircraft would not be used against the Timorese have proved worthless.

Only a few months ago, the British journalist Hugh O'Shaughnessy saw two Hawks make a low pass over Dili, the capital of East Timor, as part of the security forces' campaign of intimidation and terror to warn the people against staging any public protest to mark the fourth anniversary of the Santa Cruz massacre that had resulted in the deaths of 150 unarmed civilians. Noam Chomsky once described the west's proclaimed commitment to human rights as

"one of the great lies of modern history",

and the Government have provided ample evidence to support that assertion. As we know, they would be much happier if persecuted and abused people were prevented from coming to Britain in the first place, and in that regard the East Timorese are proving a bit of a problem.

In September, five young Timorese men applied for asylum after taking refuge in the British embassy in Jakarta. Their application stated that

"military brutality has become a fact of everyday life in East Timor—a military brutality which has consisted of sudden arrest, rape, intimidation, terror and slaughter".

In the event, Portugal granted the five asylum while Britain dragged its feet.

The military brutality referred to by those asylum seekers includes the activities of the Indonesian national police. The INP is part of the Indonesian armed forces; it is essentially a paramilitary force, which, in areas such as East Timor, is wholly under the command of the local military. The primary role of the armed forces, including the INP, is to maintain internal security. That has led to serious human rights abuses by the police throughout Indonesia, yet our Government have been providing training awards for INP officers since 1979 as part of our aid programme. A consultancy unit established under the training project is available to advise and assist the East Timorese police authorities if required, and the Government have admitted that officers trained under the aid programme may subsequently serve in East Timor.

In March 1990, the Government approved the police management training project, involving expenditure of £713,000. The project claims to have as its objective the improvement of the quality of service of the INP, through the establishment of a consultancy unit which advises senior management on strategic change. The Government have stated that they hope that the assistance that they have provided

"will influence all receiving it and help develop respect for human rights in East Timor."

In view of that statement, the support for the INP must be a completely ineffective and inefficient use of aid money.

The Overseas Development Administration's "Guide to Aid Procedures" specifically states:

"ODA considers non-military security organisations such as police forces . . . as legitimate beneficiaries of the aid programme . . . However, each request for such aid must be considered most carefully in terms of both general human rights and the rights of the individual, taking account of the circumstances of the country in question. For instance tasks assigned to police vary widely from country to country and could be of a para military nature".

Again in the words of the ODA, in doubtful cases, a request for aid must be referred

"to higher authority or for Ministerial approval."

I have strong doubts about whether correct procedures were followed before police funding was approved. If it was approved, it would be interesting to know which Minister approved it.

The Government's argument is that, in introducing officers to western approaches to policing, they are aiming to improve respect for human rights. That assertion is plainly ridiculous. Why is it that these officers receive no training in human rights issues? Why is it that the British consultants working under the project have had no formal training in human rights issues and do not even provide advice on such issues?

In the United States of America, in evidence to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about similar training for Indonesia, the executive director of Asia Watch said:

"These police are part of the armed forces, who are responsible for torture on a routine basis. Their role in practice is to get information from suspects by any means possible and to administer summary punishment as they see fit".

He added that

"to give them additional training with US funds as long as the structure in which they operate remains unchanged would be utterly irresponsible."

The degree of our Government's responsibility in training the INP within the aid programme can be judged by the records of certain officers who have benefited under British-funded training. For example, Colonel Hindarto was trained in Britain, subsequently became Jakarta's chief of police, and was clearly influenced by his British training in carrying out his duties. The *Jakarta Post* reported last year:

"Even . . . Hindarto admitted . . . that officers had a strong tendency now to shoot people caught red handed at a crime 'in order to give the public a greater feeling of personal safety'".

The article adds that

"Hindarto said he fully supported his subordinates in the shooting cases and that police sometimes are forced to resort to shooting criminals in self-defence. Since January 1995 . . . police officers have reportedly shot 25 criminals, 19 of which died."

In a sworn statement made last year in Lisbon, an exile described the treatment meted out by Hindarto, when he was chief of police of a region that included East Timor, to one victim who was accused of involvement in a demonstration that preceded the Santa Cruz cemetery massacre. The man was hit in the face with gun stocks, kicked and severely punched. He was kept naked for the first five days of his detention, tortured and burned on his face and body with cigarette butts. During the 40 days of his detention, he was repeatedly beaten and hit with bars of iron and gun stocks. In his statement, the exile states:

"His head was the target, consequently he is mad now".

The statement includes examples of other atrocities, all carried out when Hindarto—a man trained under the British aid programme—was the chief of police.

It is difficult to identify the reasons for the Government's support for the INP. However, as the Indonesian armed forces perform a dual security function, perhaps the Government are looking to foster their

*[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]*

influence over senior officers such as Hindarto who are potential buyers of British arms. In any event, there is, once again, no consideration for human rights and poverty reduction.

A few years ago, I initiated the investigation into the Pergau dam by reporting my concern to the National Audit Office. Unfortunately, I do not think that the Government have learnt one lesson from that case as they persist in funding projects which are, at best, developmentally unsound and, at worst, positively harmful. Sadly, it seems inevitable that support for such projects will continue so long as the Government remain ideologically opposed to considering the needs of the poor ahead of the needs of British arms manufacturers and business elites.

The Government spend much time and effort proclaiming that human rights and good governance are important criteria that govern their foreign aid policy—no doubt the Minister will confirm that yet again tonight—but it is clear that, in the case of Indonesia, that litmus test is not being applied and that a huge amount of public money is being spent on projects that are of no obvious benefit to Indonesia's poor and are devoid of developmental merit.

Projects that positively support the repressive Ministry of Information and the brutal national police and which aid Indonesia's illegal annexation of East Timor are a shocking indictment of the Government's handling of the bilateral aid programme—an indictment that the Government have a duty to answer.

9.5 pm

**Mr. David Faber** (Westbury): As so often on these occasions, we are a little short of time, but I should like to begin on a personal note and pay a warm tribute to my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker who, until a couple of weeks ago, I was honoured to serve as parliamentary private secretary. Just before Christmas, I and many others from the Foreign Office and the world of aid—and, indeed, representatives of foreign Governments—attended a reception at the Foreign Office to mark her 10th year as a Minister at the Foreign Office, the vast majority of which time has been spent as Minister for Overseas Development.

My right hon. and noble Friend has, throughout, been a tireless campaigner on behalf of developing nations when negotiating with the Treasury at home and in ensuring the effective delivery of aid to those who need it. It is largely because of her personal efforts and expertise that Britain is now seen as a good friend to countries in Africa, the Commonwealth and, indeed, throughout the developing world, which recognise the value and efficiency of British aid above that of almost all other countries. There can be few other Ministers who command the respect that she does among those who deliver the aid and, more important, among those who receive it.

As we have heard, the United Kingdom is the fifth largest aid donor in the world, and the programme for 1996-97 will be worth £2.154 million. In 1994, about 55 per cent. of our aid programme went on bilateral aid, 55 per cent. of that went to Commonwealth countries and two thirds went to the poorest countries. Last year's Budget settlement will mean that the planned allocation for bilateral aid for 1996-97 will be little changed from the forecast set out in last year's Overseas Development Administration's departmental report, but the Department's new plans take into account lower forecasts for multilateral aid such as that channelled through the World bank and the European Union.

The Opposition motion deals again with the well argued issue of the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product being spent on overseas aid. The Government have consistently reaffirmed that we will work towards that target, but have said, quite rightly, that we cannot set a timetable as any decision on achieving that target must always depend on an overall review of public expenditure, year on year.

In fact, as the House knows, we currently spend some 0.31 per cent. of GDP on overseas aid, which is higher than the average 0.29 per cent. of all the countries represented on the development assistance committee.

It is interesting to note that, once again, the Opposition refuse to set a timetable for achieving the UN target, presumably because it represents a too easily costed spending promise, although we heard from the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) that the trend will, Labour hopes, be reversed in the first year of a Labour Government. Rather, the motion speaks of "steady and measurable progress", a phrase that is, I think, vague and woolly enough to be supported by almost every hon. Member. Of course, Labour's 1992 general election manifesto contained a pledge—repeated at the 1993 conference—to achieve the 0.7 per cent. target within five years. That pledge would appear to have been dropped.

Nor can I let go the speech made by the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) for the Liberal Democrats. Unfortunately, she is no longer in her place, but I am sure that the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) will report to her what I say. I fear that the hon. Lady may have misunderstood my intervention. I was not in any way doubting her ability to speak on overseas aid. She has a long and good record of doing so in the House. I was doubting the remarkable change of mind that she appears to have had since June last year. I should like to quote further from the speech that she made at that time. She spoke of

"The primacy of the market for freedom and wealth creation"

and of the Government's objective being quite superbly achieved during the past 15 years. She continued:

"I was very surprised that Opposition Members, with their constant bleating about old-style socialist policies—moan, moan, moan—failed to acknowledge that great British success story."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. 108-9.]

I have no doubt that she is well able to speak for the Liberal Democrats on overseas aid, but I doubt the fact that, as recently as June, she was singing a very different tune.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (Fife, North-East): How long did it take the hon. Gentleman to decide that the poll tax should be repealed?

**Mr. Faber:** I was not in the House either when the poll tax was initiated or when it was repealed.

I, like many other Conservative Members and Conservative councillors, have had a pleasant couple of weeks reading the fascinating document "Towards 1996", which the Liberal Democrats Whips Office has produced.

I tried hard, while reading it this afternoon, to find a reference to overseas aid. The only reference to the Liberal Democrats' policy on overseas aid that I can find in the entire document is about the fact that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) cares more about Bosnia than he does about anything else.

The central aim of the British aid programme is poverty reduction. Our strategy is based on seeking to inspire broad-based economic growth, on investing in people, and on providing social safety nets where they are needed. Short-term relief for emergency aid is only part of that strategy, although it is overwhelmingly the most publicised.

Across the globe, 300 million people are affected by disasters—and the number is growing by a staggering 10 million a year. An increasing number are victims of violent conflicts. Last year, there were 56—mostly internal—wars, compared with 46 in 1990. Civilians all too often bear the brunt of such tragedies. I learnt the staggering statistics today. At the beginning of this century, 90 per cent. of all war casualties were military; now, 95 per cent. of all war casualties are civilian. Conflicts also lead to huge movements of populations. The number of refugees increased from 13 million in 1989 to 23 million last year.

Those of us who have seen at first hand the pain and suffering in the former Yugoslavia can only despair at those figures, but we can also take pride in our country's response. The ODA responds every year to between 50 and 100 emergencies, allocating more than 300 grants. In the previous financial year, those grants totalled £334 million and went to 71 countries.

Perhaps this is a suitable moment, since I am not sure that I have heard it said this evening, to pay tribute to all those who are paid or volunteer and who work so hard, often in appalling conditions, to deliver our aid overseas. We should especially remember the families of the three British soldiers who were killed in Bosnia at the weekend while going about their duty of implementing our foreign policy.

Emergency aid is only a small part of the overall programme. Contrary to the wording of the motion, there have been some marked falls in relative poverty around the world over the past 30 years. Life expectancy in the poorest countries has increased by more than 12 years. Infant mortality rates, such as in India where they have halved, have fallen steeply. There are still huge variations however, as some countries progress and others do not. That is why we target aid to the places where it is most needed.

In June 1994, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development praised the quality and effectiveness of our aid. Two thirds of our development aid goes to the poorest countries in the world. British aid works at all levels. In the local community, we target poverty reduction projects, often in support of a local non-governmental organisation. We often work with Governments to help improve standards in, for example, health or education provision. We use aid, too, to help speed up a broader policy of institutional reforms in promoting, for example, good government and sensible public expenditure. We have written off more than £1.2 billion-worth of debt, and led the way in implementing the Trinidad terms.

Most crucially, we recognise the vital importance to developing countries of free trade. Trade brings in three times as much foreign exchange to developing countries as does aid. The United Kingdom provides half of all the European Union's private investment, and it is the third largest investor in the world, after the United States of America and Japan.

Our aid programme is wide and effective. The Opposition motion says that our multilateral aid is suffering because of our bilateral contribution. In the current year, our multilateral contributions have exceeded our bilateral aid for the first time. Although an appropriate balance should be struck, it is clearly important that the money should be well spent, so I hope that, when my right hon. Friend the Minister winds up, he will say a little about the checks and balances that we can exercise in Brussels to ensure that that is so.

We all want multilateral spending to be as effectively delivered as is our own bilateral spending, and we want the United Kingdom to get proper credit for the contributions that it makes through the European Union, for example, which is not always the case now.

I am sorry to refer again to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon, but in conclusion I can do no better than quote what she said at the end of her speech on 19 June:

"this evening I urge hon. Members to discard the rag-bag of items proposed by Opposition spokesmen and to give the Government's amendment their whole-hearted support".—[*Official Report*, 19 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. 110.]

9.15 pm

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) made a powerful case from the Dispatch Box. She made the moral case for aid, but I am afraid that I do not share her optimism about the moral sensitivities of Tory Ministers, so I intend to make the practical self-interested case for aid.

I begin by emphasising that it is important to put all the issues connected with aid and development in the wider economic context. That is why I welcome the fact that the Government motion refers to their work on debt.

The first point to be made about aid is that it is quite wrong to present it, as many Conservative Members do, as though it were merely a question of charity and of handouts to undeserving black and brown people. The fact about the flows of money between Britain, the European Union, America and the third world is that more money flows from Africa, India and the rest of the third world in debt repayments than flows to them in aid.

If we put aid, especially the vexed question of debt repayment, in the wider economic context, we can see it more clearly. As there is a brief mention of debt in the Government's motion, we must not forget how the debt was incurred.

The history of the debt crisis of the 1970s and 1980s is a fantastic tale of the agents of international banks criss-crossing the third world urging dictators to take on debts. Much of the money never touched the borders of the countries that ostensibly borrowed it. Instead, it was safely stashed away in Swiss banks. Much of it was spent on arms, and most of it never trickled down to the people of the countries concerned, in whose name the debts were incurred.

*[Ms Diane Abbott]*

There is something very cruel and unfair in the fact that, as we approach the millennium, the people of some of the poorest countries in the world are toiling to pay the interest on the interest of debts incurred in their name by long-past military dictators.

The Government speak of their record on debt, and Opposition Members commend them for their efforts in relation to the Trinidad terms and in trying to change the way in which the World bank looks on debt, but, sadly, past efforts at debt reduction have focused on two categories of country—countries such as Mexico and the Philippines, where it was politically convenient for the United States to forgive debt, or the very poorest countries.

There are, however, many so-called middle-income countries, such as many of the nations of the Caribbean, with social conditions that would require the Government to consider debt reduction for them much more seriously than they have hitherto. The Trinidad terms were worthwhile, as they did not involve huge sums of money, but they only began to chip at the weight of debt—even for the poorest countries—and they did not help the deserving populations in many so-called middle-income debtors.

If the issue of aid is to be viewed properly, it must be considered in the context of this country's work on debt reduction and its role in the International Monetary Fund and the World bank. A review of the terms of some of the structural adjustment programmes that we are forcing on third-world countries is long overdue, as the record of such programmes is not wholly good. In many countries that have had structural adjustment forced on them by the IMF and World bank, living standards, education and basic health care available to ordinary people worsened in the 1980s.

Sadly, in recent years we have witnessed the redirection of flows in aid and other multilateral assistance from the poorest countries in Africa to eastern Europe. Opposition Members want, of course, help to go to eastern Europe, but not at the expense of the very poorest peoples of the world. At this point, I wish to echo what was said by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) about the Commonwealth preference. Many people were sad to hear that there is a possibility that the ODA will cut aid to any part of the world, but in particular to the Caribbean.

I travel regularly to the Caribbean, particularly to Jamaica, where my family comes from. It is sad that although people in Jamaica and the Caribbean hold the Commonwealth link in the highest esteem, Ministers speak of it in the Chamber in a cavalier way. Countries all over the world have Chambers that are replicas of this one, and one can step out of the tropical sunlight into such a replica. Those countries hold the British and Commonwealth link in the highest regard, yet daily people see Ministers turn away from the Commonwealth. I think that there is a case for a Commonwealth preference in relation to aid.

I feel most strongly about the Caribbean. It is all very well for Ministers to look at the totality of GDP figures in the Caribbean, but the figures mask the increasing poverty and decline in basic social services in health and education. The sugar and banana industries in the Caribbean have collapsed following the impact of Lomé, and the ill-effects of the north American free trade agreement have meant that trade that might have gone from America to the Caribbean is now going to the NAFTA counties.

What do the Government think the consequence will be of their cuts in aid to the Caribbean? I can tell them that it will not be an increase in self-reliance. Rural labour will not be getting on their bikes. The consequence will be an increase in the drugs trade. Where traditional agriculture has collapsed in the Caribbean, it has been replaced by the illegal drugs trade. There is no point in Ministers talking about a war on drugs while the Foreign Office and the ODA pursue policies designed to create the economic conditions in which the drug trade flourishes.

There are historic links between this country and the Caribbean. Many people from the Caribbean fought for this country in the war or helped the war effort, and there is a large Caribbean community here. There is an ever-growing drugs menace in the Caribbean, and the Government should think seriously before cutting the already low level of aid to the Caribbean.

I have spent today in the Committee considering the Asylum and Immigration Bill, and I do not wish to bring the details of that Bill into tonight's debate, but in the context of immigration and asylum we hear over and over again about the waves of economic refugees and how the continents of the world are being criss-crossed by refugees driven by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—war, famine, poverty and pestilence. What is the point of introducing increasingly punitive and criminalising measures against economic refugees if our aid programme does not address the causes of economic refugees? I am not saying that it is practical at this point for Britain to open its doors to economic refugees, but it is heartless and impractical not to aim aid and development work at dealing with the causes of economic refugees. Our aid should be directed at some of those countries to help development and growth.

Conservative Members have the idea that a practical approach to aid means misusing aid as a form of soft loan for arms deals and dubious construction projects. That is wholly impractical. Aid should be used to promote growth and development, which is the only effective check on the waves of economic refugees. Surely nobody seriously believes that people leave Africa, the Indian sub-continent and other parts of the third world to sit in damp council flats in Hackney and live on benefits. They leave because they are driven to do so by poverty.

Our aid programme should not be directed to help arms dealers: it should be directed to the relief of poverty. The aid programme should not be abused in other ways. It is bizarre that Dominica is getting extra aid—alone in the Caribbean—because it is willing to take a refugee who is inconvenient to the British Government. That is another abuse of the aid programme.

Although the Prime Minister claimed in the Queen's Speech that the commitment to overseas aid would be maintained, ever since the Conservatives came to power investment in aid has gone down and down. There is not just a moral case for aid but a present-day, economic, internationally self-interested case for aid to cement the strong relationships with Commonwealth countries, such as those in the Caribbean. We should continue to deliver an aid programme that is in the interests not of construction companies or arms dealers but of the poorest people in the world who need relief from poverty.

9.26 pm

**Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on his speech. He said much that I would have wished to say, so I need not repeat it. I strongly support the Government motion. I shall speak briefly about three aspects of aid—poverty and suffering, multilateral aid and increasing the poverty focus.

On the question of poverty and suffering, I wish to draw attention to the worldwide premature abandonment of the high profile accorded to the problem of acquired immune deficiency syndrome over the past few years. That work has not been mentioned in the debate so far, but it is crucial. Human immune deficiency virus rates are stabilising in some parts of the world, but the epidemic is continuing to spread at an alarming rate.

Many countries with weak health and social systems are finding it virtually impossible to cope with the growing numbers of people falling ill. In certain African cities, the rate of HIV infection is as high as one in three adults. In rural Zambia, mortality among hospital nurses had soared from 2 per cent. in 1980 to almost 27 per cent. by 1991.

There have been many successful interventions by the world community, and Britain—I am proud to say—has been in the forefront. Where funds have been invested in community activities in the past three years—for example, in parts of Tanzania and Thailand—there have been impressive successes in slowing the rate of growth of the HIV epidemic.

There have also been large-scale changes in sexual behaviour, which 10 years ago people said was quite impossible. There has been a clear-cut decline in conventional sexually transmitted diseases from north-west Europe to Thailand and from Costa Rica to Zimbabwe.

There are still many concerns. I hope that the future focus of the Overseas Development Administration budget will not affect programmes aimed at preventing the spread of HIV at a time when the epidemic is continuing to spread at an alarming rate. It is important to remember that, while 93 per cent. of the people with AIDS live in developing countries, only 8 per cent. of HIV and AIDS funding is allocated to those regions. It is also important to remember that the World Health Organisation has estimated that up to $3 billion is needed every year for basic prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases in developing countries, yet only 10 per cent. of those funds is currently available.

British international trade is of prime importance when considering the aid programme, and private flows simply cannot be ignored. They complement Government donations—taxpayers' donations—and the contributions of non-governmental organisations.

I sometimes wonder what my constituents in Salisbury would make of the debate, which has been esoteric to say the least, when what they understand to be meant by overseas aid is the sort of charities for which they work so hard—for example, Oxfam, which has such a strong base in our communities.

What on earth do our young people think when they hear us rabbiting on as we have been tonight? Their idealism is unmatched anywhere in the world, as far as I can tell. It is undiminished in the younger generation, compared with how we felt 20, 25 or 30 years ago. What do they think when we are not talking about how they can get involved?

We have to face some difficult problems. Humanitarian emergency aid is one. I know of no one, whatever his or her political leaning, who wants to cut that—it is accepted by everyone. However, most people understand the aid programme to be poverty focused aid—water and food, usually in Africa and perhaps in India and Pakistan. What about India and Pakistan? Are we really talking about the British taxpayer supporting the poorest people in those countries, when, at the other end of the economic scale, they have the capacity to develop nuclear industries?

I was interested to receive press releases from the Overseas Development Administration in October and December. Of Shanghai, I read:

"Rapid development is taking place."

The ODA also says that

"Shanghai is China's biggest municipality and industrial centre, supporting heavy and light industry as well as township and village enterprises."

So why is our aid programme providing £2.8 million

"to help combat industrial pollution and improve the municipal water supply"?

Similarly, I do not think that my constituents understand why the overseas aid programme is spending £8.4 million on the new international airport that is being built south of Nanjing. It is not as if the Chinese do not have an airport in that province—they have, but they do not think that it is big enough.

Of course, the Government must promote British interests and support British companies overseas, but those are important issues and they raise questions about the aid framework and particularly about aid and trade provision. I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State that the time has come for more scrutiny of the provisions—for example, the concessional financing arrangements—which would benefit our aid programme. I am not arguing that such arrangements should not be made, but they are misunderstood and a stronger case can be made for them.

On 13 February, a further concessional financing arrangement will be signed between the United Kingdom and China, which will double that arrangement. That is the sort of thing that we should tackle.

Finally, on multilateral aid, it was a pleasure to be criticised by the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) for being ignorant—I then realised that I must be on the right track. Her comments were somewhat premature, however. It is true that I do not boast about my knowledge as shamelessly or as often as she does, but I yield to no one in my support of UK overseas aid, not just as parliamentary private secretary to Chris Patten, but for many years before that as a supporter of the Project Trust and of GAP activity projects, which introduced hundreds of young people to the developing world. In multilateral aid we have a new weapon that we can use to our advantage and to that of others.

I must say a few words on the importance of the southern flank of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and how that is relevant to overseas aid—*[Interruption.]* It will take only a couple of minutes. I am sorry if the

*[Mr. Robert Key]*

hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is angry with me, but there have been some lengthy speeches by Opposition Members.

There is no doubt that poverty on the southern side of the Mediterranean is of direct significance to what is happening on the northern side. There is instability. We see the state military threat from north Africa as being small and the terrorist threat as being real, but we must concentrate on tackling instability in north African countries, using intelligence and technology. It is not simply a matter of addressing Islamic fundamentalism, which becomes a threat only if it harnesses and nourishes people's discontent.

Poverty, and the contrast with what is happening on the other side of the Mediterranean, is becoming increasingly visible through tourism and television. The answer, as with so many other examples of the use of multilateral aid, is to reduce the motive for economic migration. That is where the European Union's aid budget can be of immense assistance and can benefit both them and us. It is a question of trade and investment. Why export jobs from this country and from Europe to the Pacific rim when we can help to create those jobs in countries so much closer to home? That is a good purpose for a multilateral aid budget and I support it. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to persuade the Treasury to continue to keep our aid budget at the highest level that we can afford and justify to our constituents.

9.35 pm

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Thanks to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), accompanied by my hon. Friends the Members for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) and by the hon. Members for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) and for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) and I were able to go to Nepal. May we have some formal statement on the future of the valuable agricultural research station at Lumle, about which the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling and I met Lady Chalker? Its value is that it does urgent practical research into local crops in one of the poorest countries in the world. The scientists who took us round said, movingly, that they were really helping their people.

We have an obligation to a small group of people, the people of the Pitcairn islands, to establish whether it is true, as suggested in the serious Japanese press and confirmed this evening by some Japanese, led by the ambassador, who were in the House, that there has been serious leakage from Mururoa. We are obliged at least to establish whether the people on Pitcairn, who clearly cannot do anything for themselves, are in danger.

9.37 pm

**Mr. George Foulkes** (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am not sure what debate the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) has been sitting through or, indeed, whether he has sat through the debate. Far from being esoteric, it has been valuable and lively. As the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) said, it was opened with great sincerity by my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor). She was followed by the Minister, who spoke with some urbanity, with his carefully crafted soundbite about "the substantial aid programme of which we can be proud". We have had that on a number of occasions and no doubt we shall hear it again. Although the journalists and spin doctors tell me that this is the age of the soundbite, I do not think that soundbites can hide the truth.

The Minister attempted, with, as I said, some urbanity to justify something that I do not think that he really believes in. The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) made it clear that some Conservative Members do not believe what was said by the Minister. Some of them must oppose, as we do, the hypocrisy peddled by a Government who are seeking to hold on to the trappings of power. They say one thing and they do another. They say that there is a substantial aid programme of which they can be proud, but they preside over cut after cut. The Deputy Prime Minister cannot take that—he cannot stand people picking up the sort of soundbites that he uses and throwing them back at him.

Successive Governments' commitment to the developing world may not be seen by some as a crucial campaigning issue. Some people may think that the issue does not win elections, but that they are won on issues such as health, education and law and order. But are we politicians who care deeply about development as far removed from the public on this issue as some people would have us believe? My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles quoted a Harris poll in which 81 per cent. of those questioned agreed that it was important that the British Government—not just voluntary organisations or private sources—provide aid to the developing world, and 79 per cent. thought that Britain should increase the amount currently given. When will Ministers realise that the cuts that they regularly and meekly concede when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury calls them into his office are not supported by three quarters of the population?

The pride that the Minister keeps mentioning is nothing but rhetoric. The Government constantly say one thing and do another. The most recent Budget was a prime example. The ODA issued a public statement. Press releases quoted earlier said that the aid programme was to be increased. That was not true. The independent House of Commons Library analysed the figures, which show that, in both cash and real terms, the aid budget will fall this year. The Government say one thing but do another time and again.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles said, even the Department's fundamental expenditure review estimates that Britain's aid as a percentage of gross national product will fall to 0.26 per cent. by 1997. When Labour left office in 1979, it was 0.52 per cent. and rising; now it is 0.3 per cent. and falling. Instead of vacillating and undermining multilateral assistance, Ministers would do better to spend their time opposing the cuts and the loss of British influence throughout the world caused by reductions in the World Service and in funding to the British Council. Above all, they should look at the fundamental expenditure review and oppose the cuts and the removal of British influence in the Caribbean, Latin America, south-east Asia and the Pacific. Guyana, Haiti and Vietnam have low per capita incomes and need assistance.

We heard the Minister's weasel words about the Caribbean. I hope that he will say something more positive about the Caribbean when he replies to the

debate. He shrugged off the importance of the Commonwealth. I hope that, when he replies, he will answer the points made about it.

The Minister should not kowtow to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I hope that he will give a pledge tonight that, because of what Opposition Members and some Conservative Members have said in the debate, he will press the Chief Secretary for a substantial and effective aid programme so that his deeds can match his words. It would be an easier task if the Minister were directly involved in the decision making instead of getting the crumbs handed down from the Cabinet table.

When Labour takes power, the ODA will be transformed into a Department of international development, with its Secretary of State in the Cabinet, speaking up for the overseas aid budget. A Cabinet Committee will bring together Ministers from the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Department for Education and Employment and other Departments, to utilise their expertise in the developing world. A Select Committee will monitor our work, and a new vision and fresh impetus will be given to the Cinderella Department that exists under the present Government.

I do not deny that some aspects of the fundamental expenditure review, which will be debated in more detail once the House has received a report on it, are to be welcomed. Incidentally, some hon. Members may have seen tonight's programme on Carlton television about Humana. It was an excellent investigation into that organisation, but I hope that people will not judge the other excellent non-governmental organisations involved in overseas aid by one bad organisation. We want consultation with NGOs and an increased ODA role in multilateral institutions. There are things to be supported in the FER, but all of them are used as a smokescreen to camouflage the cuts that are the essential element of the document.

The withdrawal of aid from some of the poorest countries in the Caribbean and Latin America and the abandonment of some Commonwealth partners and of the dependent territories—colonies that have no place to look to other than the United Kingdom, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said—are an appalling indictment of the Government.

The budget has been decimated by the present Government. Before any Tory placemen rise to their feet proving Pavlov to be correct, let me reaffirm what my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles said earlier. She said:

"In their first year of office, a Labour Government will start to reverse"

the decline in overseas aid expenditure. It does not come much clearer than that. Even the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), if he were listening, should be able to understand that.

Justification for the Government's continuing reduction in the aid programme was given by the Minister on Monday and again today. We heard about reductions in other countries' expenditure—the United States and Italy are repeatedly mentioned—but countries such as Japan are substantially increasing their programme. Taiwan is becoming a major aid donor. Let us forget the irrelevant comparisons. We should be standing proud in relation to our role in the world.

The Minister's plea, in mitigation, that a tight spending round hurt everyone this year is pretty pathetic—he said that hard choices had to be made—considering the need in the third world. One person in four lives in absolute poverty; basic social services are denied to more than 1 billion people; 130 million primary school age children are not at school. Every day, 35,000 children die of preventable diseases—diseases that might be prevented with more help from countries such as Britain. The magnitude of the need is frightening, and is ignored by Conservative Ministers.

The Government, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington said, have even failed by their own standard, by their own claim, by their own natural instincts to look after themselves, to consider the political and commercial advantages to Britain in increasing the aid programme. The size and expertise of the aid programme have helped Britain to maintain an influence in the United Nations, in the G7 and in the World bank that is not justified simply by the size of our global responsibilities. We need to continue to have a global aid programme, to justify our participation in those institutions.

Looking beyond the short-termism of the present Government, aid to the developing world can save the Chancellor money. A better environment is created for trade and investment by increasing prosperity and stability in the developing world. Aid generates income for many British organisations. Do not Ministers read the advice of their experts, as expressed in the FER?

I want to give the Minister time to reply, so I shall leave out some of the things that I intended to say. No doubt I shall have opportunities to return to them. I shall say, finally, what we shall do after the next election.

Labour will set out its agenda in full during the summer. We shall produce an agenda for the future—a set of policies that will revitalise an area regarding which we have in Britain the ability, the expertise and the resources to help the developing world. The agenda will be rooted in traditional Labour ideals—fairness, rights, responsibilities and the idea of society and community, which is as relevant abroad as it is in the United Kingdom.

We recognise the enormity of that task. In the past 16 years, Conservative Governments have decimated our aid programme. Labour recognises the importance of our aid programme to the populations of the developing world, to us at home and to Britain on the world stage. Conservative Governments have failed in their moral duty to the developing world and in their obligations to Britain.

The next Labour Government will bring with them the moral values and the political agenda to tackle poverty in the developing world and to place Britain, once again, at the heart of the international community.

9.49 pm

**Mr. Hanley:** With the leave of the House. I am grateful for the courtesy that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) has shown in allowing me time to respond to some of the points that were raised during the debate.

I believe that it has been a very good and useful debate, and I am pleased to see the high level of interest that hon. Members on both sides of the House have shown about the aid programme. The subject is certainly worthy of

*[Mr. Hanley]*

debate and there is considerable public support for that programme. That is why the Government devote a high level of public spending to the official aid programme, which is several times greater than the total contribution of all the non-governmental organisations. Hon. Members' remarks during the debate confirmed their support and high regard for the official aid programme.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) said in his excellent contribution, the Opposition seem to have shed their original commitment to raise the aid programme budget to 0.7 per cent. of gross national product in the space of a Parliament—unless the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley will reaffirm that commitment now.

**Mr. Foulkes** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Hanley:** The hon. Gentleman says one thing and does another. Even after the debate, I am unclear as to the Opposition's position with regard to the size of the aid programme. The hon. Gentleman opposed almost every reduction in that programme, for whatever purpose, but he has offered no real commitments: we hear only high and pious words.

I am pleased that the debate has provided an opportunity to explain the results of the Overseas Development Administration's fundamental expenditure review. It is exactly what we are trying to encourage and I am surprised that some Labour Members found it difficult to understand. I believe that there is support on both sides of the House for what the FER advocates. We all want a strong aid programme; we all want a programme that focuses on the poorest countries, which are not yet able to help themselves. We all want aid to go where it is most needed and where it can do the most good. Would the Opposition reduce our commitment to the poorest countries? Would they give aid to countries where it is not needed?

In answer to the question posed by the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor): yes, we plan to maintain funding of the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF in 1996 at broadly the same levels as in 1995. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to the Lumle research station in Nepal. Her Majesty's Government have supported that research station for nearly 30 years and we are now examining the best way of supporting research into hill agriculture in Nepal in order to maximise the value of the research carried out at Lumle and elsewhere in the hill areas of Nepal.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to our responsibilities for Pitcairn island. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as the most easterly country for which I have some responsibility, I care about Pitcairn and its population of 53. After all, I had a majority of 74 in this place and it is fairly special when one's parliamentary majority is bigger than a country's population. I shall certainly look at the matter that he raised, although initial signs are that the people of Pitcairn are not in danger.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) referred to my comment about our national aid flows and our private sector flows. He said that I cited bogus figures. It is sad that the hon. Gentleman claims that our figures are bogus as soon as we achieve a United Nations target. The UN definition is 1 per cent. and we have exceeded that in total national aid flows and private sector flows. I think that we should be proud of that achievement; it should not be rubbished.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to the progress on the South Africa-European Union agreement and said that it had been slower than he had hoped. I agree—progress has been slower than everyone hoped. We have pressed EU member states about an early resolution of the matter, which was discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council only yesterday. We are hopeful that a timetable can be agreed, with a conclusion reached within the Italian presidency.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to Angola. I can assure him that Britain is working closely with our partners, including the United States, to sustain the peace process in Angola. We provided almost £9 million in emergency aid to Angola last year and we have developed a strategy for supporting the transition to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. I assure the House that we plan to continue our substantial support to Angola.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) said that under the FER, the ODA seems to have dropped its commitment to women. I am happy to reassure the hon. Lady that the redefinition of the ODA's aims in no way reduces the priority that we attach to helping women.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) made his usual excellent speech. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that he is always worth listening to on this subject. I shall draw his speech to the attention of my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on her return from Africa—a country that he knows very well.

I am grateful, too, for the compliments about my right hon. and noble Friend. She does a superb job, and has held that office longer than almost anyone. Her knowledge and commitment are well known throughout the world. It is unfair of the Opposition to say that our commitment to the Commonwealth is somewhat half-hearted. My right hon. and noble Friend is a living example of that commitment.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) mentioned Indonesia. I do not say "as usual", because her beliefs are sincere. She knows that we shall look carefully at her accusations in the light of the National Audit Office report, which is due in the reasonably near future, perhaps in just a few weeks' time.

The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said that Ministers decry and run down the Commonwealth. I can tell her in the politest terms that that is absolute rubbish. I attended the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting in Sri Lanka recently, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and hon. Members on both sides of the House. Anyone who attended that conference knows not only that the Commonwealth is healthy, but that British representatives there—including Ministers—feel that the Commonwealth is extremely important. We value it as a vital and unique worldwide family of nations.

The hon. Lady also mentioned aid to the Caribbean. I understand her special pleading for the Caribbean as she made it absolutely clear. As I said in my opening speech, there are still major needs in the Caribbean and I can assure her that the Caribbean and the wider Commonwealth are close to the Government's heart. She

may rest assured that we shall not turn our back on it when we have assessed the amount of money that goes to that part of the world. The figures will be announced in the reasonably near future.

At the start of the debate, I said that the United Kingdom will continue to maintain a substantial aid programme. It will amount to £2.15 billion next year, more than £2.2 billion in 1997-98 and nearly £2.3 billion in 1998-99. As I have said, the full details will be in the next departmental report.

As I have also said before, bilateral aid next year will be roughly in line with our previously published plans. Africa is likely to receive more than we had previously planned, largely because of reductions in our expenditure forecasts regarding a number of international organisations. For example, the United Kingdom assessed contribution to the European development fund is likely to be £40 million less in 1996-97 than was forecast last year. That means, not that our commitment to those organisations has diminished, but that our contributions are determined by factors such as exchange rates and relative GNP. It also means that we can maintain a high level of bilateral spending, and it demonstrates the Government's determination to maintain a substantial and effective bilateral programme.

As I explained, we get excellent value for money from the £2.2 billion that we spend on aid in one of the world's most effective official programmes. The programme commands widespread public support, yet the Opposition continue to criticise and belittle our achievements instead of taking pride in work that is well done. They tell us to spend more, as they do in every debate that touches on public spending, yet they have failed to make any commitment on spending. Nor have they said where any extra resources would come from. Until they reveal their policy on spending, how can we believe them?

The skills built up in the official programme and by the NGOs are a British success story. Our commitment to a high-quality programme is beyond doubt. It is now stronger and more effective than ever before. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley said that he gave a commitment earlier. If he gave a commitment, he did not mention money. As so often, it was just wind. If the hon. Gentleman would like to fill in the blanks, we should be grateful. In the meantime, we will help the world, and I invite the House to support the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

*Question put,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 270, Noes 310.

**Division No. 40]** **[9.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Robert
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan

Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Ms Ann Coffey.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Galle, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, The Reverend William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin and Mr. Richard Ottaway.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question*, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.

*Resolved,*

That this House acknowledges the United Kingdom's important role in helping reduce poverty and suffering in poorer countries and commends the Government for maintaining a substantial and effective aid programme which is the fifth largest in the world; applauds the Government's intention to maintain a bilateral aid programme next year which will be as large as that which had been previously planned; welcomes the central role the United Kingdom plays in seeking to make multilateral aid more effective; and commends the Government for the increasing poverty focus of the aid programme and for the leading role it has played in seeking a comprehensive solution to the debt burden of the poorest countries.

# Police Grant Report

**Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will note that the Order Paper says that the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments has not considered this report. May I inform the House that we considered it this afternoon, that we found nothing wrong with it and that we therefore have nothing to report?

However, I make the point to business managers on both sides of the House, who expect the Select Committee to scrutinise statutory instruments such as this, that they should wait until we have scrutinised them before they arrange debates in the House, and that the time from 4.30 pm until now would be short if the House expected us to produce a report, and hon. Members to be able to read it. Although on this occasion we have nothing to report, I hope that the business managers will take it into account that that should not happen as a regular practice.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the information that he has imparted to hon. Members through the occupant of the Chair.

10.15 pm

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean):** I beg to move,

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 162), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

It is a matter of great personal satisfaction to be opening this debate on police funding. Once again, I can come to the House and tangibly demonstrate the strength of the Government's commitment to the police service in England and Wales.

Since 1978-79, police strength will have increased by more than 16,000. Civilian strength has increased by more than 17,000. Expenditure has increased from just over £1 billion to £6.8 billion—96 per cent in real terms. Since the last election alone, the number of constables in forces has increased by 1,313, boosting the number of bobbies on the beat.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien** (North Warwickshire): Not in Warwickshire, it has not. We have lost more than 60 officers from our old establishment rate during the current year, and we expect to lose up to 70 officers. Is that a record of which the Minister can be proud? Is he proud of underfunding Warwickshire constabulary by more than £6 million? What does he intend to do about that?

**Mr. Maclean:** The hon. Gentleman will naturally speak out for his constituency and county—that is his job—and he will try and make the best possible fist of it. He must bear in mind, however, that the funding for Warwickshire went up more than 5 per cent. last year, that Warwickshire has a 3.5 per cent. increase in central Government funding this year, and that Warwickshire police can spend up to 3.9 per cent. more this year if they set their budget at the maximum level. At a time when inflation is so low and when officers' pay, which is the biggest component of a police force's expenditure, has increased by only 3 per cent.—civilian pay has increased by even less—an

*[Mr. Maclean]*

increase of almost 4 per cent. for the police in Warwickshire is generous, and it is in line with the national average increase.

**Mr. Barry Jones** (Alyn and Deeside): Page 14 of the report refers to indicators such as long-term unemployment and young male unemployment. I associate those two paragraphs with a problem which exists throughout the land, in every village and town where there are unemployed young men who create a nuisance, harassing older citizens and people in small village shops. Does the report contain any hope for us in tackling that real problem?

**Mr. Maclean:** If I have got the hon. Gentleman's county correct, he represents the North Wales police force area, which this year received a 5.1 per cent. increase, or certainly its budget can increase by 5.1 per cent. Not many other sectors of Government or local government can increase their expenditure by that amount this year. I must make the point again that police civilian pay is increasing by 2.5 per cent. and uniformed bobby pay by 3 per cent., and the average increase in police pay is about 2.8 per cent. For a police force that receives 5.1 per cent. more, that is a considerable advantage.

**Mr. Patrick Thompson** (Norwich, North): Before my right hon. Friend gets away from the initial figures that he was giving, will he confirm that the considerable extra money for Norfolk—some £286,000—has made it possible for the Norfolk police authority considerably to increase the number of policemen? Will he also congratulate the chief constable of the Norfolk constabulary on the excellent work being done there and on the reputation that the constabulary is building up in the local area?

**Mr. Maclean:** Of course I congratulate Norfolk. One has only to look at its latest crime figures to see the tremendous success that the chief constable and all his officers have achieved. Of course Norfolk will have an extra 6 per cent. this year to build on that considerable success.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Maclean:** I would happily stay here all night to take interventions because it is good news from the Government's point of view. I would talk until 2 am if time allowed, but I am conscious that other hon. Members wish to speak.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Minister referred to the extra money for the North Wales police. There was an extra £200,000 revenue, but is the Minister aware—he should be—that capital has been decreased from £1.596 million to £1.33 million for the coming year? That means, in effect, that there will be no extra policemen on the beat and that any extra expenditure on capital will have to come from revenue. In fairness to the Minister, he responded positively on the revenue side, but that has been negated on the capital side.

**Mr. Maclean:** Not at all—I shall be coming to that point. I should make it clear, however, that there is no linkage between revenue and capital. I should think that the hon. Gentleman's electors and constituents in the North Wales police area would be rather upset if they found that money was being switched from the funding of bobbies to capital expenditure, particularly since we have protected all major capital works and are encouraging the private finance initiative. I shall come to that in a couple of minutes, if I can make some progress.

I was reminding the House that since the last general election the number of constables has increased by 1,313. They are bobbies on the beat, not bobbies behind desks. In relation to the settlement, a total of £6.8 billion will be available for policing next year, which includes £200 million for capital expenditure. That is an increase of £240 million, or nearly 4 per cent. That increase underlines our commitment to law and order and to tackling crime, and it ensures that the police service can sustain the momentum of its recent successes.

As the Association of Chief Police Officers said in its press release welcoming the settlement last November,

"a settlement that is above the rate of inflation shows that the Government recognises the special needs of the police service."

There is an extra £100 million in the settlement for police pay, which is a 3 per cent. increase on the police pay bill of £3.4 billion. There is an extra £80 million for police pensions, and £60 million more for civilian pay and other price increases. As for capital, we shall be supporting total capital expenditure of £228 million in 1996-97. That will maintain all specific police building projects, just as ACPO wanted.

Some have suggested that the funding that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced for 5,000 extra police officers during the next three years is at the expense of capital funding. There is no such linkage. There will be no enforced cuts in the programme for major building projects. There is no reason why the funding available for extra police officers should be used for capital spending. In fact, police authorities now have the opportunity to extend their capital programmes through the private finance initiative.

The fundamental objective of the PFI is to secure the best possible use of capital resources at best value for the public sector—in this case, for the police service. The public sector does not have a monopoly of knowledge. In many situations, the private sector will have skills and expertise that can help to deliver better deals for the police. Capital resources for the police come in many forms: building, plant, vehicles, equipment and computer software, for example. We want the police to explore the new opportunity that the PFI can offer in making them more efficient and effective.

The private finance initiative is not a substitute for conventional capital spending. It is an exciting new opportunity for the police to enhance, and indeed extend, their capital resources. For example, Derbyshire is inviting private sector proposals to build, design, finance and operate a replacement police station and I congratulate it on that initiative.

**Mr. Don Touhig** (Islwyn): The Minister wrote to me in November advising me that an extra £2.5 million was to be made available to the Gwent police force this year. He has assured the House this evening that capital will not be put at risk as a result of that settlement. What extra provision is being made for the Gwent police force to take

over the buildings in the Rhymney valley—I understand that the Minister is aware that they are in a seriously deficient state—and bring them up to scratch?

**Mr. Maclean:** The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the £2.5 million in capital that we have been able to allocate. I had an excellent meeting with Gwent police authority recently and we discussed the matter to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I am very conscious of the state of the buildings that it has taken over from the South Wales police force. I was able to give the assurance that if—and it has to be if—we have surplus capital resources, I will consider the buildings in Gwent to be among our top priorities. I said that I would do my utmost to find extra capital for the force if it were at all possible.

We also discussed the private finance initiative and looked at the possibilities for Gwent. One particular possibility is in Ystrad—

**Mr. Touhig:** Ystrad Mynach.

**Mr. Maclean:** Ystrad Mynach. Some Celts cannot pronounce other Celtic languages. We have offered Gwent police authority help and assistance. If we can help and advise it to put together a private finance initiative, we shall be delighted to do so.

I know that other police authorities are considering a whole range of projects, from major headquarters, to operational buildings such as police stations, to specialist facilities such as firearms training. They will give the private sector the flexibility to design solutions in response to forces' own needs. That in turn will provide forces with increased scope for value for money.

**Mr. George Walden** (Buckingham): My right hon. Friend and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary have taken a close interest in the affairs of the Thames Valley force, and all its problems, including pensions. I am therefore extremely grateful—as I think are my colleagues in Buckinghamshire—for the resolution of those problems and for the overall 4.8 per cent increase. No one can complain about that. However, I am going to complain. Could my right hon. Friend possibly see his way to giving a further boost to secure accommodation for under-age criminals, who are causing—even in remote and idyllic parts of north Buckinghamshire—

**Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): It is not unique to that county.

**Mr. Walden:** Precisely. Those under-age criminals are causing disproportionate damage. If, in a very humane and educational way, they could be shut away, crime would go down—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. That is a disproportionately long intervention. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is winding up.

**Mr. Walden:** If they were shut away, my right hon. Friend would be able to get away next time with less than a 4.8 per cent. increase.

**Mr. Maclean:** I give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. We are pushing two strands of extra secure accommodation for young offenders—through the local authority route and through secure training centres.

I announced at the start of the debate that £6.8 billion would be available for policing in 1996-97. The distribution of funding between individual police authorities is naturally of great interest to the House and to the public, so I shall explain briefly how it is done.

The bulk of the funding is allocated according to the new needs-based formula, which was introduced for the first time last year. The police service and the Audit Commission have long argued for an objective approach to funding. The formula is aimed at producing such an approach. We are committed to its development.

The formula uses independent demographic statistics to predict each force's relative needs for resources. Hon. Members will be only too aware of the concerns which last year accompanied the introduction of the formula. As I promised then, we have worked hard to improve the formula. Independent consultants from Price Waterhouse audited the formula and concluded that it was technically sound, but that further work was needed on a number of aspects. That has been done by a Home Office-led group of police service and police authority representatives. Not all the work has been concluded, but we have still been able to make changes to the formula for 1996-97.

The formula's establishment element has been reduced from 50 per cent. to 40 per cent. We always intended that establishments should be in the formula only on a transitional basis, and we shall continue to remove establishments from the formula at whatever rate proves to be compatible with the ability to keep stability in policing.

We recognised last year's widespread concerns about provision for police pensions, so we did two things. First, we got police authority representatives to help us to estimate what pensions expenditure would be in 1996-97. The prediction was £800 million—£80 million more than authorities are spending this year—so we put an extra £80 million into the police settlement for pensions next year. Secondly, we changed the funding formula. Now the whole £800 million—about 12.3 per cent. of total police funding—is allocated according to forces' pension needs. Those needs are estimated by the Government Actuary's department, so while we were about it we got some police forces to provide new pensions data to help us to improve the Government Actuary's pensions model. Now we are asking all forces to help us, so that next year we can make the pensions model better still. That raft of improvements in the treatment of pensions expenditure has substantially enhanced the police funding formula's transparency and acceptability.

We have also introduced a sparsity factor, according to which we shall allocate 0.5 per cent. of available funding. For next year it has been done on a judgmental basis similar to that which occurs with other funding formulae such as the education standard spending assessment. The results of research in that area are not conclusive.

**Mr. David Faber** (Westbury): My right hon. Friend mentioned the problems and the concerns that were expressed when the funding formula was introduced last year. I hope that he will accept the grateful thanks of my constituents in Wiltshire, because we have seen a generous rise in the police grant this year compared with

*[Mr. David Faber]*

last year, but will he continue to pay careful attention to the factor for rural sparsity, which adversely affects counties such as mine?

**Mr. Maclean:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The argument of rural forces, that there are particular costs involved in policing their areas, is persuasive. Clearly there are much greater distances to travel, fuel consumption is greater, tyre costs are higher—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but they show their ignorance of police operating practices if they scoff at such ideas, considering that—*[Interruption.]* I shall happily come back to the House on the point if my figures are incorrect, but I believe that police tyre costs in one year run to £20 million, a not insubstantial sum.

The committee of local police authorities has already said that it welcomes and supports the decision on rural sparsity. Further development work will continue in 1996, and our working group of police service and police authority representatives has already met. I shall wait to hear its proposals, but I expect that we shall consider a programme including the examination of new data on police work and pensions, and will want to investigate further the costs of community relations, traffic policing and operating in rural and urban areas.

Outside the formula, an additional rule ensures that all forces—except the Metropolitan police, for which other arrangements have been made—can receive at least 3 per cent. more funding next year than this year. That rule derives from our belief that it is important to maintain public confidence in policing. In particular, we consider it important for public confidence that police authorities should be seen as able to provide at least the same service in 1996-97 as they did last year. At a time when police authority pay bills are 3 per cent.—the percentage is lower for civilian staff—the 3 per cent. rule reassures the public that their policing service will be maintained.

I have already reminded hon. Members of the commitment made by the Prime Minister to provide funding for 5,000 extra police officers over the next three years. To describe that, there are no words better than those of the chairman of the Police Federation, who said that it was

"a tremendous boost to the service".

In 1996-97 forces will receive the first block of that funding—£20 million. That will help them to meet their key objective of providing high visibility policing. How they do it will be for them to decide, but in whichever way it is done, police forces will be able to ensure that they are more visible to the public whom they serve. That public is therefore the basis for allocating the funding. The resident and daytime populations of each force area determine that force's share of the £20 million. This is the additional rule No. 2 set out in the police grant report.

**Dr. John Marek** (Wrexham): To return to the North Wales force, is it true that the increase in the money available for extra policemen and women in the coming year will exactly match the decline in real terms in the police grant available for capital purposes? Is the Minister not robbing Peter to pay Paul? Does he agree that there is no point in having extra policemen if they are not given the funding to do the job properly?

**Mr. Maclean:** I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman, who has shown uncustomary ignorance about what I said a moment ago about the private finance initiative. There is no need for the North Wales police force to reduce its capital expenditure in the future if it uses the PFI. Other police forces are exploring that option, which will allow forces to have more buildings and more money to spend on capital projects. We must break out—as other areas of Government are doing—from the notion that unless the Government provide every penny of capital, then no other source of capital expenditure is available.

In revenue terms, the North Wales police force has received 5 per cent. this year—way above the national average for police funding. I suspect that that puts that force in the top quarter of all forces in terms of funding, and that is very generous. Hon Members from the North Wales police force area have no cause for complaint about the settlement in their area.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire) *rose—*

**Mr. Maclean:** Nor have hon. Members from Derbyshire any cause for complaint, as the settlement for that area was more than 4 per cent.

**Mr. Barnes:** Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Mr. Maclean:** No. Hon Members will have a chance to make their own speeches, and I wish to conclude in a moment.

The three elements that I have mentioned—the needs-based formula, the 3 per cent. rule and the extra officers rule—determine the allocations of police grant. The same needs-based formula determines the police standard spending assessment for each force. Police forces also receive a capital financing SSA and, where appropriate, an SSA reduction grant.

I stress that these are methods for carving up the total available funding, and are not prescriptions for the way in which funding must be spent in each force. That is quite rightly to be decided locally, and the granting of that local discretion was one of the key reforms in the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. We have no intention now of trying to intervene to change that.

I have set out tonight an excellent settlement for the police service and a fair distribution of that settlement between the 43 police forces in England and Wales. Let me remind the House what we have done. We have allocated 4 per cent. more money, and forces will get at least 3 per cent. more—some will get much more than that. Forces will be able to recruit at least 1,000 more constables to add to the 900 constables that they have recruited this year. We have listened to criticisms of the funding formula and we have acted. There is more for pensions, rural sparsity has been taken into account and the out-dated establishment factor has been reduced.

We have made progress since last year, and we will make more next year. But I believe that the report will give us in 1996-97 a police service that is both well and fairly funded. That should be a cause for satisfaction on both sides of the House, because it falls to the police service to make the bravest and most crucial contribution to the task of turning the tables on the criminal. I command—or rather, I commend the report to the House.

10.38 pm

**Mr. Alun Michael** (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I am sure that the Minister of State would like to command this House—he has a remarkable talent for making complacency sound dramatic. He said that the chairman of the Police Federation welcomed the promise of 5,000 extra policemen. Indeed he did, but that was before the Police Federation looked at the detail. I wonder whether the Minister will take so seriously the comments that the Police Federation has made since it looked in detail at the settlement. The federation is very doubtful about the reality of that promise and it is right to be suspicious, as the Government have reneged on their promise at the 1992 general election to increase the number of police officers by 1,000. Indeed, by September 1995, the number of police officers had gone down by 470 compared with the figure in March 1992.

When the Government have failed signally to deliver the promise that they made at the last general election, is it any surprise that there is some suspicion when they say that they are going to deliver a promise of 5,000 additional police officers?

**Mr. Walter Sweeney** (Vale of Glamorgan): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the failure of the South Wales police authority, which is controlled by three local, Labour-controlled county councils, was the real reason for the failure to fund the police in his constituency and in mine? Since the Home Office has given money direct to the police, we have had proper funding—an increase of about 19 per cent. in the past two years.

**Mr. Michael:** It is nice of the hon. Gentleman to wander in and make that convoluted and inaccurate contribution. The problem with the funding of the South Wales police, as he knows, was the failure of the Welsh Office to deliver its share of the money and, indeed, its determined hiding of the standard spending assessment for the police—a matter that he knows full well was raised in the House on numerous occasions. The hon. Gentleman represents the party that damaged the police in his constituency and in mine.

I have some sympathy with the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, which had to consider the document so quickly. As was pointed out—last year, as well as this year—the document was published yesterday, which is surely not an aid to considered debate in the House.

I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) about the impact of social factors and unemployment on crime, and I shall return to that issue and its element within the formula.

The formula is not as perfect as the Minister of State made out. I thought that I heard him say that he would make whatever changes were necessary to achieve or maintain stability. The difficulty is getting a fair formula that is also stable over time. He was right to highlight the importance of the pensions element in the formula. I hope that that was a sign that he will move in the way that police authorities have requested and make that element accurate and transparent. It is an enormous burden on police authorities and it distorts all the figures year after year.

I also hope that there will be cross-party unity on police funding. The Minister has shown that he has the capacity to achieve that, for example, in relation to the Gwent and South Wales police and in the debates on the Offensive Weapons Bill and the Security Service Bill.

The fact that we have been given inaccurate information on the number of police is a great disappointment. The Minister was selective when he told us that there were 1,313 more constables, because the total number of police officers has decreased. The Government's claims about what they are doing in relation to the police contain two fraudulent elements: first, that they have increased the number of police officers; and, secondly, that they have given £20 million in new money to assist with the recruitment and employment of new officers.

At the time of the Budget, the Home Secretary claimed that he had increased the revenue cash by £20 million, but he had cut by almost £24 million the capital cash projected within the Home Office's plans—a classic case of robbing Peter to pay Peter less. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I disagree. It is not funny; it is serious. The taking of money from the capital funds of police authorities will cause problems now and in the future.

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice** (Lewisham, East): On that point, my hon. Friend is aware that a new police station was due to be built in Lewisham—amid some controversy, but nevertheless it was to be built in 1997. He may not be aware that the assistant commissioner, Ian Johnstone, has told us that there has been a reduction in the resources available for capital expenditure and that the police station will not be built before 1999 at the very earliest. Does that not confirm my hon. Friend's views on the changes between capital and revenue expenditure?

**Mr. Michael:** Yes—that and the inability to undertake capital maintenance or introduce new technology, which, as we have pointed out a number of times, is essential in increasing the efficiency of the police service and the effectiveness with which officers are deployed on our streets. Although capital finances do not seem to be immediately important, they have an impact on the ability of the police to deliver a quality service to the public.

The total number of police officers decreased—the situation is even worse if we consider the number available for ordinary duty—between 31 March 1992 and 30 September 1995 by 860 in England and Wales.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** How many?

**Mr. Michael:** I shall repeat the number for the benefit of my hon. Friend. The number has fallen by 860. When one considers that the Government promised an increase of 1,000, one realises what Conservative promises are worth.

The Home Secretary boasted of handing over the cash and giving freedom to chief constables to choose how to spend it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Conservative Members say, "Hear, hear." The point was anticipated in last year's debate when the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) asked the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), to agree that

"if there are fewer police officers on the street after April this year it will be because of the decisions of chief constables, not because of Government funding."

Not surprisingly, the Minister responded:

"My hon. Friend is absolutely correct".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 956.]

*[Mr. Michael]*

The Prime Minister promised to increase the number of police officers by 5,000, apparently unaware that his Government have passed on the responsibility for deciding police numbers to chief constables and police authorities. He did not appear to know that his Government stopped controlling police numbers last year.

There has been a cut in capital finances this year. To be precise, the cut is £24 million in the planning figure that was given in the Home Office report and £17 million in capital, comparing last year with the next financial year. Either way, there is a considerable cut in the amount of capital available to police authorities. The planning cut is more than the amount given for the theoretical purpose of providing additional police officers.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** May I offer my hon. Friend the words of my local newspaper about the Prime Minister's promise in respect of Warwickshire? The Prime Minister promised lots of extra police officers. Warwickshire has lost 60 officers so far and is likely to lose more than 70 this year. As a result of the extra £181,000 that we are getting this year, we will have an extra nine officers. The *Bedworth Evening Telegraph* described the Prime Minister's promise as "pathetic". I think that that is the best description.

**Mr. Michael:** My hon. Friend puts it succinctly and well. That is what the overall figures mean when they are translated into the number of police available on the streets in police authorities.

To fill the gap on capital funding, the Minister relies on the private finance initiative. The amount of capital that the Government are making available is not being cut because there is additional money available from the PFI. The Government are predicating a level of capital substitution in an unplanned way by cutting the money available for police authorities before any money has come from the PFI. It may well be that some good and appropriate schemes will arise next year, but that puts pressure on police authorities to go looking for additional capital. There is always a danger that that will distort police priorities and lead them into inappropriate ways of obtaining money.

We are not against the principle of the PFI. Indeed, the deputy leader of the Labour party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), was one of the first to give examples of how private money could be harnessed to the public good. However, that needs to be done in an appropriate way. There are concerns about the way in which pressure is being put on the police to find money from private sources.

The Minister quoted one comment by a senior official of the Police Federation. The Police Federation has raised some serious issues in relation to the settlement and the promise of increased funding for police officers. It wants to know from what base the additional officers will be recruited; the total number of officers in service against which the increase is to be compared; to which three-year period the Prime Minister referred; how many additional officers the Government expect police forces to recruit in the 1996-97 financial year; and what the Government assume to be the cost over the next three financial years of recruiting 5,000 additional officers.

The figures that we have seen so far assume the employment of new recruits. As those recruits become experienced police officers, they will cost more each year. Will the Government provide the additional finance to retain those trained officers, so that there is stability in the police forces, or will they simply say that it is a matter for police constables to decide? Last year, the Minister gave police constables and local police authorities the freedom to juggle the figures that they must work with this year. That is causing a dilemma for them—*[Interruption.]* I am happy to give way to the Minister if he wishes to clarify the issue for us.

**Mr. Maclean:** I was just saying that that is one of the daftest questions that I have heard in my life. If we are providing finance for extra police officers, obviously we must keep it up. We cannot fund the recruitment of bobbies for just three years and not pay them afterwards. We recognise that, if we recruit extra police officers, they will remain in the service for 25 or 30 years.

**Mr. Michael:** We shall hold the Minister to that statement when we debate the matter in the next financial year. We have no new money this year; money has been transferred from capital to revenue. The Minister has said only that the Government would find the finance to continue employment. The finance required to maintain the employment of those officers will increase year on year as their experience grows. Perhaps the Minister assumes that he will not be here to account for this matter next year.

A number of my hon. Friends have succinctly raised the problems that exist within their individual police authorities. Particular problems arise in relation to policing in London. This debate takes place against a background of increased crime in the London area, a reduction in the number of police officers, and continuing problems of low clear-up rates in key areas. The use of firearms in London has increased and the Metropolitan police, local authorities and the public are worried about the increased rate of drug misuse and fraud. The Metropolitan police fraud squad conducted 323 inquiries in 1994-95 and reported that the value of letters of credit, bills of exchange and other banking instruments seized by the fraud squad amounted to more than £1,000 million. That is a large sum by any estimate.

In terms of this settlement, the Metropolitan police are likely to use £30 million a year for the next few years. Until 1995-96, the funding of the Metropolitan police was not a problem because the Home Secretary set the Met's standard spending assessment at the same level as he set its budget. With the introduction of the new formula in 1995-96, the Metropolitan police lost about £115 million. It has received an SSA reduction—damping—grant of £85 million, which cushioned the loss in 1995-96 to 2 per cent. In the coming financial year 1996-97, however, the Met loses another £30 million from further changes to the funding formula, particularly the phasing of the "establishment indicator". Those serious losses to the Metropolitan police amount to some £60 million. The matter has caused great concern in our capital city.

In the coming year, the importance of partnership will grow again. That was recognised by the way in which the Home Secretary assessed the key objectives for the coming year, especially No. 3:

"To target and prevent crimes which are a particular local problem, including drug-related criminality, in partnership with the public and local agencies."

I note the phraseology. The Government do not appear to be able to use the phrase "local government", which is essential in that local partnership, but the general trend is welcome.

The police must have the resources to be able to play a full part in those local partnerships to reduce and fight crime. We have mentioned the pressure on the police to raise funds in a variety of ways. It is very important that that does not become a distortion in the revenue element of police finances, as it is in capital funding.

I am certain that chief constables and police authorities will seek to concentrate on their core activities and avoid distractions into commercial activity, but there must be a temptation, and removal of £24 million from capital is bound to increase the pressure on them.

In some projects, private finance in partnership is appropriate. I read plans recently for training in arms techniques in synergy with a regional facility for the sport of shooting. Nevertheless, that aspect needs care, and it is important that the Home Office does not disclaim responsibility.

Another important responsibility of the Home Office is that of getting the funding formula right for the long term. All the elements—sparsity of population in some parts of the country, levels of urban crime in others, the impact of pensions, accuracy in specifying the amount of crime that the police are trying to tackle—need to be more accurately reflected in the formula. That has been the subject of representations to the Minister by police authorities and by chief constables. I hope that the Minister only sought to appear over-enthusiastic in his comments tonight, and that he will not be complacent about the quality of the formula that we have achieved to date.

The police need certainty in order to plan to give certainty to the public and in order to tackle crime and its prevention methodically in the long term. They also need to be able to assure police officers whom they recruit that they have a long-term, stable career as an essential part of a service to the public. I hope that the Minister will take that message from tonight's debate.

10.56 pm

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton): I want to tell the House what can be achieved with tight resourcing.

Last year, the chief constable of Staffordshire said:

"the overall workload of the Force has continued to increase and there has been no increase in resources to meet it. Our funding for 1995/96, which was fixed by Central Government, gave no opportunity for expansion and barely amounted to a 'standstill' situation, even though the Police Authority allowed us to budget right up to the Home Office 'capping' limit."

It is astonishing what Staffordshire police achieved notwithstanding that tight limit. It achieved an increase in civilian support staff, releasing 21 constables for operational duties; a trunked radio system far in advance of any police radio scheme in the United Kingdom; the provision of new handcuffs, long batons and stab-proof vests, making a valuable contribution to the safety of operational officers; and success in targeting drug dealers and suppliers.

The Audit Commission indicators put Staffordshire above the national average, and surveys have shown a high level of public satisfaction with the service provided by Staffordshire police. That is a substantial record of achievement by a police force that, last year, said that it was strapped for cash.

In the report, Chief Constable Kelly went on to say, very gloomily:

"the Home Office are now looking again at their complex funding formula and there is a possibility that, because the formula may in future reflect notional rather than actual workloads, Staffordshire may receive less funding in 1996-97."

He was much too gloomy. The Government support grant for Staffordshire, applying this year's formula, amounts to an increase of no less than 7.5 per cent., from £101.2 million to £108.9 million. That is the largest increase in allocation of all the shire counties in Britain and, as the *Burton Mail* put it, a "massive rise in resources" that is likely to produce 100 more policemen over the next three years and boost the county's fight against drugs.

I welcome that grant on behalf of my constituents and I know that Chief Constable Kelly and Superintendent Glyn Heyward, the Burton divisional commander, would also want to express their heartfelt thanks. I should like to think that this represents a reward for years of superb policing and it is a tribute to all of those who serve in the Staffordshire force and those who assist it in various ways.

I shall tell the House what has happened to the law and order situation in Burton and Staffordshire as a result of those improvements in service. Crime in Staffordshire has decreased by 15 per cent. in the past two years, with a fall of 14.5 per cent. in Burton alone between January and June last year. There has been a sharp fall not only in the number of burglaries and car crimes but in theft, sex offences and serious violence.

The reduction in crime has been achieved in Burton through 90 neighbourhood watch schemes, which cover 36,000 households, and through the installation of closed circuit television in Burton centre car parks, subsidised to a large extent by the Labour-controlled East Staffordshire borough council, with some—although not enough—contributions from traders and a great deal of encouragement from the Government. The number of car thefts or break-ins has been reduced from six per week in the six car parks to three in six weeks—a decrease of 92 per cent. The town's police commander described the effect of the cameras on crime in the town centre as being "beyond all expectations". He said:

"It's like having 17 additional police officers spread around the town centre".

He then added:

"More people are coming into the town centre at night believing, correctly, that it is now a safer place to be".

The cameras are also helping to bring offenders to justice, so we can expect the conviction rate to rise.

**Mr. Bill Olner** (Nuneaton): I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the excellent scheme that the Labour-controlled council has introduced in his constituency. How much Government money was allocated to CCTV?

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** To be fair, I said that East Staffordshire borough council was Labour controlled, but one does not want to go overboard praising that council. After all, it supports the Labour party, whose slogan, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" has been shown to be a hollow load of hypocritical twaddle. Labour may be tough on the victims, but it certainly is not tough on crime.

*[Sir Ivan Lawrence]*

I asked the chief constable to tell me why he believes that he has achieved such a substantial fall in crime in Staffordshire.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** No, I must proceed—other hon. Members want to speak in this very short debate.

The chief constable said that the law and order situation in Staffordshire had improved for three reasons. First, he referred to the impact of legislation. He said:

"I particularly have in mind the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994".

**Mrs. Barbara Roche** (Hornsey and Wood Green): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** No, I adopt a completely sexless approach to dealing with interventions.

The chief constable continued:

"The numerous changes in evidential and procedural matters either already have had, or will have, a significant impact on evidence gathering and the more effective prosecution of offenders. The alteration of the law relating to bail was particularly welcome as a means of preventing persistent offenders from continuing to commit crime whilst awaiting trial".

The Labour party opposed many—although not all—of those measures. The Labour-controlled East Staffordshire borough council is undoubtedly a strong supporter of Opposition law and order policies, and it must have felt that the Government were being both ungenerous and unhelpful in stimulating the police to the kind of achievements that they have realised in Staffordshire.

The chief constable's second point concerned

"The impact of crime prevention measures"

on the reduction of crime in Staffordshire. He wrote:

"It seems clear that recent crime prevention measures, both at central and local level, have played a significant part in the reduction in levels of crime—particularly in the areas of house burglary and car crime.".

He also mentioned CCTV.

Thirdly, the chief constable dealt with

"The impact of improved tactics by the police".

The Government have gone out of their way to encourage the police to look at the way in which they practise policing and to take best practice from those forces that have been most successful in activities such as targeting known offenders.

The success in Staffordshire has been outstanding. The chief constable concluded:

"Looking to the future, there is strong support for proposals, such as the imposition of limitations on disclosure to the defence, which it is understood are under consideration . . . In addition, there is strong support for proposals to improve the treatment of victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system . . . In the round, I think that many positive steps have been taken in recent times to tackle the problem of crime."

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) said that it is a pity that we cannot all work together to reduce crime. Here is his invitation.

**Mr. Michael:** Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** No.

Let us see whether the new, tough measures that the Government are about to introduce to deal with the most serious criminals have the support of the Labour party and its spokesman.

11.6 pm

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The police grant settlement is certainly not as difficult to live with as the local government settlement that we shall debate—and no doubt vote on—tomorrow, but it raises several issues that should rouse the Government from the dangers of complacency.

The principal complaint is that, although the settlement looks good in the context of this year's public sector settlements, it does not look so good when it is compared with the needs in the police service. The increase amounts to £235 million in police total standard spending. The estimated increase in pension costs this year is £74 million and estimated pay and prices increases amount to £179 million. The shortfall is even larger when the £20 million that is intended to pay for extra officers is taken out of the calculation and one looks simply at what police authorities have to continue and develop their work.

The settlement cannot make up for the cuts in last year's budget. It does not replace the officers that were lost last year, such as the 34 officers in Dorset, or the "million miles" of police patrols that the authority calculated had been lost as a result of cuts.

The Prime Minister promised 5,000 extra police officers at the last Conservative party conference, but questions remain unanswered and there is unease within the police service. It reminds me of the Conservative 1992 manifesto pledge that stated:

"We are continuing to increase Police numbers. There will be 1,000 extra officers this year.".

There were not. Although the number initially increased by 771, there have since been cuts of more than 1,300. The Prime Minister's latest promise must be called into question by the fact that a previous commitment was so clearly broken.

Some areas have been hit harder than others. Merseyside lost 151 officers, the Metropolitan police lost 409 officers and Avon and Somerset lost 82 officers. Those figures demonstrate that there is not much reality behind the Government's tough talk about law and order.

This year's pre-election settlement allows for 1,000 additional officers rather than the 3,000 that chief constables have been seeking for several years. That is what is on the table. The rest are phantom policemen for whom no resources are guaranteed.

The Association of Chief Police Officers questioned the Government's estimated cost of additional officers. It took the view that the figures failed to take into account the full costs involved, particularly the additional infrastructure and pension costs. The Committee of Local Police Authorities pointed out that the average annual cost of a police officer is more than double the £20,000 that is implicit in the Government's figures, and applies to all ranks of police officer. North Yorkshire has been allocated £276,000, which will not even pay for 24 constables at probationer rates when all the on-costs have been taken into account.

There are further concerns about the on-going funding of extra officers. Costs will rise as officers progress through their training and career, and there is concern that

the necessary money will not be available for that additional need. There is real uncertainty about what will happen after the three-year package—if it runs for three years—comes to an end. What will the funding be? Note will have been taken of the Minister's strenuous response to the remarks of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). We shall seek to hold him to his commitment for as long as he is the Minister who can be held to it.

There have been considerable cuts this year in capital allocations. The Committee of Local Police Authorities makes the interesting comment that it has noticed an almost exact match between reductions in capital funding and the supposedly additional £20 million for extra police officers.

The impact of the reductions on authorities will be notable. In various areas, capital programmes that are of some importance will be delayed. In Hampshire, there has been a cut of £1 million in the capital budget. It is expecting, in three years' time, a £2 million funding gap in its capital programme, including expenditure on buildings, computers and equipment. There are serious implications. In a number of police authorities, the move to install encrypted radios has had to be slowed down because the money is not available. That is extremely important now that the means of breaking into police communications systems are so readily and cheaply available to criminals. It gives criminals an advantage and reduces police effectiveness.

Capital allocation cuts were described by the Association of Chief Police Officers as robbing Peter to pay Paul. One chairman of a police authority commented after the Government had cut its capital allocation and increased its revenue budget:

"We could have done that for ourselves."

There is some confusion about the private finance initiative. The Home Office says that PFI can be used to replace existing capital items, but the Department of the Environment says that it cannot. Clarification would be welcome. How are the police expected to plan their capital programmes when the Government move the goalposts so often?

The problem of pensions is yet to be resolved. There has been some provision within the funding mechanism, which the Minister described, but the real problem remains. It is more to do with the total funding that is provided for pensions. Cutting the cake differently is of only limited value. There needs to be a long-term solution to the problem, and the consultation process that is now taking place must lead to a solution, and to action on it.

The Government's plan for the future involves massive spending on a hugely increased prison population. Our vision is of preventing the crimes that would have put and kept offenders in prison by having enough police officers in the community who are properly equipped, and by tackling the root causes of crime.

11.11 pm

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): I am rather flattered that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) should remember so vividly the discussion that took place during last year's debate on these issues. I had not expected that. However, I shall draw the attention of the House to the accuracy of what I said on that occasion. In effect, my comment was a two-edged sword.

Without question, the provisions of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 give chief constables far greater discretion about how to use their resources. Like my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), I have discussed with David Burke, the chief constable of the force in the area that I represent—North Yorkshire—how the force is managing to exist under the new policy, which we were told when considering the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill in Committee would be an unmitigated disaster for the police, resulting in huge cuts in police numbers and the police budget. That has not happened.

Having spoken to the chief constable, I find—I shall not suggest that all is rosy, because it is not—that now there is greater discretion when it comes to spending money, and more cash has been found as a result of efficiency. That means that the force will be able to employ more civilians and put more officers back on the beat.

It will also be possible to recruit more officers. I am reasonably optimistic—I wish that I was as informed about the exact figures as I was when I was the vice-chairman of the police authority—that we shall have about 40 extra officers in North Yorkshire in the year ahead as a result of the grant settlement that we are discussing and the greater flexibility that will be given to police authorities and chief constables as a result of the 1994 Act and the changes in the structure of police funding overall.

It is worth remembering not that North Yorkshire county council has had severe problems balancing its budget—I am on record as having said that—but that, in the final year in which it was responsible for setting the police budget, the budget that it set was £2 million less than the standard spending assessment recommended by the Home Office. That has been put right as a consequence of the new legislation.

I agree entirely with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—we desire a long-term solution to the funding of police pensions. Even so, the change in the formula for police pensions in the year ahead is very welcome. North Yorkshire suffered under the cosh of huge police pension costs that were totally disproportionate to what was in the previous formula. I am told that, now the formula has changed, it is neutral.

Oddly enough, if we had left the formula alone, we would have received the same amount of money, but that is life and I am sure that some police force somewhere is benefiting. It is important that what a police force has to pay in police pensions—lump sums for retiring officers, especially those of senior rank, which can be tidy sums—is more reasonably reflected in the formula.

We still need a much longer-term solution to the problem. It cannot be right that some 12 per cent. of police revenue budgets is spent not on officers who are actively in service but on officers who have hung up their truncheons, whistles and radios and gone to a pasture which, perhaps, is more profitable. It was a long time ago that I did that. As the House knows, my eldest son who, I hope, will be married later this year—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—is keeping up the tradition of the Greenway involvement in the police service, and he enjoys his career very much.

I wish to make two important points. First, the Government rightly claim some of the credit for the fact that, throughout the country, crime is falling, but as my

*[Mr. John Greenway]*

hon. Friend the Minister knows—I have said this before in the House—the situation in rural areas is less attractive, not least because rural crime is growing. More rural properties are being targeted by criminals from the major cities. It is clear that local police resources are not adequate to deal with the problem.

Secondly, there is a growth in what I call crimes of rural terrorism, such as lampers—people who come on to property in four-wheel drive vehicles, causing mayhem, shooting and killing wildlife with total abandon and disregard for morality. Police resources are not adequate to deal with that problem.

Although I welcome the change in the formula, which has given greater weight to the needs of rural areas, it is not enough. We need to go further. I hope that my hon. Friend will take this on board. He represents a constituency that is much like mine. He knows of the problems that I have mentioned and which are a great worry to rural communities that do not have regular patrols of officers such as we see in urban areas.

I hope that, when we discuss the police grant settlement in a year's time in this Parliament, as this is not the pre-election police grant settlement that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed suggested—there will be another one; I am convinced of that—perhaps it will be even better and will bring in the second stage of the extra 5,000 officers.

I want to return to something that I suggested on Second Reading of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill. The new structure created a mechanism whereby the public could pay more for their police if they wanted to. We should compare what people are spending on insurance premiums, burglar alarms and other security arrangements with what an extra £10 or £20 per annum on the police precept per house would provide by way of additional officers. I rather think that the latter might prove more attractive and sensible.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned North Yorkshire, which has a population of 726,000 and, I suspect, some 400,000 council tax paying households. The sum of £10 per property would produce £4 million more for the police. Let us split the difference between the figures suggested by the right hon. Gentleman: let us say not £20,000 or £40,000, but £30,000. We are talking about well in excess of 100 more officers in North Yorkshire for an extra £10 per dwelling on the police precept. I believe that, if that stark choice were put to the voters as clearly as I have put it here, they would opt to pay the £10 and have more police officers.

It may well be possible to deal with the matter through a parish or town council precept, but I must make one crucial point. There is no doubt that, in rural areas, supporters of the party that my hon. Friend the Minister and I represent—although they see that we are doing considerably more to increase police manpower and deal with the tide of crime—would like us to go further. Rural communities in particular want more police officers, and we must find further mechanisms to deliver them. I do not believe that, without them, we shall return to the crime levels that once existed in our idyllic countryside.

11.21 pm

**Mr. Bill Olner** (Nuneaton): Before I comment on the figures, let me pay tribute to the chief constable, all his police officers and the police committee in Warwickshire. I refer not only to the implications of the grant for the coming year, but to the preceding 12 months. The police authority and its officers have put up with a budget £6 million lower than it should have been because of the new formula.

I welcome the fact that the chief constable and the police committee have more freedom to examine their budgets and decide where they want their money to be spent, but the Minister will doubtless recall visits by the police committee and the chief constable—not this year, but last year—when the £6 million shortfall was discussed. I suspect that the Treasury and the Home Office had made their calculations, and Warwickshire police force did not expect the Minister to make too many changes last year to the figures that he had already announced; what they did expect was that the Minister would give serious consideration to the logical representations made to him by the police authority and its chief constable, and would remedy a number of the difficulties in this year's grant.

We had a very good meeting with the Minister some months ago. He said, "We are looking after you very well in Warwickshire." I did not accept that, but the Minister made a cogent argument and said that the Government were looking after Warwickshire well. In response to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), he said that Warwickshire's grant had been increased by 3.5 per cent. and that, with wage levels forming the majority of the constabulary's costs, Warwickshire should be able to look favourably towards expanding its services.

It was only during this debate that I learnt that colleagues were complaining that North Wales had had only a 5.1 per cent. increase, that Buckinghamshire had had only a 4.9 per cent. increase, that Derbyshire had had only a 4 per cent. increase and that Staffordshire had had only a 7.5 per cent. increase. In this year's grant settlement, Warwickshire has had an increase only of 3.5 per cent, but even a 7 per cent. increase would not have matched the £6 million shortfall that Warwickshire constabulary faces in 1995-96.

Warwickshire constabulary is losing 61 personnel. That does not square with the Prime Minister's much-vaunted announcement of 5,000 additional police officers. There may be extra officers in some police authorities that have had these marvellous increases, but not in Warwickshire. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire said, the public, the media, the chief constable, the police authority and, more important, police officers know that they have had a raw deal from this Government, not only on last year's settlement but on this year's too.

I remind the Minister that, in our discussions, he said that, when setting its budget, the police authority had to consider not only the money that it receives from the Home Office in the form of grant, but its income generation. I agreed with him—we must consider income generation. I do not know whether we will push every council tax payer into paying additional money to assist the police authority, but I know that Warwickshire police authority considered offering businesses a key holder scheme.

At the meeting a few weeks ago, the Minister said that Warwickshire was £500,000 down on its estimated income. It is that much down because businesses, especially those in my constituency of Nuneaton, will not accept a two-tier policing system. Business rate payers and council tax payers pay their taxes. They expect police authorities to be adequately funded by the Government and by other means. That £500,000 shortfall in revenue is due to businesses' massive objections to paying into the two-tier system that the Government are proposing or forcing the constabulary to introduce in Warwickshire.

I earnestly ask the Minister to reconsider closely his settlement figures for Warwickshire. Last year represented a bad deal, but this year represents only less of a bad deal than that one.

11.28 pm

**Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): I shall be brief, but I shall take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), on behalf of my constituents and of those who live in the area served by the Northumbria police force on what he has done for policing in north-east England. The change from the historic method of funding police forces to the needs-based formula resulted in an increase of £15 million in the police budget last year and a further budget increase of £10 million this year. That is a substantial sum for the Northumbria police force and will translate into at least 35 extra officers this year. I hope that John Stevens, the chief constable, understands what my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said about the need to put some of the extra resources into rural areas.

**Mr. Beith:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the chief constable has done precisely that and released officers for rural areas after a long period when there were far too few.

**Mr. Atkinson:** I agree that our present chief constable has shown a strong commitment to rural areas.

I can give my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale some good news about crime in rural areas. In the Hexham division, the number of burglaries and car crimes has fallen and thefts from agricultural buildings and factories are down by nearly a third. That is very good news for the people of rural Northumberland, and I hope that the trend continues.

I fear that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) did not understand the point of the new arrangements for policing. We have given chief constables power to organise their own establishments. In Northumberland, that has resulted in a number of senior officers and part of the hierarchical chain of command being removed from the service. As a consequence, some officers have retired early, so numbers have fallen. At the same time, however, the chief constable is recruiting new officers, so there are bound to be fluctuations in the number of officers in the force at any one time.

In Northumbria, there is a steady upward swing in numbers, which will mean an extra 140 officers in the next three years.

**Mr. Michael:** The Northumbria force has grown in number but the overall picture has been one of decreases between 1992 and September 1995. I understand the point, but the trouble is that in many areas there has been a drop; perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not appreciate the overall picture.

**Mr. Atkinson:** I make no pretence of doing so, but I was trying to explain the method whereby police numbers will sometimes go down but then go up, depending on the way in which a chief constable decides to organise his force structure.

The deal for the people in the Northumbria police area has meant an 18 per cent. drop in crime since its peak in 1991 and a further 5 per cent. drop this year. We are getting a very good deal from our police force and we are also encouraged because arrests and the detection rate are up substantially.

The overall detection rate in Northumbria is the highest of any force in England and Wales. John Stevens, the chief constable, and the men and women of the Northumbria force deserve to be congratulated. I think that their final plea would be that a few more of the people whom they arrest and charge be convicted by the courts.

11.32 pm

**Mr. Mike O'Brien** (North Warwickshire): The House will know that for the past two years I have had the honour to be Labour's parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation. I shall hold that post for only another two days, at which time I shall hand over the position to my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig). I am sure that he will be successful and even more popular than I have been.

In Warwickshire, crime in general has trebled since 1979 and the number of burglaries and car crimes has quadrupled. However, in the past couple of years crime has started to decrease as a result of police work and, particularly, the introduction of the new community beat officer scheme, Operation Claw, which targeted burglars. It has also decreased as a result of the massive public support that was so apparent in the recent report by HM inspectorate of constabulary on Warwickshire police force.

I am angry that our force, which has been so successful in fighting crime, should be penalised by the Home Office's failure to fund it properly. The chief constable and the police authority have said that the force has been underfunded to the tune of £6 million. According to the chief constable, in this financial year 61 posts have been lost from the previous establishment figure. The previous establishment was 1,045 but by November it had fallen to 984. The chief constable anticipates that it will have fallen to 945 by April 1997—a loss of 97 officers. That is not all due to Operation Sapphire—the Minister will know what I mean by that—which involved only 22 officers. Our constabulary has experienced a significant reduction in the number of officers. The Home Office is undermining the fight against crime in our county.

There have also been increased costs to my constituents. Many of them are very angry at the constabulary's new key holder policy, whereby people have to pay £50 plus VAT for something that previously was free of charge. They understand that the constabulary is under great pressure to introduce such policies, but they are angry that it is being forced to do so by the Home Office.

*[Mr. Mike O'Brien]*

Warwickshire has been hit twice—first, by the Government's overall settlement for police, which is very tight, and, secondly, by the formula. The force says in its report to the Home Office that it hopes to stabilise the reduction in service in the medium term, but that a further decline in uniformed officers in 1996-97 is inevitable unless there is a significant shift in the spending power available to the force.

Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary said in his report on Warwickshire in 1995:

"The freeze on recruitment, elimination of overtime, depletion of staffing levels most acutely seen on public holidays, postponing IT developments, abandoning of much of the training programme and over-reliance on the Special Constabulary will have an effect, in the longer term, on core policing in Warwickshire, and thus, on the service to the public".

The Minister should be thoroughly ashamed of such a report, yet he obviously does not seem to appreciate its importance. He says that the Prime Minister's promise of thousands of extra police officers will be fulfilled. It is clearly not being fulfilled in Warwickshire. Force morale, as the police authority so graphically said, is in real danger.

I ask the Minister to consider whether it is necessary to review the funding formula. I think that it should be reviewed to take into account adjacent metropolitan populations. Warwickshire has the west midlands, Leicester and a number of large metropolitan authorities nearby. We have crime problems from those authorities, but they are not reflected in the funding formula. Warwickshire also has miles of motorway—it is probably the county with the most miles of motorway. They need patrolling, and that factor should be properly recognised in the funding formula.

The funding formula should also reflect previous years' major operations that had an overall long-term effect on the budget—the Coventry airport animal rights demonstrations, which were enormously expensive, the Wardell murder inquiry and the tragic Naomi Smith killing in my constituency. They have all been an enormous drain on the constabulary's reserves and that must be recognised when the funding formula is reviewed.

I also condemn the way in which the Home Office has failed properly to fund closed circuit television in our area. The Home Office said that it was making funds available. Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire applied for that funding and were refused. From Home Office replies, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) has been able to show that of the funding available for CCTV more than 70 per cent. went to the very few Conservative authorities in the country. That is discrimination against Labour authorities such as Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire. Thankfully, the council can claim that, as a Labour authority, it has properly and fully funded the introduction of CCTV despite the handicap of the Government.

The results of the severe damage to funding in Warwickshire are clearly set out by Superintendent Gordon Wilson, who is in charge of Nuneaton police—the area of my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner). I am sure that Mr. Wilson spoke for all the officers in Warwickshire when he was quoted in the *Bedworth Telegraph* on 8 December. I have already drawn the House's attention to the article, which suggested that the promise of 5,000 officers has resulted in the loss of 60 so far this year and the introduction of only nine. The Prime Minister's promise was pathetic.

Superintendent Wilson said:

"The simple fact is that if you don't pay, you don't get the service. If the proper funding isn't forthcoming from the government, there is going to be a reduction in the quality of service to the public.

Our officers have responded admirably this year to a lack of funds, which has meant some working unpaid overtime to make sure the job gets done.

But they can't keep doing that. Something's got to give . . .

It's a vicious circle: The more the officers are stretched at work, the more likely they are to get sick and need time off, leaving fewer officers even more stretched and even more stressed".

That is a senior police officer talking about the failure of the Government—a failure of which the Minister should be thoroughly ashamed.

Cuts in the police in Warwickshire, and the failure to back Nuneaton and Bedworth council's proposal to introduce closed circuit television in the town centre, mean that the Home Secretary is performing the job of the criminal; he is undermining the police. We have lost 60 officers in the county. The Home Secretary has ignored pleas to resource Warwickshire constabulary properly, and that is not all. When the Home Office announced that the funds were available for CCTV, our local councils did not obtain any, although Conservative councils did.

I am appalled at how badly the Home Secretary has failed people in Warwickshire. He has handicapped the police and the fight against crime. In Warwickshire, we know who the criminals' mate is—it is the Home Secretary, who is not funding the police in our county properly. When the general election comes, we shall remember the way in which the Minister of State and the Home Secretary undermined the fight against crime in Warwickshire.

11.40 pm

**Mr. Maclean:** With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. Seldom has the House been treated to such a ridiculous little speech as that made by the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). I shall treat his remarks about closed circuit television with the contempt that they deserve. Warwickshire did benefit from two Home Office funded CCTV schemes in the most recent round, and if it submits any good schemes in the next round those will be considered equally and fairly.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien** *rose—*

**Mr. Maclean:** No, the hon. Gentleman talked and bored the House for long enough. With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall try to reply to the interesting points that were made in the debate.

Last year Warwickshire had a 5.3 per cent. increase in its funding. Note the weasel words of Opposition Members. They do not talk about the Government's "cutting" Warwickshire's funding, but you can bet your bottom dollar, Madam Deputy Speaker, that if the Government had cut the funding that word would have been used ad nauseam. Instead, Opposition Members talk about a "funding shortfall".

What does that mean? It means simply that, despite the fact that the Government are giving Warwickshire 5.3 per cent. more, it had a wish list costing even more than that, and it could not get all the funding that it wanted. I do not know of any police authority in the country that has ever received all the money that it would ideally like to have. I suggest that, with a 5.3 per cent. increase, and with police pay rising by only 3 per cent. last year, Warwickshire should have lived within its means. This year it will receive a 3.4 per cent. increase in funding.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) asked a good question about the funding of an officer. We have agreed with the Association of Chief Police Officers that the additional funding of £20 million next year will be sufficient to recruit 1,000 more constables.

ACPO agrees that the marginal cost of taking on a new officer is £19,738. I have already set out that figure in a detailed parliamentary answer, and it comprises salary of £16,117, national insurance contributions of £1,251, training costs of about £2,000 and uniform costs of £370. Those are the figures for a whole year, but 1,000 officers will not all be recruited on 1 April. They will be recruited throughout the year, so all the costs will not be incurred by the police force on day one. The provision that we are allocating is more generous than the figure of £19,738 would suggest.

We know that in the second year an officer's salary will be a bit higher, in the third year it will be even more and in the fourth year it will rise again. By the time he has done 25 years' service an officer is an expensive but a very worthwhile commodity. There are also the pension commitments. Of course we know that we must also consider the additional costs in future years.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) made an important point when he talked about the doom and gloom that came out of Staffordshire last year. But that was not true of Staffordshire alone. Let us remember all the doom and gloom that we heard about this time last year. There was an ACPO forecast that 900 jobs would be lost in the forthcoming year.

*The Independent* was not to be outdone. If it can peddle a bigger lie, of course it will do so. It said that not 900 but 1,500 jobs would be lost. Then, *Police Review*—I give the magazine credit for caring about the facts, as *The Independent* did not seem to do—did a survey that concluded that there was likely be an increase of about 400 officers in the coming year with the money that the Government provided last year. But *Police Review* was too dashed conservative—we are heading for an increase of 900 constables in this financial year.

**Mr. Olner:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Maclean:** No, I have only one minute left. It is not just a matter of those 900 extra constables, because there are extra civilians too. Opposition Members quibble about whether the Government will meet our target of getting 900 extra officers. When Labour left office, the police force was 8,500 bobbies under strength. With the Labour party, it is not a case of do as I do, but do as I say. I can tell the Opposition—

**Mr. Michael:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Maclean:** No. Since we came to power, an additional 33,000 people have joined the police force—16,000 uniformed officers and 17,000 civilians. We are providing the manpower. We have done it before and we will do it again. We will honour our commitments.

*It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion,* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents).*

*Question agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 162), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

## Film Industry (Scotland)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

11.45 pm

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham** (Perth and Kinross): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise the matter of the Scottish film industry in the House. It would seem that this is the first occasion in a very long time on which the industry has been debated here in a Scottish context. That is surprising given the high profile accorded to the industry in the past year, even by the Secretary of State. I regret the absence of Scottish Labour Members, with the honourable exception of the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I understand, however, that the Labour party's indifference to the industry as a whole extends even to its Front Benchers, and that is very unfortunate indeed.

In the past few years, there has been an enormous growth in interest in the film industry, not least because of the sudden upsurge in the number of Hollywood feature films to which we have been host. Naturally, we are pleased that we have apparently become flavour of the year, but there is concern that, when all the razzmatazz has died down and the Hollywood caravan has moved on, the indigenous industry will be no further forward.

Last year, the Secretary of State made much of his commitment to the industry; indeed, he even wore a kilt to the "Braveheart" premiere—something he might have regarded as a sacrifice. But so far, all we seem to have had is words. Even the long-awaited report from the Scottish Office has yet to materialise. Indeed, all that has happened in the meantime is that two more reports have been commissioned. I hope that tonight we will be given the date for the appearance of the Scottish Office report at least.

I hope that the opportunity will be taken tonight to make a concrete commitment to the industry. That is vital if we are to build a sustainable film industry in Scotland and move away from the boom and bust scenario that seems to be our lot at present. Future success can be ours in Scotland only if we can ensure a minimum sustainable level of production at all times.

It is fortunate that we have an existing infrastructure on which to base expansion, an advantage that the Irish did not have before they set their minds to building up their own film industry. They are, however, now rapidly developing one. Indeed in Scotland, Ireland is viewed with a certain rueful admiration. Ireland's achievements have been considerable, and have been brought about by a combination of Government intervention in the form of tax breaks, meaningful grants to the industry and the creation of a film-friendly atmosphere. Taken together, these have resulted in an irresistible pull on overseas productions. That has sometimes resulted in a relocation from Scotland to Ireland, a fact that did not escape the public's attention, particularly in relation to "Braveheart".

The Minister may not be aware of some of the invidious comparisons that can be made between Scotland and Ireland. For example, the Scottish Film Production Fund receives a Scottish Office grant of £190,000, which, in effect, has been frozen for three years, whereas its Irish equivalent receives 3 million Irish punts. That is the difference between 0.038p per head of population in Scotland and £1 per head in Ireland and it does not reflect well on Scottish Office commitment. Will the Minister at least commit more funds to the SFPF?

Lottery money has certainly been made available, but it should not be seen as, and was never meant to be, a substitute for public funding. Sustainability will be dependent on a growth in both indigenous production and development over a long period. It should not be dependent on the vagaries of lottery grants.

We all need to remember that film is an industry like any other, with an enormous potential. It is easy to forget that, at a most basic level, it is about jobs, not just for the actors, directors and producers but for the carpenters and painters who build the sets, the folk who hire out the vehicles, the caterers who provide food, the dressmakers and make-up artists and the whole panoply of trades that are required in the making of any film, which is a very labour-intensive venture.

The industry is not just about jobs. Film is just one of the ways in which any society and culture find its own expression. That involves not just making films that are based on one's history or are about present-day experiences in a country, or features that are self-referential; it can also extend to the viewpoints through which other issues are seen and through which we view the rest of the world. It is important that we get the opportunity to do that as well.

Thus, it is important to get it right. Scotland needs a film policy implemented by Government and agreed by the principal bodies and players, which will do a number of things. The most important are: to prioritise commercial and employment issues, which does not appear to be being done; to attract investment, both internally and externally; to develop the skills base of the Scottish industry; to assist the commercial and non-commercial development of missing parts of the infrastructure; and to create a national organisation that can carry forward policy and strategy with the agreement and co-operation of the industry as a whole.

If I were to pick out the two first steps that are vital if the industry is to develop fully in Scotland and to fulfil the potential that is shown, the first would have to be the introduction of tax breaks for film production, modelled on the Irish section 35 scheme, which is highly admired and has become very successful in attracting the film industry to Ireland. It requires no new money from Government sources and I should have thought that that would be very attractive to the Government. Unfortunately, thus far, they do not seem to have been able to bring themselves to copy the Irish example—perhaps it is difficult to admit that a small and independent nation in Europe may have something to teach such a country as the United Kingdom.

Implementing those tax breaks would require no new money, merely a willingness to forgo income, which in any case might not otherwise come if the tax breaks were not there in the first place. Although tax breaks of themselves will not do the trick—in some cases, when films have moved to Ireland, they have merely made the film break even—they are nevertheless an important part of attracting external interest in a country.

Equally important, Scotland needs the development of a powerful new body to oversee public film policy and strategy. It will need to be properly set up and properly funded if it is to be successful. It is no use introducing

any such new body if it is not going to be resourced. I understand that the possibility of such an organisation is being canvassed under the working title of Scottish Screen. I expect to hear that the resourcing of any such new organisation would be sufficient to make it work in the long term. Any such organisation should be federal in structure, bringing together existing bodies such as the Scottish Film Council, which does good work, the Scottish Film Production Fund, Scottish Screen Locations and the Scottish Broadcasting and Film Training Trust.

In that structure, new bodies should be established, including one responsible for marketing and distribution. One big advantage of that would be the provision of a one-stop shop for those from furth of Scotland, who would find Scotland an even more attractive prospect than it is at present. It is in creating that attractive prospect that Ireland has been so successful. We would like Scotland to be able to follow that example.

One of the difficulties for interested parties from furth of Scotland is that they have to deal with a myriad of organisations. In some cases, they find it almost impossible to get help, especially as so few local authorities have dedicated film officers, or people in their economic development sections committed to attracting this important industry, which has enormous potential. That would allow the easy introduction to Scotland of a one-stop shop and make things much simpler.

We also need a properly functioning large sound stage on which big feature films could be made. Until we get one, we will have difficulty in dealing with bigger films. That means that they will end up going to places such as Shepperton or Pinewood, which would be a great loss to Scotland.

Unfortunately, successive UK Governments have regarded film as more a matter of infrastructure than of investment, and have oriented their support to a London-based industry that makes use of studio facilities. That has left Scotland exposed and without practical support. That is not good enough for such an important developing industry.

An independent Scottish Government would be certain to give the industry the priority it deserves and avoid the sort of nonsense that we currently face on the international front, where our industry may not be represented at all. For example, on the EU's Media 2 programme, UK representation comprises two people from the Department of National Heritage in London. There is no representation from the Scottish Office. I understand that, until recently, the Department of National Heritage somehow forgot to advise about the availability of a place for a representative from the industry in Scotland. Direct Scottish representation is essential for all such international bodies and is increasingly demanded by professionals, who recognise the need to insist on and maintain the distinctiveness of what is happening in Scotland.

It is the combination of practical measures and real encouragement that is vital in Scotland but currently absent. Sexy soundbites there have been in abundance, principally those uttered by the Secretary of State for Scotland, but the Minister will have to do much more than utter platitudes tonight if he expects people in the industry to have any confidence in Scottish Office commitment. He could make a start by answering some of the direct questions put to him and make some firm commitment here and now that could be reported to the industry in Scotland as evidence of a real commitment rather than simply a commitment to tomorrow's headlines.

11.58 pm

**The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton):** I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) on securing this debate on an important and fascinating subject. She has addressed it in her customary forthright manner.

We provide substantial funds to the film industry. The Scottish Office allocated £1.5 million to the support of film in 1995-96. The bulk of funding goes to the Scottish Film Council, which is currently concentrating on Scotland's response to the EC's Media 2 programme and on encouraging each unitary authority and local enterprise company to adopt a development strategy for its moving image industry. We provide £190,000 a year to the Scottish Film Production Fund, and the Scottish Office funding is a catalyst for more funding to a total of almost £750,000.

With regard to a Scottish Studio sound stage, Hydra Associates will consider the case for a new studio, but it is widely acknowledged that a studio suitable for major Hollywood films would probably be unused for most of the year. To justify such an investment, it would be sensible to secure shared usage with television companies or build the studio as part of a larger entertainment complex. We are currently looking at the pros and cons of that.

The hon. Lady mentioned the Irish film industry, which has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years, partly as a result of tax incentives which are especially useful in attracting overseas productions to be filmed in Ireland. But the tax regime is rarely the principal consideration in deciding where to shoot a film. The suitability of the production facilities and the director's personal preference are also influential. The Government will certainly consider any lessons to be drawn from the Irish experience which can be applied to Scotland in the light of the consultants' report.

Before responding in detail to some of the other points that the hon. Lady has raised, I should like to put the Scottish position in the United Kingdom context. The number of films produced in the UK has risen from just 30 in 1989 to 81 last year, the highest figure for 20 years. Between 1990 and 1994, the UK was one of only four countries among the top 20 film-making nations to show an increase in the number of films produced. The number of films produced in the United States fell by 12 per cent. over that period.

Total investment in film production in the UK had increased from £253 million in 1990 to £421 million in 1995. As a result, the UK's share of total European investment in films rose from 18.4 per cent. in 1990 to 28.1 per cent. in 1994. In 1994, UK cinema admissions rose by some 120 million for the first time since 1978, eclipsing even 1993, which had the benefit of "Jurassic Park", the biggest grossing film in cinema history. The latest estimate for 1995 is a healthy 113.5 million.

**Mr. Andrew Welsh** (Angus, East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** No, I should like to develop my reply to the hon. Lady.

*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]*

The Scottish film industry has shared in those boom years. Having made only five or six films in the early 1990s, the number of Scottish productions soared to 12 in 1994 and reached an impressive nine last year. Films are financed in a variety of ways, but it is interesting to note that "Chasing the Deer", which starred Brian Blessed, was the first Scottish production to raise the bulk of its budget through public subscription. The film has recently gone into profit and investors should now see a return on their investment. "The Bruce", which will be released in March, has been financed in a similar way. The national lottery provides yet another new source of funding to build on the successes of recent years.

It is, therefore, fair to say that the film industry in Britain is in a buoyant state. With the dollar exchange rate in our favour, the UK's film studios are full. The recent purchase of Shepperton and Leavesden studios further demonstrates the confidence that exists in the industry.

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** Is the Minister seriously suggesting, with his examples of "Chasing the Deer" and "The Bruce", that we can build a sustainable film industry in Scotland on the same do-it-yourself basis with which we might build a garden shed?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** No. A variety of measures are necessary. If the hon. Lady will await my remarks, I shall develop the theme across a range of subjects.

As the hon. Lady said, the main activity continues to be in and around London, where the major television companies and film studios are located. The challenge facing the film industry in Scotland is to produce quality films with a distinctive Scottish feel, which are commercially successful, such as "Local Hero". The responsibility for achieving that rests ultimately with the writers, producers, directors and other skilled staff working in the industry in Scotland.

However, public funding supports some of the infrastructure for the industry. As I said in answer to a question about film production in Scotland from my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith), we are looking at a number of ways to strengthen those arrangements and the current film initiative announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last September is important so that we can ensure that the industry in Scotland breaks through to a new, more dynamic era.

The film initiative is intended to maintain the momentum of the current success story. After the release last year of "Braveheart" and "Rob Roy", the 1995 Scottish theme at the cinema will be reflected in a gentler and more contemporary vein in 1996 by "Loch Ness", which is to be released next week following its premiere at Inverness this Saturday.

Such films can give a significant impetus to marketing Scotland as a tourist location, and I am very pleased indeed that the Scottish tourist board has been very active building on the high film profile that Scotland now has. The impact is already apparent in tourism receipts.

For example, in 1995 twice as many people visited the Rob Roy and Trossachs visitor centre in Callender as in 1994. That, in turn, prompted several agencies to come together to fund a £400,000 improvement programme at the centre to double the size of the facility. Admissions to the National Wallace monument at Stirling increased almost threefold in the four months after the release of "Braveheart". Passenger numbers on the SS Walter Scott on Loch Katrine are up 25 per cent. on last year—that had been Rob Roy country. We wish to build on those encouraging benefits to tourism.

To ensure that film-makers continue to come to Scotland, it is vital that all potential locations are marketed as effectively as possible. Accordingly, as a first priority for the film initiative, the Government have commissioned a CD-ROM, which will contain information about all Scotland's main screen locations. That will enable film producers throughout the world to have immediate access to visual and factual data about all the locations at the touch of a keyboard.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan) *rose—*

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** I should like to develop my arguments further.

In support of that marketing initiative, we want to remove any unnecessary impediments to overseas films coming to Scotland. That means, if I may paraphrase the usual jargon, securing a one-stop shoot, which the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross mentioned. In practice, that entails applying the "customer first" approach on behalf of the many organisations and agencies with which film makers must co-operate in their production work. Time is of the essence when shooting on location, and effective co-ordination with local authorities and others is essential if that time is to be fully used.

Different considerations apply to Scottish-made films. There also, the picture is a great deal more promising than it has been for many years. "Shallow Grave" was a box office hit on both sides of the Atlantic. "Small Faces", shown to wide acclaim at last year's Edinburgh international film festival, will be released later this year in the United States and Europe. "Trainspotting", which will have its world premiere in Glasgow next month before going on general release, promises to be a third success for Scotland. All three films have relied, at least in part, on public sector support through the Scottish film production fund and the Glasgow film fund. All three are testimony to the fact that the present arrangements can help to bring about Scottish film productions that are both cultural and commercial successes.

**Mr. Salmond** *rose—*

**Mr. Welsh** *rose—*

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** I should like to develop a few more points before I give way.

As more national lottery funds become available—to be dispersed by the Scottish Arts Council—the impact of public sector support for production is likely to be even more influential.

Those recent successes owe much to the judgment and determination of the board and staff of the Scottish film production fund.

The role that broadcasters can play in developing the film industry in Scotland must not be overlooked. BBC Scotland, through its "Tartan Shorts" scheme, in

conjunction with the Scottish film production fund, is helping to nurture talent. Indeed, the success of the Scots actor Peter Capaldi in winning an Oscar last year for his "Tartan Shorts" film, "Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life" shows the high quality of that initiative.

Recent Scottish Film Council initiatives, including its First Reels and Movie Makers projects, coupled with training initiatives spearheaded by Scottish Broadcast and Film Training Ltd, are working towards the creation of a new generation—indeed, a renaissance—of talented Scottish directors, producers, technicians and writers. That is extremely welcome.

**Mr. Salmond:** I thank the Minister for giving way and I apologise for knocking him off his stride. At the beginning of his remarks, when he compared the Scottish situation with that of Ireland, he said that tax was not crucial to film location. However, the Government argue that tax is crucial in every other area of Government policy on inward investment for every other industry. Why does the Minister argue that the taxation position of this industry does not matter and is not crucial?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** There are a variety of reasons why that is so. In the case of one film—part of which was filmed in Ireland—I understand that the cost of transporting the crew wiped out much of the tax difference. I said very clearly to the hon. Lady earlier in the debate that we shall consider any lessons to be learnt from the Irish experience which can be applied to the Scottish situation in the light of the consultant's report. We shall fulfil that commitment, and I shall bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's remarks and his strength of feeling on that point.

Despite the relatively rosy picture overall, there is always scope for improvement. In order to examine ways in which the present infrastructure might be improved further, two studies have been commissioned from Hydra Associates as an important element of the fact-finding phase of the film initiative. The first wider study is examining the overall organisation of the film and television industry in Scotland and the opportunities which exist to develop and improve it. The second study focuses more specifically on the mechanisms for funding film productions and, in particular, how to secure more private sector investment. Both studies are now well under way and they should be completed next month.

It is obviously too early to know what will emerge from the studies by way of final recommendations. However, Hydra Associates has held two brainstorming sessions with representatives from the industry, drawn from both the UK and beyond. They have identified six key themes requiring further analysis and consideration: the need to develop and provide training; strengthening the institutional arrangements within Scotland; the importance of attracting new sources of finance; the dominance of London in the United Kingdom film and television industry; improving the marketing effort; and the availability of adequate production and post-production facilities in Scotland.

The final component of the film initiative, which addresses one of the themes identified by Hydra, is the policy and financial management review of the Scottish Film Council which was carried out by Scottish Office officials last year. The review considered how to obtain maximum value for money from the central Government resources available for film in Scotland. The review will be published shortly and I will make certain that copies are made available in the Library.

Inevitably, there has been much speculation about the content and conclusions of the policy review. While I do not want to pre-empt its publication or Ministers' consideration of the review, I can say that it highlights the many developments which have taken place since the Scottish Film Council was established as an non-departmental public body in April 1990. It also draws attention to the contributions made by Scottish Screen Locations, Scottish Broadcast and Film Training Ltd. and by the Scottish Film Production Fund. Despite the progress made over the past five years, the review concludes that, in order to overcome a significant overlap in functions between the Film Council and the other three agencies, there might be merit in merging the bodies into a single new agency.

We will consider that and other recommendations contained in the review, alongside the two studies currently being undertaken by Hydra Associates. That will provide an opportunity to consider the future direction for the next five years in a strategic and a holistic way. We obviously need to be clear about our overall objectives so that they are reflected properly in any new structure to be created. We expect to be in a position to announce our conclusions later in the spring.

The hon. Lady seems to believe that the industry's salvation lies in yet more public funding. I do not think that that is necessarily the case. We must remember that, even beyond the increasing resources that will flow from the national lottery, film is an industry. Its practitioners in Scotland must be flexible, versatile and imaginative, and those qualities will flourish when opportunity knocks.

The Government carefully considered last year's Select Committee report on the film industry, which called for tax concessions. We were not persuaded that that should be a priority in last November's Budget. The tax rules for writing off film production expenses are already more generous than for industry as a whole.

Furthermore, in order to examine the availability of finance for film production in its widest sense, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage has established a high-level advisory committee under the chairmanship of Sir Peter Middleton to look at obstacles to the industry's growth. We are hopeful that Sir Peter and his colleagues will produce practical and effective recommendations.

I should say how welcome it is to see the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) in his place as he is a trustee of the Sean Connery trust. Many young people have benefited from the substantial contribution that a distinguished Scot has made to the film industry.

We want to give whatever support we can to the Scottish film industry. We want many more successes, many more tourists coming to Scotland and many more films being made in Scotland. We shall work flat out to that purpose and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for having raised the subject today.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes past Twelve midnight.*

# House of Commons

*Wednesday 31 January 1996*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Medical Misconduct

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

9.34 am

**Dame Jill Knight** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): It is now 10 years since a constituency case alerted me to the need for changes in the way in which doctors are dealt with in cases of suspension for alleged medical misconduct. Since then, I have raised the issue three or four times in the House. Action has been taken, although, as I shall seek to demonstrate, regrettably it has not solved the problem.

A lady came to my constituency surgery. She was gentle, apologetic, nervous and tearful. She was clearly stressed and told me that her husband was a consultant anaesthetist at the Queen Elizabeth hospital. He had been suspended and accused of medical negligence. She was upset because he was being paid his full salary, but was sitting at home and doing absolutely nothing; he was not allowed to do anything. She said that he was clearly upset because he had no wish to take money that he was not earning. On the other hand, bills had to be paid. It was not possible not to take the money, but it upset both of them greatly. That situation had been going on for 18 months.

I wrote to the health authority about the case and received a guarded response. I wrote again, and another year went by. Eventually, at the end of all that, he was found to be innocent of all charges. Meanwhile, his wife had died.

That doctor was most unjustly and wrongly treated, and his case is not unique. Other doctors are and have been in a similar position. I am worried about the injustice that they have suffered. I am also worried about the money that has been wasted paying them—money that could certainly have been better used by the national health service. Of course it is right that if people are suspended and there is nothing proven against them they should be paid. However, that does not solve the problem. I am worried about the waste of the state's huge investment in training those doctors in the first place, let alone the extra training for consultants. The doctors about whom I am talking today are or have been consultants.

It is perfectly true that the number of such cases is not huge, but I am sure that the House will agree that even one case is too many. Of the 101 cases of which I am aware, only 16 were found to be justified. That means that 85 doctors have been unjustly put through that hell, and it certainly is a hell. The resulting stress is severe, and it has four major sources. One source is the length of time that the cases take. I have cases on record that have lasted anything from two days to 11 years. The mean length of time to resolve them is two and a half years. In three cases, the doctors involved died while suspended, before their cases could be resolved.

In another case, the dispute dragged on for so long that the doctor reached retirement age before it was fully resolved. Although the disciplinary inquiry fully exonerated him at that time, and he was still below retirement age, the employing authority refused to give him his job back.

One doctor had to go to court a year after his suspension commenced to discover why he had been suspended. I was surprised to find that it is not uncommon for another set of allegations to be made if the first looks likely to fail. One doctor had to prepare defences for no fewer than four different successive allegations made over a long period before the authority decided to withdraw all the charges against him. One can only imagine what he went through during that time. I remind the House that justice delayed is justice denied. Something must be done to shorten the long periods during which the accused man or woman is under an extremely serious cloud.

The second reason for stress is the effect that such happenings have on a doctor's career. I have pointed out that it takes two and a half years on average to clear up such accusations, which is a huge chunk out of any medical career. I doubt whether any doctor could get back on the career ladder at the place where he or she would have been if the allegations had not been made.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster): My hon. Friend is referring to extremely honourable people, most of whom were exonerated. However 16 doctors were not exonerated, and what if one of them were to work as a locum, as one did in the north-west? Nobody knew that the doctor had been suspended, he secured successive jobs and he proved to be an absolute menace.

**Dame Jill Knight:** I hold no brief for anyone who practises medicine after he or she has been found guilty of professional misconduct.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** It was before.

**Dame Jill Knight:** The same applies to any doctor who practises when he or she is suspended. I hold no brief for any of those 16 doctors: I am not pleading the case of doctors who should not be practising. Like my hon. Friend, I deeply regret the actions of the doctor to whom she referred. That was clearly wrong—particularly if that doctor was receiving full pay, which is the standard practice, during his suspension.

According to my findings, only a tiny minority of doctors are found guilty. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to draw the attention of the House to the injustice suffered by the majority. I understand perfectly that some individuals are very difficult to work with—that happens everywhere. There is no committee, office or school which does not have a member or an employee who could be described as an awkward cuss who does not get on with his or her colleagues. We have all had experiences of that nature, but it is not right to pillory the person who does not fit. Doctors should not be pilloried on the grounds of medical incompetence when no such incompetence exists and they should not have to face trumped-up charges.

*[Dame Jill Knight]*

The third reason for stress is the cost of defence. The present disciplinary procedures are based on three national health service circulars. They define the categories for disciplinary action as: professional incompetence, professional misconduct and personal misconduct. The classification vitally affects the composition of the disciplinary tribunal panel—for example, whether there is a doctor on the panel and whether the existing professional defence organisations will assist the accused.

Although in their promotional literature such bodies promise to assist in all cases of employment dispute, it does not work out that way. One doctor was forced to pay £10,000 to defend himself successfully against allegations of professional wrongdoing. In that case, the defence body wrote that it was "not minded to help". Another doctor spent about £40,000 refuting allegations, while a third spent more than £50,000 attempting to refute trumped-up allegations. That money is not recoverable and, as far as I am aware, it is paid after tax. There is no right of independent appeal in cases of personal misconduct.

The fourth cause of great stress to doctors is the appalling stigma associated with suspension. In the constituency case that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, the wife died—perhaps as a result of the shame, the upset and the worry of that situation. One suspended doctor made a very telling comment. He said:

"The hammer blow of suspension is utterly demoralising. One's confidence and trust in one's professional ability and eventually one's own self-esteem is severely undermined".

It is also true that the more conscientious and self-critical a doctor is, the greater his demoralisation. Doctors' professional and social standing is undermined. Such people are usually pillars of their society; they are well known and respected. They are probably members of local clubs and they enjoy a certain position in society. When the rumour of their suspension circulates, their position in society alters immediately and the stigma is terrible. They are ostracised, even though they are almost certain to be found innocent. People say that there is no smoke without fire and that there must be something in the allegations, but, if we use a little imagination, we can appreciate how hard it must be for such doctors and their entire families.

There is no better example of that than the constituency case to which I referred. Wrongly suspended doctors frequently suffer permanent ill health, and three doctors have committed suicide. Even when completely exonerated and compensated financially, very few doctors are able to come to terms with their treatment. Even after many years, they cannot let go. A core of deep resentment is established and it contributes to a serious depressive state. The cases have been checked and documented; I assure the House that I have studied the matter very carefully.

I do not know whether hon. Members are aware that all suspended doctors are locked out of their hospitals and that they could also be denied NHS treatment at those hospitals. One suspended doctor who suffered a cardiac arrest and was admitted as a patient to the intensive care unit of his hospital—perhaps his heart attack was caused by his circumstances—was transferred to another hospital because he was told that he was an embarrassment. I think that that is appalling.

Suspended doctors have also been denied the right to visit family members or friends who are patients in hospital. When the wife of a suspended doctor who had been locked out of his hospital for one year—the lock-out was instigated six months after his suspension began—was admitted to hospital as a patient, she was forced to appeal to the community health council for permission for her husband to visit her in hospital. Many community health councils are excellent bodies, but they do not work at the speed of light. By the time that council had finally decided to grant permission for the doctor to visit his wife in hospital, she was dead. Another doctor was locked out and forbidden to visit his wife as she lay dying of cancer in a hospital ward. Yet another was locked out and barred from collecting essential photographic evidence which he required for his own defence. The health authority apparently knew precisely why he wanted that evidence and they denied him the right to get it.

Another doctor had his suspension and lock-out maintained for nearly nine months after a disciplinary hearing had acquitted him of all charges. The verdict had been concealed from the doctor so he did not even know that he had been acquitted, but the lock-out was maintained for nearly nine months. I have no idea why that occurred, but I have strong ideas about the morality of such a situation.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Is there no duty on the people holding those hearings to inform the doctor of the result? That seems quite extraordinary.

**Dame Jill Knight:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I have found so many injustices, and that is apparently another. I can only tell her and the House that that case actually happened. Whatever rules that exist do not work, and that is why I was so anxious to raise this subject today.

We are all told that suspension is supposed to be a neutral act, but I feel sure that those who have listened to me this morning would agree that those factors are not neutral. People have been treated appallingly. The notion that suspension is neutral is clearly not sustainable.

I believe that the information that I have sought and been given on this matter is entirely reliable. If it is, I find some of the reasons given for suspension extremely trivial. With all the consequences of a suspension that I have described, one would have thought that doctors could not be suspended without very good reason.

A serious offence, which could possibly justify dismissal, is not defined. Some of the reasons that I have discovered are trivial. There seems to be a wide variation in suspension reasons between different administrators. What some administrators judge to be a serious offence seems bizarre. One consultant was suspended for writing a repeat personal prescription for his ward sister. Another was suspended because he went through the clinical case notes of one of his own patients and took out papers that he, as the doctor, considered were redundant. A third was said to have over-claimed on his petrol expense. A motoring organisation later gave evidence that he had under-claimed to the tune of some thousands of pounds. The health authority finally had to pay him back.

One consultant histopathologist was threatened with a charge of professional incompetence because he sought a second opinion on a few slides. That is quite extraordinary. Surely it should not be an indictment to ask for a second opinion in any branch of medicine. That must be common because none of us can be so certain of our

judgment on every case. Doctors should not be barred or accused if they ask for the opinion of a colleague who also knows the facts of the case.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Health may believe that the two guideline circulars, which were issued by the Department of Health to remedy some of those wrongs, are efficacious. With great regret, I have to tell him that they are not. HGL(94)49 was intended to shorten the period of suspension and suggested that doctors should be fully informed as to why they were being suspended. HC(90)9 was also intended to shorten the disciplinary period. Not one hospital authority or trust anywhere in the past six years has observed the rules regarding disciplinary action as laid down in those circulars. That is quite appalling.

**Ms Hilary Armstrong** (North-West Durham): I am sure that the hon. Lady knows that a consultant from one of my local hospitals, Shotley Bridge hospital, has been suspended for four years. I have raised the issue in the House and the trust has now agreed to do something about the case. Suspension for such a long time is not in the interests of the doctor, the hospital or the patients. It is certainly not in the interests of the taxpayer, because the case has dragged on for more than four years and the doctor has been suspended on full pay. Therefore, he has not been making his contribution to the service and the taxpayer has been the loser. Such matters should be settled in a more effective, efficient way for the sake of the doctor, the patients and the taxpayer.

**Dame Jill Knight:** That is precisely the case that I am making and I agree very much with her. I have no doubt that many hon. Members have had such cases that have worried us. I am anxious to put on record that there have been efforts to put matters right, including the circulars that I mentioned. However, they have not succeeded in solving the problem and that is what worries me. In every case where dismissal was a possibility, the health authority has ignored the guideline documents.

It is probable that the guidelines are unenforceable. I turn for evidence of that to the minutes from the Public Accounts Select Committee of 15 March 1995, less than a year ago. The public accounts experts struggled for two and a half hours to try to unravel why a woman doctor was suspended for 11 years at a cost of £600,000 to the taxpayer and the health service. The Select Committee worked hard on the question and anyone reading the report will recognise the scale of the job it had to try to find out whose fault it was. My goodness, anyone reading the report will see that the Select Committee's job was like playing blind man's bluff at the same time as playing pass the parcel. The more I read the report, the more I thought it was a cross between Agatha Christie's "Murder on the Orient Express" and J. B. Priestley's "An Inspector Calls. It was no one's fault and nobody could be nailed for it, except the poor doctor who was suspended for 11 years. Extraordinarily, however hard the Select Committee struggled, it could not find out whose fault it was, why it all happened or how it could possibly have taken so long. The main witness who gave evidence to the Select Committee said that the rules to which I have referred were unenforceable.

Furthermore, in all cases alleging personal misconduct, the ACAS code of progressive warnings under the Industrial Relations Act 1971 has also been ignored.

In 1988 there was a joint working party report on the matter, but it was not very conclusive. Nothing has come out of that report which has alleviated the problem, although it did cite some interesting cases including some in which doctors had sued for damages—an eventuality that I have not yet mentioned.

The fastest disposal of a contested case looked at by the working party took one year. The total cost was about £250,000. That included legal fees, costs and the salary paid to the doctor. Five years ago a doctor was awarded £100,000 in damages and that has to be added to the other costs involved. Two cases are estimated to have cost £4 million between them and another has already cost £1 million and is still proceeding. There are many other examples, but I hope that I have given the House sufficient to make my case. One estimate suggests that there are about nine or 10 new cases every year and the average cost is £400,000. So we could be losing as much as £4 million per annum for the health service.

I am asking my hon. Friend the Minister to look seriously at the case I have made and I feel confident that he will do so carefully. On cost grounds alone, the situation cannot be allowed to continue.

I have already mentioned that there is no right of independent appeal in the cases I have outlined and there are other aspects that worry me. The chairman of the tribunal panel is chosen by the prosecuting health authority from a list provided by the Lord Chancellor. In the past, health authorities have rejected certain nominations as being "unsuitable"—they have said no more than that. In all alleged misconduct cases, the tribunal panel is chosen by the prosecuting health authority. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is listening carefully because it is a serious issue of justice that the judging panel should be set up fairly.

The fact that the panel is chosen by the prosecuting health authority could suggest bias. There is a growing tendency to classify all charges as personal misconduct because that makes it easier for the health authority to control the panel. In those circumstances, the authority is the instigator, the prosecutor, the judge and the appeal court. It is Gilbertian in its scope. In one recent case a panel member was the very person who authorised the suspension of the doctor in the first place, and he was on the hospital board that subsequently decided to prosecute. The same board decided to bar from taking part in the judgment any member of the tribunal panel who was not a board member. Yet it is a well-established principle in European and English law that no body can be the judge in allegations that it has made. There must be an independent assessment.

Under European law a doctor has a civil right to practise if he is so qualified and approved. That right can be removed only by a body appointed by law—the General Medical Council or the courts—and only after a fair and open trial. That has been agreed by the British Government. There was a recent case in which a French doctor's right to practise was challenged, but the doctor was found to be in the right.

The consultants I have mentioned have been denied their right to practise because suspension means that they cannot act at all. Therefore, in the eyes of European and English law, they have been told, unfairly and wrongly, that they cannot practise, although there has been no judgment by the GMC or a court. Surely that is wrong. To

*[Dame Jill Knight]*

comply with European law all cases of suspension should rightly be referred to either the GMC or, where there are accusations of personal misconduct, to the courts or to an industrial tribunal. That has not been happening. On and on go the months and years in which a doctor is not allowed to practise in the circumstances I have outlined.

If I were the Minister, I might feel a frisson of apprehension about the possibility of being taken to the Court of Human Rights in the not-too-distant future by a doctor who has been prevented from practising without proper and accepted judgments being made.

It will be apparent to hon. Members that I feel strongly about all this. However, I want to make it absolutely clear—it would be unfair if I did not do so—that I do not regard this as the fault of the Government. All the reports that I have read suggest again and again that it is the fault of the extraordinary way in which some health authorities operate. They are responsible. I have already cited the case in which 11 years went by. That was not the Government's fault. Having said that, the buck always stops with the Secretary of State. It is an unfortunate truth and we must recognise it. He is forced to take responsibility for everything that goes wrong and these things are very wrong. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to urge our mutual right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to set things right.

10.6 am

**Mr. Roger Sims** (Chislehurst): My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) has performed a signal service by bringing this matter to the attention of the House and ventilating it publicly. I congratulate her on her success in obtaining the debate and on the manner in which she has presented her case. The House will be aware that I am a lay member of the General Medical Council and, in accordance with our rules, I should declare an interest in that I receive from the GMC a modest fee in recognition of my work as a lay screener.

My hon. Friend has illustrated effectively the dilemma facing any hospital trust when a complaint is made about a doctor, particularly when it reflects on his professional ability. Clearly, if a complaint is made, the trust—the doctor's employer—will be open to criticism if it suspends him immediately, particularly if what follows is a saga such as that outlined by my hon. Friend. Equally, it could be open to criticism if it did not suspend a doctor about whom complaints had been made. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) mentioned a case, with which I am familiar, which demonstrates that point.

If a doctor were found to have performed a certain surgical procedure or taken some medical steps with serious consequences and it were found that complaints had been made about him previously and nobody had done anything about it, the trust could find itself open to criticism. There is a difficult balance to be struck.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** The doctor to whom I referred was under suspension, but was practising as a locum.

**Mr. Sims:** That is a further dimension. Although things have improved a bit, a doctor can be suspended from one hospital and then offer his services elsewhere. If that new hospital does not make some inquiries about the doctor, what follows may be similar to what my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster described.

A doctor may be suspended quite unexpectedly from his point of view, as he may believe himself to be completely innocent. The complaint may be without any foundation, so the suspension would be extremely distressing for him and his family. It is literally a waste of money because he is being paid for doing nothing. In addition, the hospital and the local community are deprived of his skills while he is suspended.

The main issue is how long it takes to resolve the matter when a complaint has been made and a doctor suspended. My experience is that it is by no means uncommon for it to take 18 months or even two years. Why? We can draw some comparisons with the time that it takes the police to make inquiries in civil and criminal cases. It often takes many months before the matter can be brought before the court. Why does it take that long?

A hospital may receive a complaint from a patient or a patient's relative that may be of such a serious nature that it feels it has to suspend the doctor. The hospital will want to pursue the matter. It will ask for further details about the complaint and then put the full complaint to the doctor, who will have the opportunity to respond. The complainant is given the opportunity to comment on what the doctor has said. An inquiry panel must then be assembled at a time and place convenient to all concerned. I accept that going through those procedures could take some time, but surely not a year, 18 months or two years.

When the panel has heard the evidence, it may conclude that the doctor is innocent and he will be cleared of the charge. However, if it decides that the complaint is justified in some respect, it may decide to punish the doctor. He may then wish to appeal against that decision—a process that can take a very long time indeed.

The problem is that that is not the end of the matter; there is a further dimension. The panel will make a judgment on the extent to which the doctor has failed to comply with the terms of his contract. A similar process applies to general practitioners. The decision will affect the doctor's professional standing. If the original complaint involved negligence—if there is any question about his medical skills—there may have been some justification for suspension. However, if it was an administrative matter, such as some of those referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston, I would find it extraordinary if the doctor were suspended.

If the hospital trust finds the doctor at fault and raises doubts about his professional competence, there is a virtual double jeopardy because the papers will be sent to the General Medical Council, which must then decide whether that doctor should be allowed to continue to practice or whether there should be an inquiry, possibly leading to suspension or even to his name being erased from the register.

Not only is that doctor suspended, not only is he is being paid for a job that he is not allowed to do—which must be extremely frustrating and demoralising for him—but he knows that at the end of the local process he may have to appear before his national body—and that could lead to serious consequences.

For most employees, employers deal with problems through admonishment or even by giving someone the sack. At least those employees can then try to get other

jobs. For a doctor, however, that is not the case, as he may have to appear before the GMC and he may be suspended or even have his name erased from the register. He will have lost his livelihood. We must be aware of the serious consequences that can follow a charge of negligence.

In my capacity as a lay screener, and because I sit on the GMC preliminary proceedings committee, I deal with a number of such cases. It is quite unfair on a doctor to bring him to account for incidents that happened three or four years ago. Part of the reason for the delay is that it takes a long time to go through the process described by my hon. Friend and then through the appeal procedure, which is far too protracted. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take that on board and take action to expedite the whole process.

I fully accept that the interests of the patient are paramount; we must ensure that only competent doctors serve patients. However, we must not forget the interests of the doctor, who must have a fair crack of the whip. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will feel able to do something about the problem.

10.16 am

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the initiative of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), who was kind enough to brief me yesterday on the range of her concerns. The overall matter is very important, as are the legal issues that it raises. The hon. Lady pointed out the apparent contradiction with European law in that in theory a doctor is in practice, but cannot practise because he has been deprived of the ability to do so. That raises proper legal issues.

I want to suggest to the Government a way to deal with the problem. I shall first make a point that widens the issue—there are parallels elsewhere. I do not do so in any arrogant way; I want to help in the process of finding a way forward.

The case has been made. The hon. Lady cited the most horrendous examples. No one in the health service, the health authorities or any other walk of life undervalues the significance consequences for an individual who is suspended but then later found fit to carry on. It is difficult to unwrite that bit of employment history. That applies not only in the health service, but in other parallel public services.

One point that the Minister might consider is the apparent non-compliance with the guidelines. The hon. Lady said—I have no reason to doubt her—that no trust has complied with the rules. The Department needs to deal with that speedily.

Similar issues in the public domain have arisen in two or three other professions. First, there have been well-reported cases of police officers being suspended because of allegations made over long periods. Secondly, teachers are often suspended for lengthy periods after allegations, often serious and worrying, by pupils. It may be a long time before the individual can return to teaching. The rumour, speculation or allegation may be made public, and the teacher's career may be severely damaged as a result.

I declare an interest in relation to the teaching profession. I have discussed the matter with the Association of Teachers and Lecturers—a teaching union for which I act as a consultant and which, as with the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and the GMC, pays me a small amount for my advice. It does so also for some Conservative Members.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. The House is debating hospital doctors.

**Mr. Hughes:** The parallel that I have drawn with teachers is relevant to the hon. Lady's case, and I will suggest a way forward that applies to them all.

Perhaps the Minister could consult on the use of employment law. The matter may ultimately be for the Department of Education and Employment. If the problem ranges more widely than trusts and the health service, there should be another way of dealing with it. It would be nonsense to have one system in the health service and a different one for other public services, such as local authorities and the police.

The hon. Member for Chislehurst spoke of reviews. If the Crown Prosecution Service or another authority takes too long to process a case, it is called before the magistrate to report progress. When a suspension occurs a court or, more appropriately, an industrial tribunal should have the power or be required periodically to consider the evidence from all the parties. If an individual were suspended today, for example, it would be his automatic right to have the state of the investigation regularly considered by an external person, beginning in one month's time. The suspended professional should be able to say, "I am being kept out of my job. Nothing is happening quickly. What is going on?", and an objective third party could say, "You're right. This is unacceptably slow." That third party could lay down a timetable and rules to govern the investigators.

Fundamental to the hon. Lady's case is a guarantee that the persons considering disciplinary action are entirely independent. In registered nursing homes, a disciplinary suspension and the adjudication on the individual's ability to continue in employment can be dealt with by the same people, which is entirely inappropriate. Of course the adjudicators can take evidence from the individuals who enforced the suspension, but the adjudicators must be independent and be seen to be independent. An external element may also be needed.

The House has just dealt with the final stages of a Bill to improve the procedure for health service complaints. It is unlikely that any of the hon. Lady's proposals can be incorporated in that measure. However, that Bill has just gone to the other place. It may be appropriate for any possible amendment that can quickly be made to be incorporated in that Bill. At most, that can accomplish only some things—the issue is much wider. I hope that the Minister will deal with action that can be immediately implemented by his Department, but it may be for the Department of Education and Employment to examine the issues as they apply to all professions across the range of public service.

10.24 am

**Mr. Henry McLeish** (Fife, Central): I am pleased to participate in the debate and to echo the congratulations extended by other hon. Members to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) on bringing the issue before the House. She graphically illustrated the

*[Mr. Henry McLeish]*

problems that arise during suspension—including delay, the impact on the individual's career and the stress caused to the doctor and his or her family.

Major problems continue to arise, despite two measures having passed through the House over the past year—the Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill and the Medical (Professional Performance) Act 1995—which strengthen health service complaints procedures. The inordinate time taken in some cases of suspension cannot be justified. If trusts look carefully at their procedures, they may reach the same conclusion.

To be fair to the Government, they have improved the procedures for processing complaints. The new three-tier system will operate from 1 April, and the monitoring powers of the General Medical Council has been strengthened. However, consideration of the matter must go beyond the structures and institutions in pinpointing why major problems continue.

Every trust has the ability to modify or change its procedures—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong. The hon. Member for Edgbaston said that national standards are needed. Fairness should apply not just in Birmingham or Glasgow but across the length and breadth of the country, and we are not seeing that. I repeat that the time taken to process some cases cannot be justified. What is going wrong?

One answer is that not enough priority is given to individual cases. The British Medical Association, among others, has pointed out that the issue is clearly one for the individual. On the other hand, there are implications for the hospital involved. The BMA points out that the suspended consultant may lose clinical skills, especially if the suspension lasts two, three or four years. A backlog of cases can be created when a specialist is lost to a hospital, and there is additional pressure on colleagues. That can be another problem in a health service that is already subject to strains and tensions.

The BMA also points to the lack of continuity of patient care. There can be nothing worse for a patient than to lose the services of his or her usual consultant. Of course, serious offences may be involved. No one is arguing that there is no case for the safeguard of suspension—but often it should be exercised as the course of last resort. Trusts may be opting for suspension rather than another course, which may not be best.

I agree with the hon. Member for Edgbaston that cases should be resolved more quickly. Obviously the issues are complex. *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether the Minister is mumbling in agreement or just mumbling to one of his hon. Friends behind him.

**The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone):** I was commenting to one of my hon. Friends.

**Mr. McLeish:** That is gratifying at this time of the morning, rather than being insulted—as I am usually.

**Mr. Malone:** Never.

**Mr. McLeish:** There is a mood of magnanimity this morning, at least in this debate.

Why do appeals and suspensions take so long? Trusts are not short of administrators, clerical employees and bureaucrats—people who want to do such work. Why should there not be a national standard and a time constraint? Some individuals will need to be suspended immediately and the cases will take a long time to resolve. The Minister could therefore aid the House in further discussions by painting a picture of what is happening nationally. We need more information.

In his winding-up speech, perhaps the Minister will be able to provide information on the number of complaints against hospital consultants and doctors being processed, the average length of the cases, and where they are occurring. I suspect that in some areas, that information would not be heartening. Clearly, in Birmingham and other areas, cases are arising routinely. The other issue that concerns me is the cost of the processes when we need to be spending as much as we can on the real business of hospitals.

Adjudication procedures concerning allegations of medical misconduct of hospital doctors is an excellent issue to discuss in the House. Although we clearly do not lack structures and institutions to cope with the problem, we must look to the trusts at the front end to improve matters. I am sure that the Minister will respond positively and I hope that he will seek information from each trust about what it is doing so that he can make a judgment on whether many of the delays are necessary. I am sure that an informed debate based on information from trusts will help to speed up the process, ease the misery of many doctors and consultants and ensure that the health service, through the trusts, is providing front-line patient care rather than dispensing of its energies or dissipating them through long suspensions.

10.31 am

**The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone):** I am grateful to have an opportunity, courtesy of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), to address what the speeches of other hon. Members have shown is an extremely important subject. I am not sure whether I shall be able to go along entirely with the attempt of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) to write part of my speech for me. I agree with him, however, and with my hon. Friend, that the matter is important not only for the medical profession but for patients—as my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said.

It is right that the House should debate a matter about which there is clear concern. Although I cannot go the whole way with my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston in some respects, some of the cases that she described seem to raise extremely serious issues, so I should be grateful if she would take them up in more detail—although that would not be appropriate in a debate on the Floor of the House. If what she is saying is borne out by evidence, I would be extremely concerned as it would be clear that the employing trust was not adhering to the very detailed guidelines on important matters.

The guidelines are constantly being reviewed and updated, as my hon. Friend said. She said that much progress has been made in recent years. The detail of the guidelines is such that I hope to be able to convince the House that the Government take the matter very seriously as a national responsibility, although that responsibility must be developed locally between employer and employee.

**Dame Jill Knight:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the receptive way in which he is replying to my remarks.

There would be no problem whatever in furnishing him with more detailed information. As he rightly said, and as I judged, it would not be correct to go into great detail, giving names, places and so forth in this debate. Would he therefore agree to see a small deputation of people who have been studying the matter? They are all doctors and they could cite chapter and verse. It might help my hon. Friend to see them as a group—not a very large group—because they are knowledgeable and have spent a long time tabulating and examining cases.

**Mr. Malone:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. If she would let me have details of what she is proposing, I shall—as always with any request that she makes—look on it very sympathetically.

It might benefit the House if I clear a little of the fog around the issue. It is important to understand the issue in its various components. There is the issue of suspension; the separate, but related, issue of disciplinary proceedings, which runs to a strict timetable; and paragraph 190 appeals should a medical practitioner employed by a hospital decide to exercise that right. When describing various cases, hon. Members have shown that, where separate procedures have been taken one after the other, there has been some muddying of the waters in understanding what rules apply to each procedure.

I do not wish to be defensive, but I am sure that the House will understand that where there is a need in the procedures to be fair to the interests of the public and the individual medical practitioner, there can be delays for a number of reasons. I do not want to refer to any particular case, but the Medical Defence Union—if it is representing a medical practitioner—or the British Medical Association may want to take a considered view of the matter, and take some time to investigate it fully, in order to present the case on behalf of their member. That is quite right, and in some cases it is an understandable reason for delay.

Illness of the medical practitioner is another reason why there might be delays, which on superficial examination might appear inordinately long, in the processes that we have set down. It is important to study each case to see whether it raises issues of unfairness. When it does, it is a matter about which nobody should be complacent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston made much of suspension. It is important to see the matter in context. Evidence to the Public Accounts Committee revealed that only six cases of suspension had endured for more than six months. The six-month period is important because the system requires suspensions of more than six months to be reported to regional health authorities. That will continue after 1 April under the NHS executive because Ministers consider it vital to be informed of delays that go beyond the time limit set out in the guidance. It also encourages trusts to ensure that they comply with the guidelines which, as my hon. Friend said, are set out in HSG(94)49.

It is important to understand the aim of the guidance, which is to avoid unnecessary suspensions. We do not want to be suspending doctors for any reason. Employers are encouraged to consider suspension as something that might be necessary, but that should be avoided if at all possible. They are also told to ensure that, if practitioners are suspended, it should be for the minimum period necessary. I am sure that my hon. Friend was not suggesting that employers should not be entitled to use suspension—

**Dame Jill Knight:** No, I was not.

**Mr. Malone:** My hon. Friend confirms from a sedentary position that that is so.

The House must consider suspension from both sides of the mirror—if I may put it that way. If we had a debate that was prompted by a patient's interest, where something had gone wrong and a clinician had not been suspended and where I was not able to assure the House that it was a balanced process and suspension was available to hospital trusts—the employers—the House would rightly take a pretty dim view.

We must consider whether suspension is carried out reasonably and in accordance with the guidance. Suspension should be seen as a neutral act. This goes to the heart of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston. Suspension is not intended to do other than protect the interests of patients, staff or, indeed, the practitioner. It is meant to assist the investigative process. Of course, it is understood that it is a measure that could have extremely serious consequences in both human and financial terms—my hon. Friend gave us a clear example of that—especially where the suspension proves to be lengthy. That is why timetables are set.

Suspension may be considered when a member of staff needs to be removed immediately from the employer's premises to protect the interests of patients, staff or the practitioner. That, I suggest, is the extreme end of the spectrum. One can foresee circumstances in which it would be necessary. It should be confirmed immediately in writing—this deals with fairness—so that the person who is suspended is made fully aware of what is going on. The letter should state clearly the effective date and time of the suspension, and the content of the allegations and confirm that a full investigation will follow.

As it is a neutral act, it would be extremely unfair not to suspend on full pay, because to do anything else would be to prejudge the issue. I remind the House that suspension takes place at a point when no judgment has been made about what is alleged.

A review of the suspension should normally be undertaken at least every two weeks, and the outcome reported to the chairman or non-executive director who is responsible for the matter. The practitioner concerned should be informed of the outcome of each review. If the investigation has not been completed within three months of the date of suspension, a report should be made to the trust board or health authority outlining the reason for the delay and indicating how long the suspension is expected to continue. It should also include a plan for the completion of the investigation.

The guidance is clear on fairness and on setting a timetable. Should delay appear to be built into the process, the guidance clearly sets out a timetable whereby an employing trust must justify any delay. The importance of that is that suspension cannot continue to be disregarded for an inordinate period.

**Mr. Simon Hughes** *rose—*

**Dame Jill Knight:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Malone:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman first, and then I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

*[Mr. Malone]*

**Mr. Hughes:** What can a suspended employee do if he or she believes that there is delay, that the guidance is not being complied with or that the reports are not proceeding? What can they do to speed up the process and ensure that the guidance is complied with?

**Mr. Malone:** It depends entirely on the circumstances. The process is designed for both parties, and under it the person who is suspended can be involved and encourage progress. There is nothing that says—I presume that this is the point that the hon. Gentleman makes—that further deadlines must be complied with, because during the suspension process investigations are undertaken. The suspension is reviewed regularly by a designated person to whom the person under suspension can complain or draw attention to the fact that matters are not proceeding properly. At that stage, any failure in the process can be brought to the attention of those who are responsible for speeding it along in the most appropriate way.

Although my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston rightly said that speed is important, in other circumstances it might not be of the essence. The person under suspension might wish to make their own preparations for what may follow. It is a two-sided argument, and that is as important an aspect of it as the other.

**Dame Jill Knight:** What my hon. Friend said a moment ago seemed to suggest that the guidelines should have been able, and were able, to stop such cases occurring. I cited the suspension of Dr. Bridget O'Connell, whose case was dealt with by the Public Accounts Committee only last March and who had to wait 11 years, despite the fact that the guidelines were in existence. Surely in that case the guidelines were proven to be ineffective.

**Mr. Malone:** The House examined the matter some time ago and was well informed on it. I think that my hon. Friend would concede that, following inquiries, the guidelines were improved. I am dealing with suspension; the case to which she referred continued after going through a number of complicated processes. I do not think that the case to which she refers falls into the category of suspension. She raises a wider point, which I shall come to. I intend to deal with the whole process and how it should take place.

The recommendations of the working party, in 1990, gave rise to further guidance. It made a number of recommendations about the disciplinary procedure, all of which were taken on board. They dealt not only with the setting up of inquiries but with the timetable for the completion of the disciplinary process. It might be helpful if I set out the timetable to the House.

After the chairman has decided that there is a prima facie case to answer and has informed the practitioner, the practitioner has four weeks in which to comment on the case. After receipt of the practitioner's comments, the employing body can decide, within two weeks, to follow that procedure. Thereafter, the chairman of the inquiry panel is appointed and the panel meets within 13 weeks. The hearing is concluded within one week. A report is produced and the factual part is sent to the practitioner within four weeks. The practitioner makes comment within those four weeks, and the report then goes to the health authority within four weeks. It is a strict timetable and it must be complied with in such inquiries.

My hon. Friend questioned whether inquiries might be biased. It is important that an investigating panel is seen to be independent of the employer; that is in the interests both of the employer and of the practitioner. Although it is set up by the trust responsible for the appointment of the practitioner, it is important to understand that the panel is distant from it. The guidance stipulates:

"No member of the panel should be associated with the hospital(s) in which he works".

Not only should no panel member be an employee of such a hospital, no panel member should even be associated with one.

The guidance continues:

"In all cases the panel should be small, normally of three persons, including a legally qualified Chairman, not being either an officer of the Department of Health or a member or officer of the"

employing trust. The chairman

"will be nominated in each case which arises by the Secretary of State from a panel appointed by the Lord Chancellor."

That is an important safeguard for the investigating panel. I am not sure what better safeguards one could build in.

That passage continues:

"In cases involving professional conduct, the members other than the Chairman should contain an equal proportion of professional and lay persons, unless the charges relate only to relationships between a doctor . . . and his professional colleagues, when it would clearly be appropriate to have a panel wholly or predominantly of professional members, apart from the Chairman."

The independence of the investigating panel is ensured and supported by those guidelines, which have been set out carefully to deal with such matters.

One of the other points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston relates to compliance. The hon. Member for Fife, Central raised that matter too, and asked the sensible question: whether, as all that guidance exists, we are certain that it is being complied with. My hon. Friend suggested that no trust is complying with it—an assertion for which, if she does not mind my saying so, I should like to see a little more authority. I would be concerned if it were true, but I do not think that it is. It is important that the guidance has force, and is not disregarded.

Guidance for national health service trusts, which are separate and independent bodies, has developed since the health service reforms. Hospital trusts have a history of heeding it, and it is heeded in this instance, but guidance is no more than that, and I do not pretend that it is.

I would not go down the road favoured by the hon. Member for Fife, Central, and suggest that we should enforce the guidance rigidly on a national basis. I agree that the guidance forms an important framework that underpins the rights of individuals, but it would be unfortunate if the ability to deal with matters at a proper level—between employing trusts and their employees—were lost, and we were to go beyond setting out guidance with which we expect trusts to comply, but upon which we understand that they may wish to build.

**Mr. McLeish:** No one would disagree with the logic of the Minister's contribution. The central point is the fact that we have structures, institutions, guidance and processes. That is not the issue. I do not say that we necessarily want a heavy hand directing from the centre, but what we have heard has made it clear that there are excesses in the system. Perhaps the cases that have been

mentioned are profoundly complex and take masses of time to resolve. None the less, it would be instructive for the Government and for us if we could find out what is happening throughout the country, so that any further consideration by the Minister could be informed by what was happening in the trusts. This is not a case of the trusts ignoring the guidelines, but it is clear that the application of them may differ from one trust to another. That may be healthy in some respects, but we need consistency and fairness, and that consistency would be better informed if we knew what was happening throughout the country.

**Mr. Malone:** The system gives me that information, should there be undue delay. I have explained to the House that, if there is undue delay in resolving a suspension and turning it into either a full inquiry or a dismissal of the complaint, the information is gathered after six months. When evidence was given to the Public Accounts Committee, six such cases were outstanding. Considering that more than 17,000 consultants are employed by the NHS, that is a small number.

When such a delay has been brought to our attention, of course inquiries are made about whether it is reasonable; we fully expect people to comply with the guidelines. The guidance is not simply thrown out into the blue yonder, with Ministers washing their hands of it and saying, "We have written the guidance, and that is all we intend to do." It is important to us that there is general compliance. However, I reiterate the fact that we expect employers to build on the guidance in a manner appropriate to their local circumstances.

It is important that all procedures are clear and flexible and ensure that patients' interests are protected, that fair treatment is provided for practitioners, that cases are dealt with as speedily as possible, and that professional advice is taken in appropriate circumstances in individual cases. Those are the principles on which the guidance is based.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston raised several specific points, with which I shall now deal. First, she said that suspension was sometimes used for trivial reasons. The guidance clearly implies that suspension is a serious matter and should not take place for a trivial reason. However, what is a trivial reason in the eyes of one party may be an important reason in the eyes of another. I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that I would not expect trivial reasons to lead to suspension. I would expect employers to consider all such issues carefully, as the guidance requires them to, before taking the important step of suspension.

My hon. Friend also talked about the process not affecting the right to practise. It does not. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) rightly said that there are other ways in which the right to practise can be handled—through the General Medical Council.

Perhaps it would be helpful to my hon. Friend if I were to clarify the position. Suspension is a neutral act, so if a practitioner under suspension decided to resolve the matter himself or herself by simply moving out of the context of that employment and getting another job, that would be entirely possible. Nothing would have been proven against the practitioner, and it would be wrong to prejudge the issue by saying that the right to practise should be diminished by the act of suspension.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Should not the fact that the practitioner is under suspension be disclosed to the hospital to which he applies?

**Mr. Malone:** Suspension is a neutral act. My hon. Friend is suggesting that suspension should be seen as something other than a neutral act.

The House has put legislation on the statute book which allows immediate referral to the GMC if the suspension involves a serious matter of basic professional competence, and that is the correct route in such cases. That is a decision for the individuals involved. We must not forget—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston does not forget—that a reference to the GMC can be made by someone other than the employing body; it could be made by a fellow practitioner. There is a range of ways in which to handle that aspect of the ability to carry out medical practice, apart from the act of suspension.

This has been an important debate. I thank my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to address some of her concerns directly and to explain the position on suspensions and investigations. I hope that I have also given the House an assurance that the Government take the matter extremely seriously. I hope that my hon. Friend will bring the individual cases that she has raised to my attention. I shall be happy to consider them, and I have said that I shall consider her request for a meeting with those who have raised them with her.

When we talk about the suspension of a member of any profession, we are dealing with a difficult and sensitive area. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey alluded to some parallels. It is vital to the public interest and to patients that we get it right. We have made excellent progress in recent years. Where we have been able to learn lessons, we have always been happy to translate them into the guidance that we expect to be reflected across the service. We have an open mind on these matters. Where improvements can be made—we can discuss that with the profession in particular—we are more than happy to make progress and build on the current guidelines.

## Meat Hygiene Service

10.59 am

**Mr. Edward O'Hara** (Knowsley, South): When the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations (1995) were laid before the House in March 1995, I tabled early-day motion 845, in which I posed certain serious questions about the rationale, proposed operation and likely effectiveness of the Meat Hygiene Service. The early-day motion attracted considerable support from a remarkable spectrum of interests across the House, an indication not only of the strength of the case but of the far-reaching implications of the new arrangements for abattoirs and jobs across the country.

Following a prayer against the proposed regulations, they were presented for the scrutiny of the Fifth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments on 4 April 1995. A devastating case against the regulations and the introduction of the MHS was developed in that Committee with the support of the hon. Members for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland), for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis)—an interesting cross-section of Members.

The rationale offered for the establishment of the MHS had three legs—greater cost-effectiveness, greater efficiency and greater consistency in relation to the existing system managed by local authorities. In Committee, it was clearly demonstrated that the MHS would not satisfy any of these criteria.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, the MHS has an establishment that costs about £54 million to run. All these costs must be taken out of the industry in charges. I have heard varying figures for the cost to the industry in charges to local authorities under the old system, ranging from £26 million to £45 million. Whichever figure we take, there is a sudden and serious increase in overheads to be financed by the industry.

I shall not burden the House with excessive repetition of the case made in Committee, as the non-validity of the claims of greater efficiency and greater consistency will be exposed in my remarks today. Suffice it to say that, I made no apology then for stating that there was a crisis in the fresh meat industry in two respects.

First, small and medium-sized operators, such as Sammy Morphet of C.S. Morphet and Co. in my constituency, were predicting that they would be driven out of business by the increased charges. Indeed, in my early-day motion, I asked whether the new system was actually intended as an instrument for enforced rationalisation in the industry. This was a serious question, as to whether we were witnessing rationalisation by statute, rather than by inducement and compensation.

An important aspect of the crisis in the industry was the breach between the hierarchy of the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers—the consultative body for the industry favoured by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—and people such as Sammy Morphet of Cronton in Knowsley, Thomas Slinger of Greater Harwood near Blackburn, E.D. Jones and Son of St. Asaph, Cig Môn Cymru—I hope that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) will forgive my pronunciation—from Llangefni in Anglesey and Keighley Abattoir Ltd. Mr. Whitely, from the last company mentioned, said in a letter that was passed to me in April,

"For God's sake make them understand what is going on".

Many others have been involved, including Toby Baker of Nailsea. I mention him in particular because he is the secretary of the Quality Meat and Livestock Alliance, to which many disillusioned small and medium-sized operators have turned to represent their interests.

Secondly, many endangered operators are determined not to pay the increased charges with which they are faced under the new system. It is a classic case of "can't pay, won't pay". I have kept in touch with the situation since the introduction of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 and the inception of the MHS, and I take no pleasure today in saying, "I told you so". All the predictions have come to pass, and a report in the *Daily Mail* this week stated that 120 companies are refusing to pay their fees to the MHS, which is facing a shortfall of £14 million in its annual budget.

MHS has served writs on three companies, including that of Sammy Morphet in my constituency. Sammy Morphet is happy to lead with his chin and test the principles at issue in court, the High Court and the European Court of Justice, if necessary. He describes the new system as a shambles, and cites the example of the residue inspection charges. In the past, MAFF checked any meat suspected of containing harmful chemical residues and, as I understand it, made no charge. Under EU directive 86/469, a new system was set up, co-ordinated by the Government's veterinary medicines directorate and run since April 1995 by the MHS.

The charge imposed by the MHS for this service on C.S. Morphet is £12,000 per annum for the analysis of eight pigs' kidneys a month.

**The Minister for Food (Mrs. Angela Browning):** I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he should be aware that, prior to the MHS carrying out the testing duty, Mr. Morphet was invoiced by Knowsley borough council. It was not a free service—he received bills for the inspections.

**Mr. O'Hara:** There was a dispute at that time between Mr. Morphet and Knowsley council, and the council understood that Mr. Morphet was making a test case at that time. When I was referring to a free service, I meant the service that was in operation before EU directive 86/469. I am grateful to the Minister for pointing that matter out, but I was aware of it.

I was referring to the charge of £12,000 per annum for the analysis of eight pigs' kidneys per month. While £12,000 in itself is a burden on Mr. Morphet's business, he could not believe what happened next. During the summer of 1995, MHS officials arrived at his abattoir with a fridge-freezer, which they plugged into his electricity supply—without asking permission, by the way. Eight kidneys per month were placed in the fridge-freezer by MHS inspectors but, from June to December, no one came from the MHS to collect them. However, on 14 December 1995, Mr. Morphet received a bill for £5,000—for the inspection of the kidneys that were still in the refrigerator.

In case one thinks that that was an isolated case of cavalier charging in the meat industry, I shall give the example of Cig Môn Cymru, from the constituency of the

hon. Member for Ynys Môn. In March 1995, the firm received its last bill from the local authority for inspection services at its abattoir in Llangefni. The charge was £9,945.18 for 60,061 sheep slaughtered in a four-week period, which works out at 16.56p per sheep. On 27 June, the firm received its first invoice from MHS for a two-week period from 3 to 14 April 1995, when 25,699 sheep were slaughtered. The bill was for £6,405, or 24.92p per sheep—an increase of 50 per cent.

There are by-products of these increases. For example, the increases are not uniform across the industry, so livestock traders will pick and choose their abattoirs. That can mean that a longer distance is travelled by live animals for slaughter. Jobs are being lost in abattoirs, which may have to close for that reason or because of heavy charges alone. The current position also encourages live exports to Europe, where abattoir rates are cheaper. No wonder Sammy Morphet faces an extra £30,000 a year in charges for his average throughput of between 2,000 and 3,000 pigs per week.

Another example of cavalier charging relates to the recognition of experienced slaughterers. The industry might understand a charge of £65 for the validation of newcomers to the trade, large though the increase is in comparison with the original nominal fee of £1—the charge may have been reduced recently; I do not know the exact figure—but experienced hands in slaughterhouses not only consider the charge exorbitant, but find it demeaning to be validated by official veterinary surgeons who, although they may have professional veterinary skills, do not possess the manual skills with the knife that are the essence of the slaughterer's trade.

That brings me to the nub of the dispute between the dissident element in the trade and the MHS. The justification for the new system is the implementation of European directives governing meat hygiene. No one argues with the principle, but it must be asked how the new charges here can be higher than charges elsewhere in Europe. In fact, the question, "How are the charges so high?" is easy to answer; more interesting is the question, "Why are they so high?"

Let us deal with the "how" question first. Ante and post-mortem inspections are carried out in abattoirs in accordance with European Union directive 91/497. Under the MHS, they are conducted by official veterinary surgeons, who cost more than mere meat inspectors. Yet it is maintained that the identification of unsound meat is a special skill that can be acquired by technicians who do not need the full range of skills possessed by the veterinary surgeon—stockmen or slaughterers, for instance. Indeed, it could be argued that a typical OVS does not possess the knife skills that are necessary for the post-mortem examination of a carcase under directive 91/497. Official veterinary surgeons are expensive—and that is why MHS costs are so high.

Members of the trade would maintain that OVSs are not needed in static postings in all abattoirs. Indeed, it could be said that it is their visible input in static postings that has lowered their credibility among experienced practitioners in the trade. OVSs would make better use of their specialist skills, and recover their credibility, in the role of monitors of meat inspectors in more than one abattoir. The resultant service would be cheaper, too, and directive 91/497 would be met. I understand that the system works satisfactorily elsewhere.

Let me make two further points. First, it may be asked what the ante-mortem inspection achieves that cannot be achieved by the post mortem. Secondly, I am advised that the whole system of inspections is—here I use a word that I have used before—a shambles. Abattoirs are reporting variations of as much as 400 per cent. in the inspection hours allocated to similar slaughtering operations. In some abattoirs, inspectors will examine "green offal"—stomachs and intestines—and in others they will not. Some inspectors insist on being present throughout the time when killing takes place; others do not. The Government have cited inconsistencies between local authorities as a justification for the new system. So what is different?

Previously, if a proprietor had a complaint or query, he or she had only to call in at the local council office; now he or she must try to communicate with a remote organisation in York. No wonder it is known as the Kremlin: it cannot communicate answers to simple questions such as how many hours are being charged for when invoices are presented.

MHS field staff are no less bewildered. They find themselves being arbitrarily allocated to slaughterhouses miles from their former work places, and doubtless their travel costs are passed on to the slaughterhouses. They find that overtime is subject to random variations, and that—especially in the case of part-time inspectors—work is erratic and uncertain. They find that the overwhelming burden of paperwork takes colossally more time than under the old local authority system, and they must endure a constant flow of confusing edicts and counter-orders from York. That is what I mean by a shambles.

**Mr. David Nicholson** (Taunton): On 4 April last year, a Standing Committee implemented the regulations. The hon. Gentleman was a member of the Committee; I attended, although I was not a member. When I asked my hon. Friend the Minister to assure us that the system that was about to be introduced was the simplest and most cost-effective system that could be introduced consistent with the European directive, she told me that there would be

"close contact with the MHS to ensure that the organisation's costs are held down year on year."—[*Official Report, Fifth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.*, 4 April 1995; c. 8.]

The hon. Gentleman has done Parliament and the country a great service in bringing to our attention horrific evidence of the costs of the new system, and I wish him well in his efforts.

**Mr. O'Hara:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support. Sadly, all the horrifying predictions are coming true.

I said that the organisation was a shambles. That brings me to the other question that I posed: why does such a system exist? That, as I said, is the interesting question. The answer lies in the nature of the MHS, which is not a simple quango but a self-financing regulatory authority, or SEFRA. It has an establishment of about 1,000 staff, and its total running costs are some £53 million or £54 million—all to be financed from charges levied from the trade. It is not subject to Treasury strictures and controls like other quangos—like, for example, my local NHS hospital trust, with which I had some dealings earlier this week. It is currently having to cope with a directive to cut management costs by 5 per cent. and allocate the savings to front-line services.

*[Mr. O'Hara]*

A SEFRA, however, has every incentive to perpetuate its bureaucracy by imposing ever more, and ever more unreasonable, regulations on what it calls—in a distortion of the term—its customers. It means the trade. The customers of the MHS are, in fact, the public, whose health it purportedly exists to protect. It is as if the police financed their traffic services with the fines levied on speeding and over-the-limit motorists, and called them their customers.

There is, however, a more sinister aspect, which also derives from the nature of a SEFRA. I mentioned earlier that a large block of the trade—some 120 firms—had lost faith in the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers. That is because they feel that the big operators who are the hierarchy of the FFMW are supporting the MHS, with all its faults, precisely because its operation, as I have described it, will drive the small operators like Sammy Morphet out of existence. I shall not use the term "unholy alliance", but there is a convenient coincidence between the interests of the big operators and those of the people who run the MHS.

What is in it for the big operators is that they will eventually dominate the trade when the small operators are driven out of business; what is in it for those who run the MHS is a lucrative, risk-free business with rich remuneration. That is why last year, in early-day motion 845, I questioned the interests involved in that risk-free business.

What is the prognosis for the long term? When the big operators have the field to themselves, they will call the shots. They will be in a position to dictate to the MHS. For example, by threatening to relocate elsewhere in Europe—many are multinationals—they will be able to expose the MHS shortfalls in fee income and so ensure that their wishes dominate the continuing activities of what is called the "Service". The technical term for that is regulatory capture.

I am talking about cartels. They will be able to force the imposition of new regulations, which will drive smaller rivals out of the trade and prevent newcomers from coming into it and it will all be done in the name of such virtuous cloaks as meat hygiene.

I have the evidence for that in a letter from the general secretary of the FFMW to the principal finance officer of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, dated 8 November 1995, which refers to unpaid bills that existed at the time and includes the words:

"it would be helpful to this end for the Minister to stick firmly to his stated intention not to issue licences to plants which have not achieved the structural standards required by the end of the derogation period on 31st December 1995, (except in exceptional circumstances beyond their control)."

This is the interesting point:

"This would have the effect of at least preventing a number of plants who have no intention of fully complying with the legislation or paying MHS bills from continuing to exacerbate an already serious situation".

That is a sinister comment in a letter from an officer of the FFMW to an officer of MAFF.

What will be the consequences for the true customers of the MHS—the meat-buying public? There will be a reduction in consumer choice, as the fewer large outlets will concentrate on standardised fare to the exclusion of the variety of livestock breeds available through smaller, specialist outlets. I imagine that such outlets exist in constituencies like that of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn—in rural areas.

The cartel will be able to control prices to a much greater extent because small, independent livestock buyers will be removed from the market. There is a close analogy with the domination of the retail trade by the giant supermarket chains. But, in the case of the meat industry, there is an added and serious dimension. Food safety—the ultimate rationale of the MHS—will deteriorate. With fewer, larger units processing greater numbers, there will be increased danger of cross-contamination in slaughterhouses, increasing the spread of such bacteria as the salmonellas, campylobacter and E. coli 0157. Incidentally, it is worth noting that the only E. coli outbreak ever associated with meat came from a fully approved EU slaughterhouse of the type that I predict will dominate the trade. Tracing sources of infection will become inestimably more difficult and the break-up of the present food hygiene system, with the introduction of the MHS, will make it more difficult to trace food poisoning. In short, we are not merely looking at a monster in the creation of the MHS, but at a nightmare for public health.

The local authority system, for all its faults, was not broken, although it may have needed some fine tuning in keeping with progressive demands. Sadly, however, one cannot expect local authorities, pressed as they are to meet their statutory responsibilities in many fields, suddenly to step in and bail out the Government by resuming a responsibility so summarily removed from them.

Yet a system is needed to enforce the regulations, which necessarily and rightly flow from EU directives on meat hygiene. The interesting thing about the abomination of a system that the Government have introduced under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, is that it makes the option of opting out of the EU regulations more attractive than it otherwise would have been to many people. There are those who say that we should opt out for ideological reasons. Others are saying that we should do so because the system is such a mess.

Given that the EU is reviewing the meat inspection system to bring it into line with more modern systems of risk assessment, there is scope for returning the responsibility for inspecting their own produce to the meat traders, leaving the regulatory officials the simple task of monitoring systems in the same way as they are monitored for the rest of the food industry.

I conclude with this appeal to the Minister: pursue that self-regulatory line in Europe, pressing for the development of systems that will make the MHS redundant as soon as possible. She would thereby be doing a great service to the economic health of the fresh meat industry, the jobs of people employed in it and, more importantly, to the health needs and wealth of choice of the meat-buying public.

11.25 am

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on obtaining this debate. Having listened carefully to everything that he has said in the past 25 minutes, I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister that I find it difficult, if not impossible, to disagree with anything. The hon. Gentleman has spoken the truth and put forward the case

on behalf of the meat industry and I endorse not only what he said, but his request that that monstrous edifice and organisation in York be abolished at the earliest possible date, given all the unnecessary on-costs that it carries.

Macclesfield has long-standing historical connections with the farming and livestock industries. There is a splendid market at Chelford, which is owned and run by Frank R. Marshall—a company that has been in business for more than 100 years. Another market is on the borders of my constituency, lying in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), who is away on an Agriculture Select Committee visit—otherwise she would be here supporting the views expressed by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South. That cattle market is owned and run by Whittaker and Biggs.

I have regular contact with small, private butchers, who are members of the Macclesfield and District Butchers Association—an organisation that still exists despite the tremendous competition from the superstores, such as the Tescos, Safeways and Sainsburys of this world. Funnily enough, I am going to its annual dinner and dance in only a few weeks' time. I applaud the role that the small, family butcher and the small and medium abattoir play in the life of the farming community and in that of many rural towns and villages.

Macclesfield is also home to a most excellent slaughterhouse, operated by TTS Meats on the Hurdsfield industrial estate. It is on behalf of that slaughterhouse, those who own it and supply it, those who are employed there and those who ultimately benefit from the high-quality products that it provides for customers that I have been conducting an on-going and determined correspondence with my hon. Friend the Minister and the Department for a considerable period of time. I am deeply concerned about the significant and adverse impact that dramatic over-regulation and excessive—I really mean that—administrative charges have imposed on that slaughterhouse and other small and medium slaughterhouses.

My passion for deregulation is well known to the House. It is a passion that I had been led to believe was shared by my colleagues in the Government. I despair of the way in which the Meat Hygiene Service was set up by MAFF and of how it has operated.

Abattoirs are singled out for extra regulatory controls, unique in the food industry: the presence of full-time public sector/agency officials to inspect the supervised hygiene procedures for meat and to apply what I would call a "health mark". They are also required to pay an inspection levy that enables the MHS to recover the costs of the health controls. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South mentioned that £54 million has to come out of the industry each year.

All other food businesses are essentially self-regulating. Operators take responsibility for compliance with regulations under the food safety legislation without having to pay direct enforcement costs. There is no evidence that that way of operating is anything other than successful. For slaughterhouse operators, the cost of funding public sector/agency meat inspectors has increased considerably and resulted in controversy, anger and resentment throughout the industry. I do not think that I can be contradicted when I say that the industry is totally opposed to what has happened.

Millions of pounds are involved annually in meeting this hidden but unavoidable tax, which leaves the British slaughterhouse industry at a competitive disadvantage in Europe—a point eloquently made by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South. That threatens to drive it out of business altogether. Many hon. Members could name slaughterhouses that have gone out of business, to the disadvantage of the agricultural industry and of the communities in which they were located.

I refute absolutely the argument that the current punitive regime of inspection and fees is necessary on public health grounds as my hon. Friend the Minister will, no doubt, argue in her response. Ministers from her Department frequently come before the House and assure us, I believe rightly, that British meat is safe. She has said that time and again in recent weeks and I agree whole-heartedly with her. It is safe. However, that is not because of the bureaucratic empire that has been built and financed by sucking the blood of smaller businesses, but because most operators are responsible in their approach to hygiene and public health. They know that that is their duty and that they will suffer sanctions if they are not responsible. They know that the customer, Mr. and Mrs. Citizen, has never been more aware of, or demanding about, food safety issues and they respect that.

Meat hygiene legislation is founded on two fundamental myths. The first is that the slaughtering stage of the meat production chain presents special health risks that can be eliminated only by the full-time presence of public officials. The second is that abattoir operators, uniquely in the food industries, are either incapable or irresponsible in their approach to the introduction and implementation of adequate control measures. Neither of those misrepresentations can stand close scrutiny, but, until this debate, they have never been challenged on the Floor of this House.

In a food scare climate, which frequent outbreaks of mad media disease have exaggerated and misinformed ever since the first salmonella salvo from my misguided hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie), public officials with jobs and empires to protect have shown even less inclination to question their purpose in life. Fresh meat is a low-risk food and current hygiene legislation has been demonstrated to have nothing to do with health control.

The greatest risk in the food chain, to those who know anything about it, is not slaughterhouses but the way in which cooking, preparation, storage, display and serving of food are undertaken. The wealth of scientific evidence to support that view was ignored by the House in 1992 when the meat hygiene regulations were introduced. It was against the background of sensational and irresponsible reporting by the media, faulty technology and a questionable law that the creation of a centralised meat hygiene service was pursued—wrongly, in my view. It is not surprising that dissent, confusion, anger and frustration have followed.

The regulations are not only unnecessary but, I say in support of the case of the hon. Member for Knowsley, South, anachronistic. They belong to another age and have no part in a modern society. Fresh meat is not a hazardous food. The sensible measures that are required to produce safe, good-quality meat are well within the capability of competent butchers. Abattoir operators can achieve the

*[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]*

necessary standards in the context of the Food Safety Act 1990 without being singled out for trampling under the iron heel of Meat Hygiene Service charges.

Today, that iron heel demands that if an abattoir has enough turnover to keep an inspector occupied for only one hour a week, the operators nevertheless have to continue to pay for 40 hours' inspection charges. Such blatantly unfair practices, ridiculous overcharging, unacceptable levels of inspection and total lack of consultation have led to turmoil in the industry. Responsible business men and women are refusing to meet the unreasonable bills that they are being sent. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not ask whether I support such action. I perhaps would not give a direct answer but I fully sympathise with them and believe that they have a very good case for taking that action.

Abattoirs faced, as the Minister knows, an immediate 25 per cent. increase in inspection charges when that monstrous body, the MHS, wrested responsibility from local authorities, to which I pay a tribute for the role that they previously played in the industry. On a turnover of £3 million a year, a typical slaughterhouse faces inspection charges of a staggering £50,000 annually. Businesses cannot survive in such a climate.

Furthermore there is patchy commitment on the part of the service to the implementation of the rules. That was referred to in a number of cases mentioned by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South. Responsible traders, who feel morally obliged to comply with regulations that require massive investment, are understandably bitter when they see the Meat Hygiene Service in other areas fail to take action against those who flout the regulations. While we have these regulations and this monstrous body, let the regulations be evenly implemented throughout the country. I do not like to look to Europe too much or too often but let us consider the charges that apply on mainland Europe.

It is high time that there was a root and branch reform of the Meat Hygiene Service and, what is more, of the principles upon which it is based. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, in replying to the debate, will agree to such a review in addition to the request made by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South. I hope, too, that other hon. Members, perhaps those who serve on the Agriculture Select Committee, will consider this important matter and take steps to save our abattoirs before they are dismembered on the butcher's block of excessive bureaucracy.

11.38 am

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): I congratulate, as will the whole House, the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) not only on bringing the matter before us but on the unstinting way in which he has examined the problems inherent in the Meat Hygiene Service. I hope that the Minister will note that any issue that brings together the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and myself must be of wide significance in rural areas. I want to deal briefly with three specific issues and underline the points already made by other hon. Members.

My first point concerns the rationale for setting up the Meat Hygiene Service. At the time, there was some misunderstanding and misapprehension—it was thought that the MHS in its present form was set up at the direct instigation of the European Union and the European Commission. Nothing could be further from the truth. On 5 April 1995, in the Fifth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, the Minister was good enough to say that that was the case. The MHS is a British organisation—it is the product of the thinking of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is not some wicked Brussels bureaucratic plot.

As the hon. Member for Macclesfield has said, it is significant that other parts of the European Union have adopted different techniques, mechanisms and institutions to fulfil their obligations under the treaty of Rome and the directives. We need to know today—we pressed the Minister on this in Committee and did not get a wholly satisfactory answer, although I admit that that was because the institutions were comparatively new—what the comparable arrangements are in the other 14 states, as they now are, and if they are as expensive, as bureaucratic and as burdensome as the hon. Members have said. What is the competitive position in the so-called single market?

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South referred to the way in which the MHS has been set up and its responsibilities to its customers, to Parliament and to the nation. I repeat the statement made by the Minister in answer to a number of our questions in the Committee. She said:

> "I reiterate that the MHS is answerable to the Minister, who is ultimately answerable to Parliament. That is the line of communication. There is therefore no question of its being a stand-aside quango which is unaccountable and can go its own way".

Through the Minister, the MHS is answerable to the House—that is why the debate is vital and timely. It is an opportunity for the Minister to answer for the MHS. Note again: there is no question of the MHS being answerable in any sense to the bureaucrats of Brussels.

It is extremely important that we acknowledge the debt that we all owe to Christopher Booker, who has also considered this issue carefully and has identified the extent to which the responsibility lies fair and square with Whitehall. This problem was home grown, within a few hundred yards of this building. It is nothing to do with Brussels.

Secondly, I know that the Minister and the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) will share my concern at the way in which, over recent years, the regulations—not just since the MHS has accelerated the process—have impinged on the smaller abattoirs in south-west Britain. The same may be true in Wales and in other parts of the United Kingdom, with which I am not so familiar.

In Committee last year, we were able to demonstrate, using the Meat and Livestock Commission's figures, that the reduction in the number of abattoirs had been accelerating as the regulations came into place in 1992. That acceleration had increased. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us the latest figures for the number of abattoirs. It is not the throughput but the number that is important. That is what is geographically significant.

**Mrs. Browning:** In the past three years, 51 abattoirs have closed. From 1971 to 1992, when the regulations on fresh meat came into force, 62 abattoirs per year closed. That is a significant difference.

**Mr. Tyler:** I am grateful to the Minister. Clearly, the fact that closures have occurred and are continuing since we raised this issue with her in Committee last year must be a matter of real concern.

**Mrs. Browning:** In three years, 51 abattoirs have closed, compared with 62 closures per year from 1971 to 1992. That is a significant reduction.

**Mr. Tyler:** That is precisely the point that I was trying to make. In Committee last year, the Minister gave us assurances that that trend would not continue. It is disturbing to find that it is, and at the time when—I think that the Minister, with her south-west experience, would be with me on this—greater and greater concentration of abattoir facilities inevitably leads to longer journeys. We all know, and she knows better than anyone, from the problems with the new regulations on the welfare of animals in transit—apart from the export problems with which we are all familiar—that we must staunch the wound, and stop any more smaller abattoirs closing. The centralisation of facilities is damaging in that wider sense.

Thirdly, on the charges, the Minister said:

"The new fresh meat regulations include a number of minor changes designed to reduce compliance costs."—[*Official Report, Fifth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.*, 4 April 1995; c. 7-23.]

If that is true, either they have not worked or other increases in the cost regime have outbalanced that. As the hon. Members for Macclesfield and for Knowsley, South said, in some cases, the overall cost increases are dramatic. I suspect that, at the core of this, is again the fact that Britain has insisted on using expensive, skilled but utterly inappropriate methods for the purpose of inspection. The official veterinary service is not the right organisation to be employed on such an exercise. I hope that the Minister will tell us what is happening in the other 14 states. Are comparable professionals, at comparable cost, being used?

I was not there but I understand that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food spoke at the Conservative party's Blackpool conference and that the emphasis of his speech was that he was declaring war on expensive red tape in his Department. Some might say, "16 years too late", but never mind—that is good. I want to know whether this particular example of expensive Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gold plating of what was given to us by agreement with the European Union has resulted in excessively burdensome costs on all parts of the industry, as the hon. Member for Macclesfield has said. Surely, if there is a war on red tape, this is a good place to open the first front.

11.46 am

**Mr. Nicholas Baker** (North Dorset): I welcome the debate. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) was wrong on costs. He ignored the need for standards and much of the debate has ignored the fact that British people require standards, to which my hon. Friend for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) referred, because of the way in which they have been frightened about meat eating. Clearly, the way in which the Meat Hygiene Service is working in practice in his constituency is different from the way that it is working in mine, and I am sorry to hear that. Some of his predictions were imaginative, speculative and—I hope and believe—wrong.

The figures that I have are that the total cost of providing the inspection service in 1995-96 is expected to be just over £35 million, compared with the previous local authority arrangements, which cost £45 million. That is a greater saving than was promised to us in the first place. Of course, I should like that cost to come down, but it is an improvement on what we had before.

Given that my experience of the MHS is different from that of my hon. Friend, I asked the National Farmers Union in my constituency what its experience is. It tells me that the work relationship between the MHS and NFU members and abattoir owners is generally good. It is impressed by the openness with which the MHS operates. There have been relatively few complaints from owners of abattoirs. I will discuss an abattoir in my constituency later, so I am familiar with that side of things.

In most of the debate so far, hon. Members have ignored the fact that the previous arrangements involving local authority inspections were severely unsatisfactory. They not only cost the business community overall a lot, but provided uneven and different standards in different parts of the country. Different arrangements prevailed.

Like other hon. Members, I regret today's climate. Like the Irishman, I should like to start my way to Dublin from somewhere else. Nevertheless, we must recognise that the old system of regulating and inspecting meat provision was unsatisfactory, unfair and did not produce results with which the consumer would ultimately be satisfied.

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): Will my hon. Friend expand on his last statement, that the old system was unsatisfactory? It is easy to make such comments, but in that instance, he needs to provide some proof or evidence that the old system resulted in an unsatisfactory product.

**Mr. Baker:** I recognise my hon. Friend's expertise and I have no doubt that his direct experience is different from ours in the south-west, but it is the considered view of the National Farmers Union in my part of the country that the standards that were applied were different and that different abattoirs had to conform to widely differing standards—a practice to which, understandably, they objected strongly.

The Sturminster Newton abattoir in my constituency, with which my hon. Friend the Minister has been closely involved, provides an excellent service to the farming community and to the meat and butchering trade, and it has been affected by the regulations. They are a considerable hurdle for business to overcome. I must record my gratitude, and the Burden family's gratitude, to the Minister for the way in which she has handled the case. In the special circumstances, she felt it right to give a further derogation from those regulations to enable that business to renew itself.

Like me, the Burden family do not like regulations, but they recognise that today they must provide a first-class service. They want to achieve the best standards possible and, in so doing, do not want to pay more than necessary. They are undertaking a major fund-raising exercise to build a new abattoir. They want to take their business into the next century, and they want to export meat. They want to achieve the oval stamp.

There is a great market for the Burden family's beef, and for other meat, in the third world. That market will not be available unless the meat achieves the highest

*[Mr. Baker]*

standard and the family need time to ensure that their factory meets those standards. They are grateful to have been given that time. The family recognise, albeit reluctantly, that if they want to compete, to provide a good service to the farming community and to export their product, they must achieve the highest standards.

Why are standards necessary? It is all very well for the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) to say, "Let us go to Europe and discover what other standards apply." Although that is a useful exercise, we start with the British consumer, who demands very high standards.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield that, regrettably, the British consumer has been panicked by a combination of mad professors and other people with other interests into being frightened of eating meat. Therefore, at least for the foreseeable future, we must ensure that standards, and no doubt even bureaucracy, exceed what we would like them to be ultimately. I concur with the hon. Member for Knowsley, South, who wanted self-regulation, but that is light years away. I wish that it were nearer, but it is not.

I conclude by quoting to the House an example from Dorset, which may be of interest to the hon. Member for North Cornwall, of the way in which panic and irresponsible behaviour operates on the British consumer in a way that it probably does not operate in any other country in Europe. Ten days before the end of the winter term, Dorset county council, under Liberal Democrat control, imposed a temporary ban on beef products in schools, not because new evidence had emerged—it had not—but because of scare tactics. The media were at work. One or two mad professors had made pronouncements. It was alleged that there had been

"lots of requests from parents"

for the ban. Further inquiries revealed that a total of six letters had been received.

The ban had a devastating effect on the farming community. There was, I should add, no ban in old people's homes or anywhere else, only in schools. As the *Dorset Evening Echo* said, that was a "knee-jerk reaction" by the Liberal Democrats, and it was very much to be regretted. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee continued to state throughout that time that there was no evidence of linkage.

About two weeks ago, the ban was halted and the decision was changed. I welcome that. That step was taken as a result, not of new medical or health evidence, but of pressure and of a recognition that damage had been done to the farming community. Irresponsibly, a highly damaging panic was stirred up, and that is not an isolated example of the fears that can be aroused by people who appear to believe that it is in their interests to do so. There are more mad cows in county hall in Dorset than in all the cattle herds of North Dorset. I deplore that.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us how she can reduce costs and bureaucracy—an aim with which I am entirely in sympathy—while maintaining across-industry standards. I was disturbed to hear suggestions earlier that standards were uneven, even under the new provisions. British meat is a first-class product. Our producers want to sell on the world markets. High standards of safety are required for public protection. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister understands that, even if others do not.

11.56 am

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones** (Ynys Môn): I hope that the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker) will forgive me for not following him into his little difficulty with the Liberal Democrats. I shall turn my attention to the core subject of the debate, which was expressed well by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), who has done us all a great justice by initiating the debate. It is important that the House recognises that there is considerable and widespread concern at the way in which the Meat Hygiene Service operates, the costs of that service, which are now evident, and the impact that they have not only on the abattoir industry but on the farming community generally.

I know that the Minister is aware that it is necessary that several outlets should be available to farmers. As other hon. Members have said, a vast number of small abattoirs have closed. The Minister may be able to tell us that the rate of closure is slowing, but some are still closing, to the detriment of the agriculture industry.

The Minister knows that, in sparsely populated rural areas far from a marketplace, some abattoirs have great difficulty attracting the right level of throughput from their local community throughout the year. At some times of the year—in my area, from January to April, before the lambs come on the market—they have to bring in animals from other parts of the United Kingdom, which is an increased cost. It is necessary for employment to be maintained in the abattoirs throughout the year. Abattoirs are an important source of local employment. Their difficulties have been compounded by the substantial increase in costs that has confronted them as a result of the introduction of the Meat Hygiene Service.

When I spoke to managers at the abattoir mentioned by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South—Cig Môn Cymru Ltd.—they predicted that their costs would increase by between 50 and 55 per cent. when the service commenced. In January 1995, they gave me an estimate of what they thought the cost of meat inspection and veterinary visits would be. Some people thought that they were being pessimistic and that the level of charges would be substantially lower. When the Government introduced the concept of the Meat Hygiene Service, it was on the basis that it would be cost-effective and reduce the overall burden on the industry.

In March 1995, the abattoir company came to me and said, "Our predictions were right. Our costs will go up 50 per cent. because we have been told by the Meat Hygiene Service what our costs are likely to be". I have been in regular contact with the Welsh Office, which is responsible for agriculture in Wales, about the level of charges. I have been told that there will be consultation between MHS officers and each abattoir to determine the level of cost for each abattoir and whether it can be justified.

Despite the predictions that were made in January 1995, despite the representations that I made in March 1995 and despite the Department's statement that there would be consultation, the January 1995 predictions were absolutely correct. There has been no variation in those charges, and the costs are exactly as predicted.

I subsequently made representations to the Welsh Office, and I was told that it was difficult to make a true comparison between proposed MHS charges and previous local authority charges. The Minister added in a letter to me:

"Owners may have changed their plants' size or operating hours; the throughput or the types of animals slaughtered may have altered."

I have heard some excuses for price increases in my time, but that takes the biscuit. There had been no change in the type of animals going through the abattoir, no change in the level of throughput and no change in its plant size, but the cost still increased by 50 per cent.

By the end of 1995, even though the industry had been told that there would be consultation and an appeal procedure, and that the service would be cost-effective, charges were substantially higher than they were under the old local authority regime. I agree with the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker) that we must have a hygiene service for meat that is of the highest possible standards. People need to be confident that the meat that they eat is safe—but the current system is destroying the industry.

The Government must find a formula that enables abattoirs to be absolutely confident that the meat is safe, yet reduces the burden and cost of bureaucracy that the type of service which the Government have introduced has placed on them. That is absolutely clear. I should like the Minister to acknowledge that the abattoirs which predicted that costs would increase have been proved right and that Ministers did not listen to them. The Government must respond to that. People at the abattoirs have asked me, "Why should we have to pay this kind of charge to the Meat Hygiene Service when there is no competition? We have a service that can charge virtually what it likes. How can we challenge that? The Minister will not listen to us, and the Government will not listen to us. Why don't they introduce a service that has an element of competition in it?"

If someone else can produce a service that is more cost-effective and competitive, it should be considered. I know that the Minister is aware of those issues, and I hope that she will take them on board.

12.3 pm

**Mrs. Llin Golding** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on so diligently and eloquently pursuing this further disgraceful episode in the misgovernment of our country. The Government's excuse for taking away the responsibility for meat inspection from local authorities was the desire to avoid the varying standards and costs that applied in different local authorities. The truth is that it was part of their vendetta against local government in general, no doubt brought about by the humiliation heaped upon the Tory party at every local election. As Lord Howe has apologised for getting rid of the Greater London council, so I hope the present Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), will soon repent for the damage that he has caused the meat inspection service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), who has great experience in these matters, put the issue clearly when he said that any problem in obtaining uniformity in pricing and standards could have been solved simply by issuing guidelines. The solution is simple. I must tell the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker) that there was no reason to create, without accurate and adequate consultation, a new organisation with so many drawbacks and which has aroused fears that, after short-term cushioning, charges will increase substantially, which would speed up the decline in the number of British slaughterhouses, harm jobs and lengthen travel distances for animals.

One of the main concerns expressed about the Meat Hygiene Service was its lack of accountability, and that is still the case. A great advantage of today's debate is that it gives the Minister the opportunity to cast aside some of the secrecy with which the MHS has been shrouded. Perhaps she will tell us when the agency intends to report publicly on its activities. We should appreciate information on cost-effectiveness, throughput, animal health, and enforcement against abattoir operators and meat traders. Will she tell us when we can expect more information so that we can better judge whether the MHS is providing a more efficient service?

Meat products are notoriously open to contamination and the dumping of bad meat. It is essential that effective monitoring arrangements are provided.

**Mr. David Atkinson** (Bournemouth, East): The hon. Lady will be aware that the total cost of providing the service through local government was about £45 million a year, which is slightly more than the MHS proposes to spend this year. Is she aware that many local authorities subsidise their inspection service? Does she believe that it is right for council tax payers and consumers to continue to subsidise the British meat industry?

**Mrs. Golding:** The system we now have in place is a costly shambles over which we have no control. Prices can be increased without any consultation or recourse to anyone.

**Mrs. Browning:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs. Golding:** No; the Minister will have time to reply, and I should like to make some progress.

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs. Golding:** No, I will not. There is not much time, and other hon. Members have been waiting to speak.

I should like to examine some of the specific matters which have given local authority associations concern. One of the main bones of contention between local authorities and the Government when local authorities controlled meat hygiene was veterinary supervision of meat plants. The local authorities' view was that environmental health officers were cheaper and more effective than vets.

Local authorities wanted to reduce veterinary supervision, but the Government refused to allow it. However, the Government are now allowing the MHS to reduce supervision—the very thing that was refused to local authorities. Why, oh why, is that? Because the MHS has found it difficult to recruit staff, not least in hiring the appropriate veterinary surgeons to manage staff at slaughterhouses and abattoirs? Is it because the

*[Mrs. Golding]*

Government now understand the problem that high veterinary fees—the basic legality of which are now being studied by the European Court—caused local authorities?

Costs would be even higher if the Government had not made the savings that local authorities wanted, but were not allowed, to make. Will the Minister tell us what the annual cost of the MHS would have been if the savings had not been made, and what the cost is now?

While local authorities and MHS local officials are working together—the MHS is using local authority offices in such places as Smithfield market—local authorities are concerned that the MHS has added to the confusion over food safety enforcement and created gaps. Will the Minister tell us what arrangements the MHS has made to inform local authorities about food health issues in their areas?

Those important issues must be addressed if the public are to receive proper protection. For example, the Association of District Councils has drawn my attention to the issue of illegal slaughter by unlicensed slaughtermen on premises that are also unlicensed. As a consequence, meat is sold that may have been prepared in insanitary conditions. It has advised that:

"Currently the MHS and the State Veterinary Service have the exclusive power to deal with this situation; however, the MHS seems unwilling to take action on incidents which occur outside licensed premises, and the SVS does not have the staff available to respond quickly enough to tackle the problem. The earnest desire of the Association is therefore that L.A's are given comparative powers to the MHS and SVS in order that they are able to adequately protect the public health and safety."

Will the Minister comment directly on that point, which has a bearing on the important subject of bovine spongiform encephalopathy? On 4 April last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South drew attention to the fact that it was local authorities which had pressed a reluctant Government to:

"enforce better procedures for beef carcass splitting in the industry."

Will the Minister confirm what guidance is now issued to MHS staff about BSE matters in general and, in particular, about the enforcement of the new regulations relating to bovine spinal offal?

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities is concerned about the low profile of the MHS and the responsibility of its vets during the BSE scare last year. The AMA tells me that, from a local authority point of view, it is "very suspicious". The AMA has long held and expressed the view that vets are not the right people to be put in charge of meat hygiene. It has said:

"vets are best left looking at the health of animals, and they have insufficient knowledge in detecting unhealthy food. With BSE for example, they won't know once the bovine in killed whether or not the animal carcass is healthy. Similarly their expertise will not be in forming a judgement on whether or not the spinal cord has been properly removed and left healthy meat".

The AMA's view is clear:

"When meat hygiene was left with local government, wider enforcement activity was possible. If inspection staff thought 'mucky' meat was being produced from unhealthy animals, they would then call on the wider resources of the local authority to help complete their investigations. This is no longer the case."

They are very serious concerns and the Minister must address them.

There is great concern in the country about BSE, animal health and animal welfare. From the local authorities' point of view, there is little evidence that the MHS is tackling those problems with the vigour that the Government would have expected from local authorities. We seek an assurance from the Government today that they will repair the damage that they have done to our country's food protection service.

12.12 pm

**The Minister for Food (Mrs. Angela Browning):** I shall begin by picking up some of the points that hon. Members raised during the debate. Throughout his contribution, the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) worked on the assumption that the Meat Hygiene Service has cost £54 million—which was the figure that he mentioned in the Statutory Instruments Standing Committee. I am astonished that hon. Members on both sides of the House have assumed that that figure is absolutely correct. Any one of them could have tabled a written question in the past few weeks and received an answer from my office as to the exact cost of the service 10 months down the road. The hon. Gentleman's figure is quite inaccurate, as I told him in the Standing Committee. Today, I shall provide the correct figures, which prove that the basis of the hon. Gentleman's argument is flawed and that the allegations made by hon. Members on both sides of the House are totally without foundation.

I shall deal now with the points raised by hon. Members. We consult not just the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers, but the Quality Meat and Livestock Alliance, British meat manufacturers and a whole range of people who represent both large and small companies. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South pointed to regulation inconsistencies between different abattoirs. The system that we operate in this country is based on the hazard analysis critical control point system. So as not to over-regulate them, plants are assessed individually and the amount of inspection required is based on things such as throughput and the need for further inspection.

That system has been welcomed not just by the meat inspection industry, but by whole areas of British industry as a minimalist approach to regulation. In other words, inspection is concentrated on those points in the process and on those premises where it is deemed necessary. We seek to reduce regulation by working in partnership with the abattoir owner. That is why some plants have more inspections than similar plants.

The hon. Gentleman then suggested that we should adopt the European proposal, but the Europeans are considering the system that the United Kingdom has pioneered in that area. Under our system, inspections are different from plant to plant, but regulation is minimal. We do not over-regulate where regulation is not needed. The system also helps plants to recognise the role that they must play to reduce the number of inspections of their premises.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South also said that the MHS is not subject to Treasury controls. That is not the case: it is subject to both Treasury and National Audit Office controls. I point out to him and to the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) that the fact that we are having this debate, in which I can answer for the Meat Hygiene Service, proves that that service is directly accountable to my right hon. and learned Friend

the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and myself. Consequently, I am here today to account to the House of Commons. There could not be a more transparent line of communication between the service's operations and its accountability to this place. I think that the hon. Gentleman described it as a self-financing regulatory authority, but that is not the case. There is a clear line of direct contact, which I welcome.

Many hon. Members mentioned competition in Europe. My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker) made a very telling point, using the example of the small abattoir at Sturminster Newton in his constituency. I have met my hon. Friend and the owner of that abattoir, and I issue an open invitation to hon. Members to meet me, with abattoir owners from their constituencies, and talk about problems in abattoirs and about the details of individual cases.

That abattoir owner came to my office and said, "We want the European health mark. We want to be able to export, because it is a £1 billion industry and we are very good at it." The demands of the marketplace, both at home and abroad, create huge opportunities for those abattoirs that aspire to those standards, that control and the health mark. The industry is asking for that. That is where the industry is heading in the next century, and I am astonished that hon. Members want to see a reduction in the controls that allow British companies to compete.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) referred to other member countries. Many, such as Ireland, Denmark and Holland, have centralised inspection systems. There is no evidence to suggest that the United Kingdom is disadvantaged commercially as a result.

I shall deal now with the main substance of the debate, as I should like to put the facts to the House. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South. When the Statutory Instruments Standing Committee debated the regulations which transferred responsibility to the Meat Hygiene Service last April, the hon. Gentleman painted an alarming—indeed, an apocalyptic—picture of the effect that the MHS would have on the meat industry. I am sorry that he chose to pursue that theme in his remarks today because, 10 months down the road, I can provide more information.

I can confirm that accountability was made very clear from the time that the MHS was established. It will produce an annual report after the first year—it is now 10 months old—which will be placed in the Library. There is no question of any secrecy, and it is rather disappointing that the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme did not know that.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South predicted that the industry would have to bear overhead costs averaging £20,000 per abattoir and that his constituent, Mr. Morphet, would be charged an extra £30,000. He said that the MHS would have a built-in incentive to maximise its own requirements, that it would drive small and medium operators out of the industry, that consumer choice would be restricted and that prices for livestock farmers would be reduced. The hon. Gentleman even predicted that fewer than 95 slaughterhouses would remain in business by the end of 1995. He will have heard the figure I gave twice, and I hope that the hon. Member for North Cornwall also understood the figure. I told the Committee in April that those accusations were unfounded. This morning, I shall give the House the facts.

The story of the Meat Hygiene Service is worth telling. When we set it up, Ministers gave it a target of achieving an efficiency gain of 10 per cent. in relation to estimated costs—our figure of £45 million, not that of £54 million given by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South—in 1994-95. We expected the MHS's operational costs, with the 10 per cent. efficiency gain, to amount to £40 million in 1995-96.

We also took the view that it should be possible for the MHS to achieve further efficiency gains in future years, and we concluded that it would be right to make available some financial assistance in the first year to ease the transition to the new arrangements. We therefore made available up to £3 million, for 1995-96 only, and we made it plain, in the House and in another place, that the Meat Hygiene Service would be expected to find the efficiency gains necessary to compensate for withdrawal of that transitional relief after 31 March 1996. In other words, the MHS was required to ensure that chargeable costs in 1996-97 would be less than £37 million—the amount that we expected to be charged for the industry in 1995-96, taking into account the efficiency savings and the transitional relief.

The MHS is now forecasting, just two months before the end of its first year, that its operation costs for 1995-96 will turn out to be £35.2 million pounds. I wish that hon. Members had thought to ring my office or put down a parliamentary question, because the contributions to the debate, including that by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), have been based on the wrong assumption that the figure was almost double the actual figure. The erroneous figure was produced by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South last year and was perpetuated by him this morning.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** The Minister is making much play of the actual costs of the MHS. My figures show that, in 1990, local authority costs for a similar service when there were 700 abattoirs and more than 100 poultry plants were £32 million, yet in 1995 the figure for the MHS, when there are only 400 abattoirs—not 700—and a static number of poultry plants, is about £37 million. Will the Minister comment on the statistic quoted by my constituent about his abattoir—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that these are short debates, and one question is sufficient.

**Mrs. Browning:** I hope that my later points will help my hon. Friend.

The MHS is now forecasting that its operational costs for 1995-96 will be £32.5 million. That is an efficiency gain of more than 20 per cent. in the first year, despite the fact that we had charged it to make an efficiency gain of 10 per cent.

Because the European legislation prohibits subsidisation below the level of the so-called Community standard charge, and the MHS charges to many plants are coming out below that standard charge, only £2.5 million of the £3 million allocated to transitional relief will be used. So the total amount paid by the industry in 1995-96 will be some £32.7 million pounds. I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield made about fewer plants, but we are several years down the

*[Mrs. Browning]*

road and the MHS is charged with additional responsibilities. For example, it now has a very important role in animal welfare in the abattoirs.

**Mr. Tyler:** In the debate in Committee, the Minister said:

"As far as charges are concerned, we expect them to be no higher next year than they have been in the current financial year."—[*Official Report, Fifth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.*, 4 April 1995; c. 24.]

Is she now saying the figures are 20 per cent. lower than expected?

**Mrs. Browning:** No, I am saying that, because of the 20 per cent. efficiency gains made by the Meat Hygiene Service, there have been considerable reductions, but they may not apply to every single plant because of the point I have just made about minimum charges. When we set up the Meat Hygiene Service, we knew that there were variations in charges. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) gave a constituency example that is a case in point. In some areas, but not all, local authorities subsidised the charges that they levied from taxpayers' money.

That excellent result from the MHS means that some plants have had reduced costs this year compared to what they paid under local authorities. A large red meat plant that paid some £610,000 in 1994-95 will pay around £556,000 in 1995-96—a saving of £54,000. A medium pig slaughterhouse that paid £56,000 in 1994-95 will pay £39,000 in 1995-96—a saving of £16,000. A small abattoir that paid nearly £3,400 in 1994-95 will have a bill of less than £2,900 this year—a saving of just under £500.

As for Mr. Morphet, the constituent of the hon. Member for Knowsley, South, I understand that he has refused to provide the MHS with copies of his local authority invoices. It is therefore difficult to make an accurate assessment of how he has been affected by the MHS, but we believe that in his case the Meat Hygiene Service's charges are likely to be some 20 per cent. lower than he was charged by his local authority in 1994-95. If the hon. Gentleman or his constituent would like to supply me with those invoices so we can make the comparison, we would be very pleased to see them. To date, they have not been forthcoming.

There are also equally impressive savings in the poultry sector. One large plant will save around £75,000 on its 1994-95 bill of nearly £400,000 and another will save nearly £59,000 on a 1994-95 bill of more than £236,000.

We have always acknowledged the fact that, in individual cases, charges could go up under the MHS, because there was a wide disparity in charges under the local authority system. By and large, those who find themselves paying more under the MHS are those who paid well below average before. The industry in total is paying substantially less, and that is a very important point. Also, the charging policy is consistent across the country and the staffing levels on which the charges are based are being adjusted as necessary, following a thorough audit in each plant. That is the point that I made to the hon. Member for North Cornwall just now.

I hope that the House will recognise the commendable achievement of the MHS. I pay tribute to the chief executive and all his staff—especially the meat inspectors in the plants—for the energy and the commitment that they have shown in tackling their challenges. However, hon. Members will not be surprised to learn that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I have no intention of allowing the MHS to rest on its laurels. It has done extremely well in its first year of operation, and we shall make sure that next year's targets require the chief executive and his team to keep up that good work.

In practice, the MHS is already delivering in its first year an efficiency gain that we had expected would take more than two years to achieve. It would not be reasonable to expect another 20 per cent. from it next year, but we shall certainly keep pressure up.

Hon. Members have made comparisons between what is done now and what was done by local authorities. As the Minister responsible for dealing with BSE, I have had several meetings in the past year with my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister and members of the meat trade. We have discussed some of the problems that we have encountered in slaughterhouses, including staining and disposal of specified bovine offals and the retention of small pieces of spinal cord in the vertebral column. Those problems did not come to light under local authority inspection.

The general public and the meat industry must be reassured that we now have efficient, uniform inspection carried out throughout the country. When we find a problem, we are able to deal with it by bringing forward measures such as those which we have placed before the House in the past few months. I hope that all hon. Members recognise how important it is, especially in BSE controls, that we have that professional, uniform service so that when a problem arises we identify and deal with it quickly.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South has had much to say in his local press in the past few days, as well as in his contribution to this debate, about non-payment. If the message from new Labour is "Do not pay your bills", we take note of that. That is a rather familiar theme and I thought that it was an old Labour message. Perhaps it has been forgotten. About 90 per cent. of the MHS customer base of 1,800 businesses—that is slaughterhouses, cutting plants and cold stores—are paying their bills. Those who are not paying are giving themselves a nice little advantage over their competitors while the legal arguments are being pursued.

In the Woodspring case, the judge made it clear in his November statement that there was no reason why payment should not be made while the matter was before the European Court of Justice. In other words, some people are working the system to their commercial advantage while others in the meat industry are working to improve our export trade and build up their businesses. Those people will not carry those who have debts and nor will the British taxpayer. I will pursue those debts through the courts rigorously. I hope that the hon. Member for Knowsley, South will consider exactly what he is supporting when he suggests that people who—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. We must move on.

# Pollution (Bexley)

12.30 pm

**Mr. David Evennett** (Erith and Crayford): I am pleased to be able to raise the important issue of pollution in Bexley borough in this short debate. Pollution is an issue of increasing importance within our society and, in my borough of Bexley, it is causing growing concern. The borough is an extremely pleasant place in which to live and work, and it is certainly a privilege to represent it in Parliament. However, there are important factors at work which are causing increased levels of pollution locally and putting strains on the local environment.

I must stress that pollution is not an issue that divides people on the grounds of political affiliation. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) in his place. Pollution is not restricted to one part of my borough or to that borough in isolation. However, Bexley's problems are greater than in neighbouring London boroughs or in Kent.

Bexley council's environmental agenda document entitled, "A framework for consultation and action" will be debated at a conference on the local environment in Bexley on 10 February. The aim of all in my constituency and across the rest of the borough is—as the document says—

"to ensure that Bexley is a clean, healthy, pleasant and accessible Borough for people to live and work in and to visit."

There are many interesting sights in the borough to which people can come, and we welcome visitors from other parts of the country and abroad.

As one of the borough's representatives in Parliament and a resident of Crayford, I wholeheartedly endorse the sentiment contained in that document. I am determined to push hard to ensure that local pollution is reduced. Although education must be a factor, we must look to local and central Government, as well as local industry, to play leading roles. Today I am looking particularly to my friend and colleague the Minister, the hon. Member for West Hertfordshire (Mr. Jones), to take on board my concerns and to ensure that his Department plays its full part in the fight against increasing levels of pollution in my borough. We need more help in the future.

Air quality in Bexley borough has been monitored for the past 10 years. Originally, the late and certainly unlamented Greater London council and the London scientific services maintained a constant monitoring station at Crossness sewage works in the north of Bexley. That unit measured sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and ozone—in other words the major industrial and road transport air pollutants. It produced annual reports.

Bexley London borough has a monitoring station located in my constituency at Slade Green, which measures all the pollutants assessed by the old GLC station, as well as the levels of respirable dust in the air—known as PM10. Bexley's station commenced operation in 1992, and since 1994 has been affiliated to the Department of the Environment's national automatic air monitoring network. Reports are produced daily, quarterly and annually.

In addition, pollution is monitored in Bexley at a station established in Belvedere in August 1995 by Barking Power plc, to measure air pollutants that may be emitted from the combined cycle gas turbine power station in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham. I am advised that that monitoring station, established in accordance with a planning condition, will be transferred to Bexley council in 1999.

We have considerable monitoring of local air quality, and the results suggest that, although Bexley experiences air quality similar to that of other urban areas, there is an additional problem of air pollution from specific industrial sources in the east Thames valley. Our area appears to have higher levels of pollution.

The results of monitoring show that the local levels of sulphur dioxide pollution exceed reasonable standards. The Department of the Environment's panel on air quality standards has recommended a protective standard of 50 ppb measured over one hour. However, the local measurement has recorded a maximum considerably higher than that for many hours over the past year. Therefore, the level exceeds the Department's recommendation.

The reasons for that lie with the power stations and large industrial processes to the east of Bexley, over which the local council has no control. Bexley can monitor, complain and highlight, but it does not seem to have any power to take action.

It is alleged that particles in the air are responsible for the increasing number of bronchial and asthmatic illnesses in northern Bexley, particularly in Erith, Belvedere and Thamesmead. Local measurements suggest that the guideline of 50 $\mu g/m^3$ of air, measured as a running 24-hour average, is frequently exceeded. A peak 24-hour running average would be 90 $\mu g/m^3$ in Bexley. That is probably associated with local road transport and local power stations. In addition, local road transport, particularly the large and heavy lorries, is responsible for high levels of nitrogen dioxide, which may also exceed the guideline for air quality control set by my hon. Friend's Department.

We do not have accurate figures on this and, although I appreciate that there are statistics and statistics, there is a growing feeling within the council, among local residents, and certainly among the borough's Members of Parliament, that there is a problem. The statistics presented to me by Bexley council's environmental health department give me some cause for concern.

I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate from the figures and from my concerns that, although I do not wish to be a scaremonger, I am concerned that the levels of pollution appear to be increasing, and seem to be much higher than they should be under the Department's guidelines. I hope that the Minister will take on board the issues and concerns that I have raised.

**Mr. John Austin-Walker** (Woolwich): The Thamesmead area, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, is partly in his constituency and partly in mine. I wonder whether he has seen the evidence produced by the former director of public health for Bexley, which showed that levels of respiratory illness in the Thamesmead area are far higher than the census economic deprivation statistics suggest. Will the hon. Member also confirm that the former director showed that the level of asthma and

*[Mr. John Austin-Walker]*

respiratory illness among children in the area was the third highest in the south-east Thames area, the highest being in the part of the locality that I represent?

**Mr. Evennett:** The hon. Gentleman is right, and I share his concern. I have seen that report, and I hope that there will be some action to reduce the problems of respiratory illness in that area, particularly among young people.

The provisions of the Environment Act 1995 which relate to air quality management will come into force in 1997. My borough of Bexley has already made it known to the Department of the Environment that it would like to take part in the pilot project to test the implementation of the new statutory controls contained in the Act.

The pilot scheme is due to commence soon—perhaps as early as April. I hope that Bexley will be one of the councils allowed to participate in it. I urge the Minister to give a favourable response to Bexley's application, because of the concerns in the borough about the level of air pollution.

To add to the pollution problems caused by local industry, the power stations and the east winds that seem to blow pollution into the borough, the local environment is also threatened by an application by PowerGen and Cory to build a huge waste energy incinerator at Belvedere in northern Bexley. The proposal, which is strictly the responsibility of the Department for Trade and Industry, has been refused once, but if it is allowed to be built, that could result in further pollution problems for my area.

The application has been refused by Bexley council, and it is opposed by all local people, organisations, political parties, community groups, the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker), myself and others. I hope that there will be a public inquiry to allow local views to be aired more fully.

**Mr. Austin-Walker:** The hon. Gentleman referred to the threat from the Cory-PowerGen proposal. Does he agree with the statement of the Baptist minister for Belvedere, Mr. Goode, in his letter to the DTI? He said:

"to knowingly build this plant in an area already experiencing such acute problems with pollution and its resultant illnesses, would be scandalous and irresponsible. An act of environmental vandalism towards the residents of Belvedere and beyond."

**Mr. Evennett:** I certainly endorse that view, although I do not like the emotive language. I would not use such language.

The issue of refuse disposal is important. Unfortunately, because of shortage of time, I was not called to participate in our recent debate two weeks ago. However, I did sit through the whole debate. I was encouraged by the Minister's speech, and by the general tone of the debate. Of course there is a need for more recycling—a message that came loud and clear from both sides of the House. However, I believe that we need local solutions to local problems.

Bexley council and the residents are keen to have local solutions to Bexley's refuse problems. What they do not want is to become a home for huge amounts of waste from neighbouring boroughs—and possibly, in time, other parts of Europe. With the PowerGen-Cory proposal, some 1.2 million tonnes of refuse will be required to operate the vast incinerator, yet only 7.5 per cent. of that would emanate from Bexley borough.

Although some of the refuse would travel on the Thames, the rest would travel across the borough and add to the pollution on our already overcrowded roads. I strongly objected to the proposed incinerator on many grounds, but in particular on the environmental issues and the threat of increased transport pollution. I look forward to a public inquiry into the matter.

We had hoped that the excellent proposals for the development of the Thames gateway would mean a rejuvenation and regeneration of the Thames riverside, with new clean industries. For far too long the potential of the area has been under-utilised and damaged by the dirty and polluting industries of the past. Thamesmead, Belvedere, Erith, Slade Green and Crayford look forward to new investment, jobs and homes as part of the initiative. A waste-to-energy incinerator was not what we had in mind to improve the area. I hope that it will not prejudice the development of the clean industries and new homes and jobs that we want in the area.

I pay tribute to the organisation BADAIR, set up to lead the campaign against the PowerGen-Cory incinerator proposal, and in particular its former chairman Alec Tapper and vice-chairman Commander John Mankety—local people, determined to improve the local environment.

Having dealt with incineration and the problems associated with emissions from that, I want briefly to deal with pollution from lorries and cars. The problem of increasing traffic and the environmental consequences of exhaust fumes is widespread across London; it is not just an issue in my borough. However, the position is exacerbated locally because of the inadequacy of local roads and the increasing number of vehicles travelling through residential roads in Crayford, Bexleyheath and Bostall in particular. Huge lorries thunder along roads that were never meant to take them.

For example, Crayford has become a continuing traffic nightmare, with the stop-start progress of cars and lorries emitting exhaust fumes causing more pollution. There has often been near-gridlock in the town centre, with exhaust fumes causing a cloud over the town.

Meanwhile, on the major motorway crossing our borough—the A2—traffic has increased dramatically over the past few years, causing increased pollution and creating more difficulties for those whose homes are close to the road. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) has raised the problems experienced by his constituents with our hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London.

The road now ranks among the busiest in the United Kingdom. At times, it is so congested that cars and other vehicles travel at low speeds, stop-start and create more pollution. The road is fairly busy for some 20 hours a day, and has changed out of all recognition from when it was opened.

Traffic from the A2 causes great environmental problems across the whole of the borough. While I realise that that is not the subject of today's debate, and needs to be pursued with the Transport Minister, it nevertheless highlights the problems of Bexley caused not just by industry but by traffic passing through the borough to other destinations and by the heavy lorries that come to

Bexley's industrial areas. The increasing frequency and size of lorries and the growth in the number of car journeys in the area contribute to the poor air quality, which is being monitored by Bexley council.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister and his Department to do all they can to improve air quality and reduce levels of pollution across London, but especially in Bexley. In the short term, I believe that Bexley has a strong case for joining the pilot scheme and for monitoring the new statutory controls under the 1995 Act. I also believe that the Department's overall responsibility for the Thames gateway initiative will allow it to help to invigorate and rejuvenate the area as part of a riverside community, with environmentally friendly industry, in which it is a pleasure to live and work.

Our area has great potential, but it needs help from the Government and the local authority, as well as local industry, to kick-start the development. We need clean industry and cleaner air for the residents, the visitors and everyone who works in the borough of Bexley.

12.47 pm

**The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones):** I welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate, as it enables me to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), who has waged an energetic and single-minded campaign to improve the environment of his constituency. He is a respected campaigner on this and many other issues, and Bexley is fortunate in having him as a champion.

As my hon. Friend said, Bexley contains one of the air pollution monitoring stations belonging to the Department of the Environment's automatic urban monitoring network. It shows that Bexley experiences levels of pollution that are, on the whole, not unusual for any urban site in the United Kingdom. For example, levels of nitrogen oxides can approach, although they rarely breach, the Department's poor air quality threshold. It was breached for only a single hour in each of the last two years. Levels do not approach the European Community's limit value, which I remind the House is 200 $\mu g/m^3$ and the 98th percentile of hourly means over a calendar year.

We recognise that levels of sulphur dioxide have occasionally caused poor air quality, as defined by the Department's air quality banding. The poor air quality threshold for sulphur dioxide roughly coincides with the World Health Organisation's guideline value. This level was exceeded in Bexley on four days in 1994, and on 13 days in 1995.

That is the picture of air quality in Bexley. The question of sulphur dioxide apart, it largely reflects the air quality to be found in other urban sites. The Government recognise that there is nationwide concern over growing evidence on the health effects of some pollutants and the desire to improve living conditions—particularly in our cities. The Government are determined to take effective action where the need to bring down levels of air pollution has been identified. I will outline the broad framework of pollution control.

The United Kingdom already has in place one of the most sophisticated industrial air pollution control systems in Europe. It was introduced in the Environment Protection Act 1990, and consists of two elements—integrated pollution control and local authority air pollution control.

Integrated pollution control applies to large industrial installations and is currently administered in England and Wales by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. Its authorisations set limits on emissions to all environmental media from such installations. Local authority air pollution control, which is administered by the relevant local authority, covers emissions to air from small and medium enterprises.

In both systems, authorisations are based on best available techniques not entailing excessive cost—BATNEEC—for the industrial process in question, and are reviewed every four years, so that changes in the available technology can be taken into account. Across the UK, some 2,000 processes are authorised under integrated pollution control, and there are about 13,000 local authority air pollution control processes nationwide. The figures for the London borough of Bexley are five IPC processes in operation and 31 LAAPC processes. I will refer later to industrial emissions in Bexley and the east Thames corridor.

Emissions of sulphur dioxide and smoke from domestic households are controlled through the smoke control areas system, which was introduced in the Clean Air Act 1956. Bexley has completed its smoke control programme, so 100 per cent. of households in the borough fall within smoke control areas.

As to pollution from transport and road traffic in particular, emissions from the transport sector are mainly controlled through European Community legislation—specifically, through emission standards on new vehicles sold in the Community and standards on the quality of automotive fuels. Standards that make compulsory the fitting of catalytic convertors to petrol cars took effect from 1993. Stricter standards for vehicles have been agreed for 1996-97. The effect of the standards already in place will be to bring about a continued dramatic reduction in emissions of traffic-related pollution well into the next century.

We recognise that the steady rise in the size of the vehicle fleet will militate against that downward trend. It is estimated that, on current policies, emissions will begin to rise again around the year 2010. If we are to achieve and maintain our air quality targets and objectives in the face of transport fleet growth, further progress is needed in reducing average emissions per vehicle.

The European Commission is expected to bring forward this year new proposals for vehicle emission and fuel quality standards for the year 2000 and beyond. We shall be looking to agree a positive, cost-effective package of measures that will bring down emissions further and bring us closer to meeting our air quality objectives.

As cleaner vehicles come to predominate in the fleet, we are also tightening up the MOT standards, to ensure that we pick up on catalysts that have stopped working efficiently, and that vehicle owners keep their vehicles properly tuned. In addition, we are tackling the volatile organic substances given off when tankers load and unload at fuelling stations.

Reducing pollution cannot be left entirely to technological fixes. Air quality can also be improved through changes in patterns of behaviour. We are encouraging public and private fleet operators to act in an environmentally responsible way, and we are providing the public with information about greener motoring habits.

*[Mr. Robert B. Jones]*

To deliver a sustainable improvement in air quality in areas where quality currently exceeds the levels that are considered desirable, a national framework of air quality objectives and assessment, and management practices within which the right balance of policies can be set, are needed. The Environment Act 1995 committed the Government to producing a national air quality strategy.

That strategy, which we will issue this year, will set out the framework. It will be based on sound scientific advice about the health and other effects of air pollutants—recommendations from the independent expert panel on air quality standards and information from other sources, such as the World Health Organisation, which will provide the technical expertise to provide that scientific basis; clear national standards and objectives for air quality, to be achieved by a given timetable; a national strategy backed up by flexible and cost-effective action at a local level, through the system of local air quality management areas; a commitment to keep Government policies under review, to ensure that progress is maintained; and clear and accessible information for the general public and advice on how they can help. We need to keep the strategy flexible, so that we can continue to find cost-effective solutions and to ensure that as further air quality targets are agreed in Europe, the mechanism can encompass them.

The work of laying the ground for the air quality strategy has already started. It is fairly clear that a single solution for the whole country is unlikely to be cost-effective. To ensure that action is not unduly burdensome or bureaucratic, problems must be solved where they occur—whether across the whole of Europe or in one congested high street. To ensure that solutions can be put in place, a new legal structure for local authority action is needed.

The Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to review their air quality against the standards and targets in the strategy. Where targets and standards are not going to be met, an air quality management area will be designated and a more thorough assessment will be made, to work out where the problems are, how bad they are and what is causing them. The local authorities involved will be required to prepare and undertake a plan of action to remedy the situation.

The Government are currently drawing up guidance, in consultation with local authorities, on how they can meet their duties under the Act. Furthermore, we are initiating the first phase of local authority assessment and reviews this year. It will include a Londonwide initiative.

Our aim is primarily to ensure that air quality can brought to acceptable levels and sustained. Local authorities will be free to use all the powers at their disposal in the discharge of their duties under the Environment Act 1995. Those powers encompass the setting of conditions in local authority air pollution control authorisations—which in future must have regard to the forthcoming air quality strategy.

Over the long term, local authorities can bring their planning powers to bear on air quality. Guidance has already been issued to them on ways of lessening the need for private transport through judicious planning.

I have outlined the Government's national approach to controlling pollution, all of which has great relevance to my hon. Friend's constituency, and I will make a few comments specific to the area that he represents.

As to sulphur dioxide, there are no major processes regulated by HMIP within Bexley that release significant amounts of the pollutant. There are a number of major sources within the wider area, within a 25 km radius. Most prominent among them are the power stations at Littlebrook and Tilbury, oil refineries at Coryton and Shellhaven, and a cement producer at Northfleet. All those processes are to the east and to the north of Bexley, which is upstream of the prevailing winds. It is possible—under certain, infrequent weather conditions—that these processes contribute to the raised levels of sulphur dioxide in the Bexley area.

Nationally, we are committed to a significant reduction in emissions of sulphur dioxide over the coming years. By 2010, emissions should have been cut by 80 per cent. on 1980 levels. That continued reduction is administered under the national sulphur plan and will be delivered largely by increasingly strict conditions in integrated pollution control authorisations, which should mean that the risk of raised levels of ambient sulphur dioxide should also reduce significantly.

In 1992, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution commissioned a major study of the environmental impact of all the major industrial releases of nitrogen oxides in the east Thames corridor. A number of processes were subject to application for authorisation and their potential effect was considered. The ensuing report reached the conclusions that existing industrial processes make a relatively small contribution to annual nitrogen oxide concentrations, accounting for not more than 17 per cent. of current levels; each new plant would make only minor additions to the existing levels of nitrogen oxides; and all the releases of the proposed new plants would not threaten the statutory EC directive limit value.

HMIP has used and will continue to use the BATNEEC principle to ensure that state-of-the-art technologies are used to minimise the release of nitrogen oxides and other pollutants, including sulphur dioxide, from the major industrial processes in the area. Of the 10 processes proposed at the time of the study, three are in operation and performing to the required emission standards.

Of the remaining seven, the most significant plants for Bexley are the sewage sludge incinerators at Crossness and Beckton, and the waste to energy plant at Belvedere. The sludge incinerators, which will be operated by Thames Water, were authorised in 1994, and are currently under construction. They have been designed to meet the tight emission standards imposed by HMIP for plants in the east Thames corridor.

Cory Environmental Ltd. was granted an IPC authorisisation in 1993 for a waste and energy plant at Belvedere, designed to treat 1.2 million tonnes of London's waste and to produce 108 MW of electricity. I understand that the prospective operators of the plant have not been successful so far in obtaining planning permission, and it is not appropriate for me to comment at this stage on the application, in the event of any further procedure under the planning regime.

I hope that what I have said will reassure my hon. Friend that the Government have very much in mind his concern about environmental quality, and that we are committed to the measures necessary to enhance and improve it over the years ahead.

## Sustainable Development

1 pm

**Mr. Cynog Dafis** (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), for agreeing to participate in this all-too-brief debate on an issue of enormous global significance which is of particular relevance to Wales.

It is important to recognise at the outset how far-reaching a transformation is implied by the achievement of sustainability. The principles of sustainability, which are being elaborated at all levels of human society, have been accepted by the Government through their endorsement of the Rio documents and their participation in the process of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development, which came about following the 1992 earth summit. I shall recall some of those principles.

First, there is a need for a radically different method of measuring economic success other than gross national product growth—what are called new economic indicators, bearing in mind environmental and social considerations. The second principle is to give resource productivity priority over labour productivity as a measure of progress, which implies major changes in taxation, and taxing pollution and wasteful resources instead of jobs.

Thirdly, there is a preference for the use of renewable resources over non-renewable resources. Fourthly, it is suggested that environmental considerations should be integrated into all decisions on development. Fifthly, the implementation of the proximity principle is recommended, encouraging more localised patterns of production, distribution and consumption. That is some transition.

The European Union recognises the validity of those principles in its fifth environmental action programme "Towards Sustainability" and in the very important White Paper "Growth, Competitiveness and Employment". In the second document, the EU argues that environmental sustainability and the solving of the unemployment problem must and can go together.

The Government have established bodies to advise them and to promote sustainable development. The round table has representatives from business and voluntary sectors. Indeed, last week the second report of the advisory panel on sustainable development, chaired by Sir Crispin Tickell, was published. It reviewed last year's recommendations and considered the next priorities. It is lucid and succinct yet forceful, and it merits very serious attention.

When those organisations were set up early in 1994, a special body on sustainable development was established by the Secretary of State for Scotland, but in Wales, under the former Secretary of State, there was nothing of the kind. To members of Plaid Cymru, who attach importance to Wales as a country in its own right, and do not think of it only as some kind of appendage to England, that was offensive.

Countries will succeed and contribute to the collective welfare of the global community in the extent that they tackle the sustainability issue seriously. It is as crucial as that. The indications are, however, that the Government of Wales—in effect the Welsh Office—is failing in its

*[Mr. Cynog Dafis]*

responsibility to put our country, for which it is responsible, on the road towards sustainability: the only basis for true and lasting prosperity in the 21st century.

That is not to say that nothing has been done or that nothing is happening in Wales. Indeed, I am happy to make that point. The Welsh Office organised two seminars—in November 1993 and May 1995—that were attended by representatives of various quangos, local government, the social partners as they are called, non-governmental organisations, and so on. Copies of the minutes of those seminars, which happen to have found their way to my desk, suggest that the seminars were useful enough, but the suggestion that

"a working group which could meet at regular intervals to discuss sustainable development"

seems to have come to nothing. I hope that the Secretary of State will at least support a permanent working group. I shall, however, describe a more radical proposal later.

The absence of any kind of permanent body, or any Welsh Office think tank on sustainable development, raises questions about the local Agenda 21 process in Wales. Local authorities, which are involved in reorganisation, are enjoined to consider sustainable development in producing their local plans. What kind of guidance are they being given by the Welsh Office? Without adequate guidance, how can an all-Wales Agenda 21 evolve? Perhaps the Under-Secretary could enlighten us on the matter.

The business in the environment initiative is being delivered in Wales by the Arena network to assist Welsh businesses in achieving greater environmental efficiency. Will the Minister tell us how the Arena network programme's progress is being monitored and how many businesses have participated in it? I imagine that many businesses in Wales, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, will not even know of its existence. That needs to change.

The Welsh energy project has been acknowledged inside and outside Wales as an important and useful initiative. It produced a five-point action plan for a pilot series of innovative sustainable economic development areas, business development initiatives, the creation of a network of local information centres—I know that that is happening—the encouragement of investment in energy efficiency and the growing worldwide environmental protection market, and the provision of help to local planning authorities. What monitoring is taking place to assess the extent to which the action plan is being successfully implemented?

Renewable energy, in view of the serious pollution and the climatic effects of burning fossil fuels, and of course the fact that those fuels are being depleted, is hugely important, as I tried to show when I spoke in the debate on the Queen's Speech. We in Wales have major resources which could provide significant and sustainable economic development and employment opportunities.

I quote the words of Mr. Mike Brooker, chairman of the environmental study group of the committee organised by the Prince of Wales, which held a very successful seminar entitled "Towards a Sustainable Energy Strategy for Wales", which I attended and by which I was very impressed. In his summary of the findings of that seminar, Mr. Brooker says:

"Delegates at the conference—representing industry, environmentalists, politicians and academics—concluded that, although there was a huge amount of complex and detailed information available, there appears to be no coherent strategy to embrace environmental, social and economic issues. Developing such a strategy is an essential pre-requisite to the future management of energy issues.

There was general agreement about the need for change by all the stakeholders,"—

forgive the word stakeholders—

"Government, Power Companies, Planners, Environmentalists Business, Industry and the public at large. The difficulty is creating a focus to establish strategy and precipitate local action. How can we create an Action Plan in Wales?.. Which organisation should oversee the strategy and create delivery at a local level?"

The Welsh Office should have something to say on that last question. Is the Welsh Office not the responsible organisation? What is it doing to ensure the creation of such a strategy? Is it not time—this is a practical proposal—to revitalise the Welsh energy project established in 1991 before the Rio summit, and update it in the light of the sustainable development agenda, which has moved ahead significantly since the project was established?

I am aware of the Aries project, which is supported by the Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales and which receives European funding, on the economic development opportunities of renewable energy. The study was organised by an interesting little company in my constituency, called Dulais Engineering, which exports, among other things, photovoltaic equipment, refrigerators and medical equipment to Eritrea, and does other important work in relation to third-world economies.

I am aware of the Alt-Energy Wales project, which is funded from the European Union Altener programme. I hope that the Welsh Office will support the idea of creating an Aries Wales forum, which would provide a focus for stakeholders—there is that word again—and would provide information and assistance with preparing business plans and so on. Such a forum would help to energise the renewable energy scene in Wales.

All these matters should be considered in the context of an overall strategy covering planning issues, the encouragement of manufacturing and sourcing in Wales, training, research and development and so on. It should have targets for the contribution of renewables to total electricity supply and for reducing demand through improved efficiency. I understand that a reduction of as much as 20 per cent. is perfectly feasible.

One of the advantages of such a strategy, the drawing up of which would entail wide consultation, would be that the public at large would be able to understand the broad context in which individual developments occur. The singularly ill-informed public debate on wind energy, which is influenced more by misinformation than by enlightenment, shows that currently that is not so.

Crucially, an energy strategy should tackle offshore oil and gas resources. Currently, Welsh Office input into this enormously important and controversial policy is minimal. Perhaps the Minister will tell us what the Welsh Office is doing about it.

Sustainable development is not just about energy, although that is perhaps the central issue. I recommend to the Minister the very useful overview on the subject provided in Plaid Cymru's consultation document, "A Sustainable Development Strategy for Wales". He already has a copy, and I have been looking forward for some time to his response.

Other areas are considered in the document, and I ask a series of questions. First, what is being done to encourage the location and growth of environmental goods and services industries in Wales? By 2000, there could be a global market of $600 billion in that sector. Does it figure in the inward investment strategy of the Welsh Development Agency or of the Development Board for Rural Wales, or in Source Wales?

Secondly, on transport, what long-term thinking is in progress in view of the Government's intention to continue to increase fuel duty, the royal commission's recommendation to accelerate that increase and the possibility of a carbon tax? What would that imply for regional economic development in Wales? How are rural areas to cope or be compensated? To what extent should electronic communications supplant physical mobility? How should that affect investment priorities? How can we develop an integrated transport policy for Wales? How will train services be protected—enhanced, even—under privatisation? How is that affected by the fact that rail is not the responsibility of the Welsh Office? Should not that be changed?

Thirdly, on farming, when will we have an integrated all-Wales agri-environmental scheme?

Fourthly, and most important, how can we create employment through sustainable development? I refer the Minister to Plaid Cymru's excellent document, "100,000 Answers", in which 30,000 of the jobs described would be created as a result of environmentally linked activity.

These issues cannot be tackled without a thoroughgoing strategic approach. Pace the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), the Tory right's so-called economic instruments on their own would be not only inadequate but socially inequitable and damaging. The 17.5 per cent. VAT on domestic fuel showed that with startling clarity. We need a range of instruments and interventions, and we need them soon, because unless we tackle the issues, Wales will lag far behind instead of being, as it could and should be in this matter, in the lead.

I have seen reference in the Welsh Office documentation to the idea of a centre for sustainability in Wales. Perhaps the Minister can tell us what is happening to that proposal, which we would strongly support. Wales should aim to become a centre for sustainability. Placing Wales at the forefront of sustainable development should be the great millennium project for Wales—that and the achievement by 2000 of real democratic self-government. The Welsh Office, even though its masters do not share our enthusiasm for the latter project, has a responsibility now to lay the foundations for the first.

What kind of body should be responsible for driving the sustainable development process in Wales? It should, of course, be a powerful Welsh Parliament, but what about the interim? Should it be the Countryside Council for Wales? Sustainable development is about much more than the countryside. It is just as much about what goes on in the factories of Glamorgan, Gwent and Deeside. The new Environment Agency has a remit for sustainable development. We do not have our own agency in Wales, as Scotland does, although there is a Welsh regional structure. In any case, the agency's responsibility is primarily pollution control and waste disposal, and sustainable development goes way beyond that. Sustainable development is about integrating all aspects of life in keeping with its central principles, and the organisational structure in Wales should reflect that.

The Secretary of State for Wales should now set up a powerful working group for sustainable development, comprising representatives from the Welsh Office, local government, the new Environment Agency, the WDA, the DBRW, CCW, NGOs such as Friends of the Earth, and, indeed, the Prince of Wales's environmental trust for Wales—soon to be christened "Bro"—the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress, with higher education and research to provide the scientific and academic underpinning.

In the absence of a properly constituted democratic forum for Wales, only a powerful partnership such as that can provide the focus and resources for such a vital project. To set that process in motion would be to provide true leadership, and would mean that when a democratically elected Government or Parliament meets in Cardiff, with sustainable development as the first item on its agenda, it would already be up and running in Wales.

1.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) for raising the important topic of sustainable development and for the considerate and positive way in which he has approached the debate.

I am sure that we agree that this is an issue that should concern us all. Yet very often its importance can be lost through simply not understanding or realising what it means. In the words of the Brundtland definition, sustainable development is

"development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs".

That, perhaps, still provides the most succinct definition. It challenges us to recognise the needs of economic development with those of environmental protection. Both are important and both should be in harmony. Both need to be emphasised, but not at the expense of each other.

Sustainable development is not just a matter for Government: it affects, or should affect, everyone's life style. None the less, the Government have played a significant part in taking forward the challenge of the agenda that was set at the earth summit in Rio de Janeiro.

Two years ago, the Government published their national strategy for sustainable development, which not only set out the principles of sustainable development but looked ahead 20 years to identify problems and opportunities. The underlying principles include sound science, the precautionary principle, the polluter pays principle and the need to take account of the natural environment, especially non-renewable resources.

Central and local government, business, industry, the scientific and voluntary sector and, not least, individual citizens all have a role in carrying forward the strategy. To foster that, the Government established three independent

*[Mr. Gwilym Jones]*

bodies to promote sustainable development. The Government panel on sustainable development gives authoritative and independent advice to Government on a number of broad strategic issues. The United Kingdom round table on sustainable development draws in a wide cross-section of advice from the main sectors and groups who have a role in developing and carrying forward sustainable development, and the Going for Green initiative seeks to carry the message to individuals and local communities.

I note that the hon. Gentleman expressed a preference here—and in almost every other area—for setting up a separate Welsh forum or a Welsh version of Going for Green. I remind him that there are Welsh representatives on the round table and Going for Green, and the Welsh launch of Going for Green will take place in the spring.

As the hon. Gentleman said, both the Government panel and the UK round table on sustainable development have recently issued reports. Both reports are under consideration by the Government, and responses will be issued shortly. He will appreciate that I would not wish to anticipate the detail of the responses at this stage.

One of the major developments during 1996 will be the setting up in England and Wales of the Environment Agency, which will take up its responsibilities in April. It will build on the work of its predecessor bodies, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, the National Rivers Authority and local waste regulation authorities. It will seek to protect and enhance the environment in line with the Government's commitment to sustainable development.

Greater integration will mean that the agency will be better placed than its predecessor bodies to consider the environment as a whole, to ensure a consistent approach to regulation and to provide a more streamlined service to industry and to the public. The Government will issue specific guidance to the agency about the objectives, and the contribution that it should make towards achieving sustainable development. Drafts of that guidance have been issued for consultation.

The Government are anxious that their strategy for sustainable development is continually updated and developed. Annual reports are published, reviewing achievements against previous commitments, and setting quantified targets and priorities for future years. The next annual report is due in March.

The hon. Gentleman rightly concentrated on the relevance of sustainable development in Wales, and on the actions that he considers should be taken to promote that concept in the Principality. I welcome his contribution in areas such as energy, transport and agriculture. If time permits, I shall return to those issues briefly during my reply.

As I have already said, the achievement of sustainable development depends on a large number of players, of which the Government are only one. That is as true in Wales as it is elsewhere. None the less, in the Welsh Office we recognise and welcome the role that we can play in Wales. We are of course paralleling and augmenting many of the United Kingdom initiatives that I have already described.

Each year since 1991 the Welsh Office has published "Environment in Wales" reports. They provide an overview of the state of our environment, record progress made towards meeting previous commitments, and look forward to the likely impact of new initiatives. As the hon. Gentleman said, the Welsh Office has also hosted two seminars on sustainable development. Their purpose was to draw together key Welsh organisations, and so to encourage an exchange of ideas. I hope that a further seminar will be organised soon.

The pivotal role that local government can play in achieving sustainability was accepted at the Rio earth summit. It was agreed that every local authority should produce its own local Agenda 21 to provide a framework for sustainability in its area. Many local authorities in Wales have already made progress on that front, and we have made it clear that we hope that the new unitary authorities will give priority to completing their local Agenda 21 documents.

Raising public awareness of the relevant issues is vital if we are to achieve the goal of sustainability. I therefore very much look forward to the official launch of the Going for Green campaign in Wales.

I am confident that Wales will fully share in the benefits of the new Environment Agency. A committee will be established to advise the Secretary of State on the activities of the agency in Wales, and I am sure that its new integrated approach to the environment will enable it to become a key player in bringing about sustainable development in Wales.

Last September my right hon. Friend announced his intention of publishing a White Paper for rural Wales, and immediately set in hand a wide-ranging consultation exercise to encourage and promote debate across the whole range of the Welsh Office's policies as they affect life in rural Wales. The response to the consultation was very good, and we are grateful to all those who took the opportunity to participate, including the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North. The House will understand that it would, of course, be inappropriate to refer now to the probable contents of the White Paper, which we expect to be published shortly. In the meantime, the hon. Gentleman may be confident that sustainable development will be at its heart.

I shall now say a little about particular environmental issues in Wales. Our rivers and coastline are an intrinsic part of the Welsh environment, which we must protect for this generation and future generations. Recent years have brought a considerable investment in improvements to our aquatic environment, and we are now seeing the results. Last year 89 per cent. of the identified bathing waters on the Welsh coastline met European mandatory standards. That compares, for example, with a pass rate of only 48 per cent. in 1986.

The National Rivers Authority deserves much credit for the achievements that we have seen in river water quality. The authority has worked closely with the water companies and with other sectors of industry, including agriculture, to tackle the various sources of pollution. As a result of that combined effort, the most recent figures published by the NRA show that 98 per cent. of Welsh rivers are now classed as of good or fair quality, including 89 per cent. classed as of good quality. That record of achievement is set to continue. Welsh Water alone intends to invest £650 million in its environmental programme over the next five years.

Increasing pressures for housing and development require even greater care in optimising the use of scarce land resources. Within Wales the Welsh Development

Agency's land reclamation programme is the largest landscape improvement programme in Europe. Since its formation the agency has reclaimed more than 15,000 acres, and its aim is to reclaim all significant dereliction in Wales by the end of the century.

Some of Wales' most attractive new business sites are on reclaimed land—for example, Swansea enterprise park and Delyn enterprise zone. In addition, 80 reclaimed sites have been developed for housing, such as the former national garden festival site at Ebbw Vale. In those and in other cases, land reclamation, besides being positive in itself, also avoids the need to develop green-field sites.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): On the provision of housing, is it not incumbent upon the Government to make it more feasible, and more commercially and financially attractive, for properties in town centres to be carefully and tastefully refurbished, so that our built heritage can be looked after in that way, rather than making it difficult, as it is now, for that to take place, which creates more pressure on green-field sites?

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** I think that the hon. Gentleman and I have similar outlooks in that respect. We both want to see the best use made of existing housing. We have put in a considerable investment—about £1 billion—since 1990, and in the coming year we shall invest another £180 million in renewing Welsh housing stock, but we should make the best use of existing stock. We are very aware of the pressures on other green-field sites, as I have described in connection with business uses.

The hon. Gentleman raised other specific points, and I well appreciate his concern for Project Aries, which represents a positive initiative to produce practical solutions to assist the development of renewable energy in Wales. The Principality has a range of renewable energy sources, such as hydro, wind, landfill gas and biomass, which could be harnessed to assist the economy and the environment, through lower emissions. I welcome the project's aim of involving key organisations and individuals interested in renewables, and to identify ways of reconciling differences between them.

The project is now coming towards its conclusion, but I am pleased to see that work in that area will be taken forward in the new ALT-INVEST project, which is intended to stimulate private investment for the most promising renewable energy source schemes. I imagine that the hon. Gentleman will wish to study that.

I am sure that we are all equally concerned that road building should be part of a sustainable transport policy. Decisions to proceed with new road schemes are taken only after careful assessment of all realistic alternative solutions to the problems identified. Every effort is made to avoid areas of natural beauty or scientific interest, and if that is not possible we try to minimise the effects. Environmental impact assessments are undertaken for schemes costing over £1 million, and for all schemes affecting national parks, and areas such as sites of special scientific interest.

The Secretary of State's trunk road priorities and plans were published in "Roads in Wales: 1994 Review", which identifies three major strategic routes—M4, A465 and A55—on which resources will be focused. The document stresses that the A40 in Mid Wales and the A5 on the mainland are not to be developed as major routes for long-distance heavy traffic.

In the public transport sector, Wales has seen many improvements to its local rail services. South and west Wales have new links to the north-west, the midlands, the south coast and to London's Waterloo station, to connect with Eurostar services to the continent. There have also been improvements in local services in mid and north Wales. The Government's rail privatisation programme should see even more. Indeed, in being awarded the InterCity franchise into south Wales, Great Western announced its intention to provide extra services on that network.

Recently I announced the go-ahead for a range of transport measures, including new rail links to expand and improve rail services between Cardiff bay and the south Wales valleys, new bus priority schemes, and substantial cycle ways along both the north and the south Wales coasts.

All aspects of energy policy are clearly relevant to sustainable development. On the one hand, energy is an essential input to economic activity, while on the other, the production of energy can have major environmental effects through local pollution caused by emissions and through climate change caused by global warming. I have referred to actions related to carbon dioxide emissions from energy production, and we are also encouraging energy efficiency. The Government are actively promoting that policy in both the supply and demand sides of the energy industries. For example, new legislation will come into force this year requiring local authorities to identify means of improving the energy efficiency of residential accommodation.

In Wales, the NHS is working towards a 15 per cent. reduction in energy usage, and the Welsh Office has reduced its energy costs by 18 per cent since 1991. The Government are seeking to encourage new and renewable energy sources which have the prospect of being economically attractive and environmentally acceptable. Sustainable development, however, is an issue that goes wider than the environment. It is a matter of harmonising development and environmental protection. Development is needed, but it brings its pressures, and we are addressing such issues in Wales within—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

## Charity Shops (Business Rate)

1.30 pm

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): I draw the attention of the House to the entry in the Register of Members' Interests which shows that I am an unpaid adviser to the British Shops and Stores Association.

I want this short debate to explore the status of charity shops, particularly as far as their business rate status is concerned. I had some difficulty in finding a title for the debate that would apply solely to one Minister, because the position of shops generally, and charity shops in particular, on business rates is part of a wider picture—the fate of town centres, and the pressure which traders feel they are under. It is not simply a matter of business rates—although, to be fair, that is regarded by most traders as the most significant matter—but also the effect on their business prospects of out-of-town shopping centres, parking restrictions and the like.

In many town centres, traditional trading communities are finding it increasingly hard to trade in a way which is traditional and conventional, while enabling them to be able to offer service to the public. There is no doubt from the representations that I have received that some traders—I would have to say, most traders—believe that the status of charity shops has a part to play as well.

Perhaps it should not be necessary—but, in this day and age, I am afraid it is—to emphasise exactly what one is not doing, as well as what one is doing. Let me make it abundantly clear, however, that I am not launching an attack on charities or charity shops. I am not saying that their role in society is anything but good. I want to emphasise that I am not attacking charities, which have a unique place in British life. There are a whole range of fiscal measures in terms of income tax, corporation tax and VAT that make it abundantly clear that charities have—and, I dare say, will always have—a unique position in our national life.

That is recognised not only by the Government, but by people up and down the land. One only has to see the amount of work that is given freely and voluntarily by members of the public to charities to know that, in a uniquely British way, charities play a part in our national life that is wholly for the good. Therefore, in no sense are my remarks to be taken, or deliberately misconstrued, as an attack on charity shops.

What concerns the traders who have made representations to me is more fundamental than that—they are concerned that measures designed specifically to help charities, particularly in relation to business rates, are being used to help organisations that are, in all but name, fellow traders.

The position in law is straightforward enough. Section 64(10) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires a charity shop to fulfil two conditions to be exempt from business rates. It must be wholly or mainly used for the sale of goods donated to a charity, and the proceeds of the sale of the goods, any deduction of expenses, must be applied for the purpose of a charity.

Despite having made an immodest living interpreting the law in the past, I do not know what that means. One understands what "wholly" donated means, but what does "mainly" donated mean? Does it mean that 51 per cent. of the produce in a shop is sufficient, or 80 per cent? I suspect that that ambiguity lies at the heart of the current problems.

If a charity—let us call it Charity Ltd.—has a number of shops in a national context, it is possible that the charity as a whole may purchase only a tiny number of goods directly for sale. But if the goods are found in one particular shop, it may well mean that the trader next door finds that he is trading in commodities against someone who is in a totally different position.

This is not an isolated problem. It has not been raised with me on only one occasion—it is a matter of great concern locally. The matter has been discussed in the past by Teignbridge district council and Newton Abbott town council, while it has been raised with me by the chambers of commerce from Teignmouth and Newton Abbott. I dare say that that can be replicated up and down the country.

If one goes to Newton Abbott, within a few minutes of walking around the town centre one sees shops representing some of the great charities in the land—the Red Cross, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Rowcroft hospice, Cancer and Leukaemia in Childhood, Imperial Cancer Research, the British Heart Foundation, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Barnardo's.

In Teignmouth in my constituency, one sees charities such as Yugoslavian Refugees, Oxfam, the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, Rowcroft hospice, the YMCA, the Children's Society, Holiday Services for the Disabled and the RNLI. The idea that we are talking about one or two shops is a mistake.

The difficulty is that one must rely to an extent on anecdote, and I must rely on the information that traders have given me. I am told that, if one goes into some charity shops, one does not see the traditional bric-a-brac or second-hand goods. One is looking, to all intents and purposes, at premises selling new goods. One shopfitter recently told me that the best contract he had had all year was from a charity shop. He said that he wished "other local traders", as he put it, were able to give him such good work, but they were unable to do so.

One might think that some charity shops are buying in the majority of goods to be sold on in a way that directly competes with businesses next door that simply do not have the advantage of having at least 80 per cent. relief on rates, with the potential to applying for a further 20 per cent. relief from the local authority.

What can be done? I suspect that part of the problem depends on the meaning of "wholly or mainly". In a letter in September 1994, my hon. Friend the Minister of State said:

> "The meaning of 'wholly or mainly' is determined by the local authority."

That is like defining the functions of an archdeacon by saying that an archdeacon performs archdiaconal functions—it is true, but I am not sure how greatly it helps.

It would be asking too much of a local authority to carry out an audit on each and every shop that applies for an exemption from business rates. One runs into a problem right away—an authority may discover that a local shop selling a high proportion of bought-in goods is able to say that it is a part of a greater organisation, and the authority's considerations may not apply. It seems to me that it would be very difficult for a local authority to have to make such judgments.

The effect of this ambiguity should not be underestimated. If premises are in all but name local traders, we must consider what the effect can be if they do not have to pay the uniform business rate. They will be in a position to pay higher rents, but those directly competing against them do not have the benefit of not paying UBR. Therefore, circumstances would be conceivable in which local traders were simply priced out of the market.

The question that must be considered is, in a sense, even wider than that which the Minister will answer today. We live in a time when, for reasons to which I have referred, town centres are under unique pressure. Traders in those centres are also under pressure, and society must ask itself whether its intention is that we prefer one class of trader over another by giving one unique privileges.

It must be said that there is nothing wrong with trying to earn a living by selling goods in a town centre. There is nothing wrong with being a charity, either, but if one trader—uniquely—is in a better position than another, questions must be asked.

Lest anyone imagine that I have got it wrong, and that charities never see themselves in that light, I can do no better than quote that excellent publication the *Mid-Devon Advertiser*, which recently carried an article about charity shops. The main point of the article is not relevant to this debate, but it contains observations that are.

It explains that a certain charity shop was not reaching its targets, and quotes a voluntary worker—understandably, the staff are not paid—as saying:

"We took £94,000 since we opened in September '94 . . . I'm sure other shops would like to do that."

"Hear, hear", many might say. The article then quotes a man described as a chief executive of the charity's shops division as saying:

"The shop hasn't performed as well as it should have done . . . A target is set monthly".

The man said that the shop was

"effectively a retail business, and had to set targets to reach each week."

That says it all.

**Mr. Sebastian Coe** (Falmouth and Camborne): I do not think that my hon. Friend has got it wrong. Two weekends ago, I walked the entire length of the main retail street in Redruth, in my constituency. The main issue that every retailer raised with me was having to trade shoulder to shoulder with charitable shops that had budgets that most Redruth traders could only dream of, and competing with central purchasing managers. Like my hon. Friend, I am not knocking charities.

**Mr. Nicholls:** My hon. Friend's intervention shows that the problem is not unique. It also reminds me to say that my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who wanted to attend the debate, was unable to do so because of a regional planning conference. He tells me that the position is similar in Totnes and Kingsbridge in his constituency.

What is to be done? Again, I emphasise that I am not attacking charities. It is important for me to make that point, because some people will try to misrepresent what I am saying. Nevertheless, if traders cannot compete with others who are traders in all but name, I feel that the Government should comment. The position is considered a local issue in at least three areas in the west country.

I should be interested to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister whether it would be possible to amend the law if such amendment proves necessary, even allowing for the constant pressure on legislative time; I should also like to know whether there is a judicial definition of "mainly" that is easy to understand. I suspect that the possibilities for litigation are legion.

It would also be useful to know more about the relationship between a local shop and the charity of which it is part, and to hear of any guidance that my hon. Friend can give. I suspect that charities themselves would welcome guidance. It must sometimes be hard for them to know precisely how the legislation applies to them. Some may be saying, "Perhaps we should take advantage of the position; other charities have. Where do we stand?"

I am not talking about traditional charities carrying on in the traditional charitable way, but I think that the current position must be addressed. If a man from Mars came here, he would see no difference between two traders, apart from the fact that one incurred expenses that were not incurred by the other.

1.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford):** I am always glad of the opportunity to listen to Conservative Members from the south-west, but I feel that they tend to gang up. When they have a cause, they pull together and fight for their constituents in a way that is seen in no other country. Dealing with their concerns can be a bit like facing the All Blacks.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said, we recognise the good work done by charities, and realise that charity shops are an important source of funds for many of them. My hon. Friend, however, is worried about the possible effect on local businesses. He acknowledged the special role of charities. They are given relief from many of the taxes that commercial businesses pay, including rates, and in many cases that is right and proper; but I think it worth touching on some recent history.

Rate relief for charities predates the non-domestic rating system. Rate relief of 50 per cent. was mandatory for property wholly or mainly used for charitable purposes under the provisions of the General Rate Act 1967. Rate relief for charity shops is not a recent innovation; it has existed for some time. Specific legislation was introduced to provide rate relief for charity shops in the Rating (Charity Shops) Act 1976. Those provisions were carried through to the new system in the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Initially, the Government proposed that the provisions from the earlier legislation be repeated in their entirety. They specified, as now, that to qualify for relief a charity shop had to be wholly or mainly used for the sale of goods donated—it is worth emphasising that—to the charity. If a shop met the criteria, 50 per cent. rate relief had to be given by local authorities: that was mandatory. The amount could be increased to as much as 100 per cent. if the authority saw fit. If it felt that the charity was particularly deserving of local support, it could top up the relief, but the extra cost would be borne by local ratepayers.

*[Sir Paul Beresford]*

At the time of the passage of the 1988 Act, it was feared that the new rating system might impose an unacceptably high rates burden on charity shops, and interfere with their ability to raise funds. In response to enormous pressure, the House increased the mandatory element of the relief from 50 per cent. to 80 per cent. The cost of the mandatory part is borne by the non-domestic rating pool. If a billing authority decides to give discretionary relief, it can, as under the previous legislation, top up the relief to 100 per cent., but 75 per cent. will be borne by council tax payers; the remaining 25 per cent. will be borne by the pool.

My hon. Friend is concerned about competition with local traders. He spoke of the difficulties experienced by various shops and towns, and mentioned a number of causes. Let me keep to the point, however.

To qualify for relief, charity shops must sell donated goods. That generally seems to mean old clothes, old toys and second-hand ornaments, but—anticipating the fierce case put by my hon. Friend—I decided to visit some charity shops in my area, as did some officials in the Department. They had the impression that the shops that they visited would have accepted unwanted Christmas presents: indeed, there seemed to be a fair display of those on the premises. I was reminded of a Conservative association bring-and-buy stall, and beat a hasty retreat. I saw nothing that quite fitted the pattern suggested by my hon. Friend. I suspect that, in fact, the shops I visited contained genuinely donated goods.

My hon. Friend asked how many other representations I had received. I cannot give the precise figure, but I think that the number of letters I have had must amount to about 5 per cent. of the number we receive about rates in general. Ultimately, I do not feel that my hon. Friend's concern is justified to the extent that a change in the existing law is needed. Charity shops that wholly or mainly sell goods bought from wholesalers are not entitled to relief. If the charities choose to raise revenue through such means, they too must pay rates on the shops, just like their neighbours.

I am sure that shops that sell donated goods rely on the good will and generosity of members of the public, as my hon. Friend pointed out, both in the donation of goods and as a means of donating to the charity. I am also sure that people who donate their old clothes, books and unwanted Christmas presents to a worthy cause want the money raised from the sale to go to those causes.

As I think my hon. Friend will accept, the issue pivots on the action of the local authority, not on a blunderbuss, across-the-board treatment by central Government through legislation or direction. There is a horses-for-courses arrangement, in which the local authority has the ability and the expertise, and can visit each premises and judge for itself.

The phrase is not simply "mainly", but "wholly or mainly". References to premises used "wholly or mainly" for certain purposes are found throughout rating law, and the definition of "wholly or mainly" will depend largely on the circumstances of the case involved. There is a body of case law on the meaning of

"wholly or mainly for charitable purposes",

which may shed light on the issue. If my hon. Friend wishes, I will write to him with some examples.

**Mr. Nicholls** *indicated assent.*

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I see that he would be interested.

In the case of charity shops, in the first instance it is for each local authority to decide whether a shop meets the legal requirements to qualify for relief. The authority might want to consider a wide range of factors when deciding whether a charity shop is wholly or mainly selling donated goods. Local authorities are in the best position to see the local situation and to judge it. Indeed, most local authorities have been exercising judgment on charity shops sensibly for at least two decades.

There is a discretionary element, and again, it is right and proper that local authorities should use that when deciding which charities are deserving of local support. I understand that Teignbridge district council has decided that a blanket policy is to be avoided, which is right. It is approaching the element of local discretion in entirely the right way. Each case should be decided on its merits and on local circumstances, and each billing authority should decide whether the charity is worthy of additional relief. The authorities have a financial incentive to choose wisely. After all, they have to pick up three quarters of that extra funding if they decide to give the relief.

Proper consideration and implementation of the legislation, as it stands, and leaving the matter in the hands of the local authorities are the right way to proceed, but I will write to my hon. Friend with some additional bits and pieces to explain cases that we considered. I hope that, in areas of concern, he will apply pressure to the local authority to do what it is there to do.

*It being eight minutes to Two o'clock, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed.*

*Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.*

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

### Edinburgh Assay Office Bill

*Read the Third time, and passed.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## SCOTLAND

### Income Tax

1. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the Treasury concerning the practicalities of a different rate of income tax for Scotland. [10785]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth):** Labour, Liberal and Scottish National party support for a tartan tax will be immensely damaging to Scotland and create huge problems for employers on both sides of the border.

**Mr. Arnold:** Bearing in mind the huge costs and problems for employers in Scotland, and although I, as an English Member, would welcome the transfer of jobs from Grangemouth to Gravesham, how on earth does my right hon. Friend think that Labour and the other parties can justify to the Scottish people that impact on jobs in Scotland?

**Mr. Forsyth:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The tartan tax will be a tax on Scotland's jobs and would certainly disadvantage Grangemouth. He also has considerable cause for worry about his constituents in Gravesham, because Labour is proposing a tax on jobs—the social chapter—that would apply to the whole of the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Canavan:** Can the Secretary of State name any Parliament in the world that does not have revenue-raising powers or any country in the world, apart from Scotland, that has its own laws and legal system but no Parliament of its own to pass those laws?

**Mr. Forsyth:** The hon. Gentleman should move back two Benches and join the Scottish Nationalists if he wants to ask questions like that. In case he has not noticed, the United Kingdom is the greatest country in the world, with the greatest history. All parts of the United Kingdom have benefited from that.

**Sir Hector Monro:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that, during the passage of the Scotland Bill in the 1970s under a Labour Government, it was generally accepted that the advice from Treasury Ministers to the Government was that it was impossible to introduce a differential income tax in the United Kingdom? What is the view of the Treasury Ministers in our Government?

**Mr. Forsyth:** I have to agree with my right hon. Friend. He is right. It was considered impractical for the same reasons as Labour Members have opposed a local income tax. They argued that a local income tax would be difficult to collect because of great administrative problems. People are taxed not according to where they live but according to where their employer is. There is no doubt that a tartan tax would create enormous problems and anomalies. For example, Scottish Labour Members would not pay the tartan tax even though they were Scottish Members because they are paid in Westminster in England and would therefore be exempt from it.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** The Secretary of State has obviously taken a careful interest in the effect of taxation on employment. Would he be kind enough to tell us his assessment of the consequences for employment in Scotland of the tax increase—which is now equivalent to a net 6p in the pound—that his Government have imposed since 1992?

**Mr. Forsyth:** The hon. and learned Gentleman has a real cheek. To be fair to his party, it is at least honest—unlike some Opposition Members who vote for our tax reductions and then complain about the public expenditure consequences. The hon. and learned Gentleman and his party want income tax to go up. Although their partners in the Scottish Constitutional Convention say that there is no tartan tax, he and his hon. Friends are going around promising to spend it even before it has been brought into being.

**Mr. Peter Atkinson:** Will my right hon. Friend speculate on the tartan tax's impact on businesses on either side of the border? Would it encourage more of my constituents in Northumberland to shop in Scotland, or even more Scots to travel from the border regions to Newcastle shopping centres?

**Mr. Forsyth:** Far be it from me to give any credibility to the idea of people not shopping in Scotland, but my hon. Friend is right. The tartan tax would add to the costs of employment and of businesses. It would put prices up in shops in Scotland. As my hon. Friend points out, his constituents would benefit from that. Even more seriously, together with the crackpot policies for a Parliament whose funding would still be determined here, it would lead eventually to the fragmentation and break-up of the United Kingdom, which would mean huge price increases in Scotland, high inflation levels and spiralling unemployment.

**Mr. George Robertson** *rose—*

**Mr. Jenkin:** Cluck, cluck.

**Mr. Robertson:** Dear, oh dear. That comment, Madam Speaker, was from the parliamentary private secretary to the Secretary of State.

Now that the Secretary of State has had his wrists slapped for breaking the guidelines, will he apologise to the Scottish Office information directorate for using it as a scapegoat for putting party propaganda in press releases, and to the Scottish taxpayer for peddling propaganda at their expense? When will he realise that the truth about the popularity of our plans for a Scottish Parliament will always beat the lies about non-existent taxes?

**Mr. Forsyth:** When will the hon. Gentleman rise to the occasion that being shadow Secretary of State for Scotland requires? On the use of the phrase "tartan tax", before I used it—and I did so in the first press release that I issued from the Scottish Office—I asked for advice from the permanent secretary and I was assured that it would be in order. The permanent secretary's advice changed

after the hon. Gentleman complained that the phrase was in widespread use and now a matter of political controversy. I have always accepted that advice. Why is the hon. Gentleman so afraid of the tartan tax? Is it because he knows that the people of Scotland do not want to pay it? If it is non-existent, let him rise in the House and tell the people of Scotland that he will drop his crackpot proposals to have a tax-raising power for his Scottish Parliament, which would impose that tax on the working people of Scotland.

**Scottish Government**

2. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future relationship of the Government of the United Kingdom with the Scottish people. [10786]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** We are Unionists and stand four square behind the Union, which has benefited Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

**Mr. Duncan:** Does my right hon. Friend accept that those of us from England who express an interest in Scotland do so not to pursue narrow party advantage, as the Labour party does, but out of concern for the United Kingdom as a whole? Will he reaffirm that devolution would be a profound act of unsettlement? Would it not throw into turmoil the number of Westminster Members of Parliament that there should be from Scotland, the way in which Scotland is taxed and funded, and the election system itself? In seeking any cross-party understanding on this matter, has my right hon. Friend had any confirmation from the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) that he is prepared to deal with the anomalies to which he has admitted, and with his differences with the Liberal Democrats?

**Mr. Forsyth:** I do not like the word "anomaly", which is how the hon. Member for Hamilton has described the vital issue of how many Members of Parliament represent Scotland in the House. Nor do I agree with the Leader of the Opposition, who described the funding of the Scottish Parliament as an accountancy detail. On those matters rests Scotland's prosperity, the quality of public services and our ability to have an effective voice for Scotland here at Westminster, where, even under the Scottish Constitutional Convention's proposals, the big decision—on Scotland's budget—would be taken. Liberal Democrat Members are at least honest enough to admit that there would have to be a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament, and the loss of the office of Secretary of State for Scotland. That is too high a price to pay on top of the Labour party's tartan tax.

**Dr. Reid:** One of the primary mechanisms by which the people of Scotland convey their representations to the United Kingdom Government is local government. I understand that, within an hour, there will be a report of the inquiry into local government in North Lanarkshire council. Why was that not available before Question Time today? Is it because it exonerates councillors in North Lanarkshire and, if so, will the Secretary of State tell us how much the inquiry cost and who will pay, and guarantee that in future such inquiries will not be used as a party political weapon by one party against another?

**Mr. Forsyth:** A written question has been tabled and the report will be published. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will be able to study it, together with the report that has been published by his own party. The inquiry was established after we received representations from those with responsibility for ensuring fair play in local government, and it is pretty disgraceful of the hon. Gentleman to ask a question in those terms.

**Mr. Marlow:** How would my right hon. Friend describe a proposal that would allow Scottish Members of Parliament to vote, for example, on whether there should be selection in our schools in England, but would not allow English Members of Parliament to vote on education policy in Scotland? Would that not be hypocritical perhaps?

**Mr. Forsyth:** I am a Unionist. I believe in this Parliament and I believe in everyone's right to vote on matters that concern the United Kingdom. Opposition Members have argued that English Members should not vote on issues affecting Scotland. It is interesting to note that tonight, when we celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Robert Burns—

**Mr. Foulkes:** The death.

**Mr. Forsyth:** All right, it is the bicentenary of his death. The hon. Gentleman may be celebrating his death, but let us compromise on death and birth so that we have his life's work.

It is significant that tonight, as we have a big function in Whitehall to celebrate the life and works of Robert Burns, Scottish Opposition Members will insist on no pairing arrangements applying to voting on, of all things, the English rate support grant.

**Mr. George Robertson:** The relationship between the Government and the Scottish people will be immeasurably soured by the spending restrictions that the Secretary of State is imposing on Scottish local councils. Has he read *The Scotsman* today, in which the Tory leader of the new Borders council has expressed his disgust at the spending restrictions that are being imposed on that council, necessitating cuts in the education budget?

When the Secretary of State sounds off about law and order in Scotland, which is an important issue in the relationship between Government and the people, will he explain why the expenditure of Strathclyde police joint board is £304 million yet the Government will give it only £302.5 million? With that spending gap, how will the police be able to tackle the problems of law and order in that part of Scotland?

**Mr. Forsyth:** I have given substantial increased provision for the police. The hon. Gentleman's position would be slightly more credible if he and members of his party were not travelling around Scotland saying that expenditure was not enough without saying how much extra they would spend.

Instead of speaking about cuts, perhaps the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge that there is an increase in local government expenditure in Scotland over and above the amount that we get under the Barnet formula consequences of more than £25 million. Instead of telling fibs about the Government and what the Government have done, members of the Labour party would do better to draw

attention to the increase that has been made. If the hon. Gentleman feels that the expenditure is not enough, he should say how much more a Labour Government would provide. If he is not able to do so, he should stay quiet.

### Unemployment

3. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest unemployment figure; and what the equivalent figure was in December 1992.[10787]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson):** Unemployment in Scotland has fallen by 55,000 since December 1992, to 195,900 in December 1995.

**Mr. Marshall:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that unemployment in Scotland, at 7.9 per cent., is much lower than in France, Germany, Italy and Spain, all of which follow the economic policies recommended by the Labour party? Does he agree that the only threat to a continued reduction in unemployment in Scotland comes from the proposals for a national minimum wage, the adoption of the social chapter, and from that confounded tartan tax?

**Mr. Robertson:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am sure that he will understand me when I say that it is with real regret that while he, as a Scot in exile, can take great pride in all of Scotland's achievements and its advances, the Opposition Members who have the privilege to represent Scottish constituencies use every opportunity to run down Scotland, as the next few minutes will no doubt prove.

**Mr. Michael J. Martin:** What steps is the Minister taking to bring more employment to the districts of Possilpark, Springburn and Dennistoun?

**Mr. Robertson:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman realises that unemployment has decreased by 6 per cent. in the past year in the areas that he has mentioned in his constituency. Obviously, we will continue the policies that he knows are working.

**Mr. Ian Bruce:** How much would a separate Parliament in Scotland have to levy on employees in income tax if it were to make up the £3.1 billion extra that the Government spend in Scotland over and above what they spend in England per head of the population? If that levy were imposed, how would it relate to those employees' income tax and to the unemployment rate in Scotland?

**Mr. Robertson:** As my hon. Friend knows, the proposed tartan tax of 3p in the pound would raise £450 million. I leave it to my hon. Friend and to Opposition Members to work out exactly what the shortfall would be. I hope that they will put that in each and every one of their election addresses at the next general election.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** The Under-Secretary of State will be aware of the announcement this week of the closure of Buchan Meat, which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). It is a very important plant for meat producers in the north-east of Scotland, employing almost 300 people. Can he explain what his Department is doing to make contact with Grampian Enterprise to ensure that we save those jobs and maintain the added value that that high-quality meat facility provides in the north-east of Scotland?

**Mr. Robertson:** The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and people at the factory have been in touch with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State today and yesterday. Of course I agree with the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) that the loss of jobs is always a matter for regret, particularly when it is such a large number in a relatively small community. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), are keeping in close touch with Scottish Enterprise and Grampian Enterprise to see what can be done.

### Exports

4. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current level of Scottish exports. [10788]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch):** Scotland's manufactured exports have reached an all-time record of £14.3 billion.

**Mr. Coombs:** Can my hon. Friend confirm that, besides whisky and computers, almost all sectors of Scottish industry showed export growth in 1994 and that, in particular, the motor car and spare parts industries showed an increase of almost 60 per cent. on the rate in the previous year? What would be the effect of a tartan tax on that excellent growth record?

**Mr. Kynoch:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the exporting successes during the past year. In fact, exports in the food and drink industries, excluding whisky, increased by more than 11 per cent.; paper and printing exports increased by 23.7 per cent.; and chemicals exports increased by 14 per cent. Growth has been right across the board.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to refer to a tartan tax because export success depends on the competitiveness of the Scottish industrial base. Not only would a tartan tax hit exports, but I read in the press this morning that the deputy general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Council proposes that we now go for a four-day week, but maintain wage rates. That would result in a 25 per cent. increase in costs and a dramatic reduction in competitiveness, which would be disastrous for exports and disastrous for business.

**Mr. David Marshall:** What information can the Minister provide to the House on the progress of negotiations with Japan about the vexed question of taxation and Scotch whisky exports?

**Mr. Kynoch:** I think that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that that subject is examined constantly. The World Trade Organisation is considering the matter at present,

and both Scottish Office and other Ministers raise the issue with the Japanese Government whenever they visit Japan.

**Mr. Gallie:** Is my hon. Friend aware that the rise in Scottish exports has played a major part in reducing unemployment in my constituency by 24 per cent. in the past three years? What assurances can he give me that that welcome progress will continue?

**Mr. Kynoch:** My hon. Friend's local enterprise company makes a sterling effort in that regard. That fact was repeated to me this morning when I attended the celebrations for the bicentenary of Robert Burns's death. *[Interruption.]* That shows that I learn quickly. Scottish Enterprise, together with the local enterprise companies, is participating in the new export strategy, the international challenge, which I launched in September. We are making a great effort to ensure that small and medium-sized companies receive the best possible exporting assistance. That will ensure continuing success and continuing record exports from Scotland.

**Mr. Beggs:** Does the Minister agree that exporters in the west of Scotland, the highlands and islands, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic would benefit from increased funding and further expenditure on the A75 and the west coast main line? Will the Scottish Office endeavour to ensure that such upgrading continues?

**Mr. Kynoch:** I am delighted to see the hon. Gentleman for the second time today—he was present this morning at the ceremony at the statue of Robert Burns on the embankment. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I shall ensure that my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for transport issues in the Scottish Office hears the same thing.

## Film Industry

5. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish film industry to discuss the industry's future prospects. [10789]

**The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton):** My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the Minister with responsibility for the arts in Scotland, met leading figures in the film industry from overseas, the United Kingdom and Scotland on 10 January.

**Ms Cunningham:** As part of his continuing film initiative, will the Minister institute discussions within his Department and with other interested parties about establishing a Scottish film school, which would do a great deal to nurture and develop talent in Scotland? If he agrees to do that, will he take into consideration other international models, such as the Danish film school—which, in its 20 years' existence, has made an enormous contribution to the film industry in that country?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** We are now looking at all the options for which the Secretary of State has asked and which Scottish Enterprise is undertaking. The hon. Lady will also be aware that a number of studies are taking place, and we hope to be in a position to make a comprehensive statement in the early spring. The hon. Lady will appreciate that tourism figures have soared in Scotland as a result of the enormously successful films set in Scotland: "Braveheart", "Rob Roy" and "Shallow Grave".

**Mr. Jessel:** In view of the fact that the Scottish film industry is becoming more and more successful, does my hon. Friend believe that increasing tourism in Scotland could be damaged by the tartan tax? Will he also confirm that the new film "Loch Ness" is to be premiered shortly in Inverness?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Yes, that film will be premiered in Inverness shortly and I believe that it will be extremely successful.

As to the first part of my hon. Friend's question on the tartan tax, he is absolutely correct to suggest that those who provide facilities for overseas tourists would have the greatest reservations about the tartan tax if they had to pay far more than tourist operators and tourist service providers elsewhere in Britain.

**Mrs. Liddell:** If the Government are so anxious to do something about the Scottish film industry, why have they failed to convince the Chancellor to amend the Capital Allowances Act 1990 to encourage private investment in the film industry by redefining expenditure on film as revenue expenditure? If the Government simply duck issues such as that, it will become patently obvious that their interest in the film industry is yet another propaganda exercise and another opportunity for the Secretary of State to pose for nice photographs with Mel Gibson to use in the right hon. Gentleman's election address.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** We are looking at all the options, including the position on tax. As I stated last night, the Government will consider whether there are any lessons to be learnt from the Irish experience which can be applied to the Scottish situation in the light of the consultants' report. The hon. Lady will be pleased that the production of a CD-ROM, about Scotland as a screen location, has been funded by the Scottish Office, and many hundreds of thousands of pounds are being provided by the Scottish Office for films in Scotland.

## Forestry Policy

6. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about forestry policy. [10790]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The main aims of our forestry policy are the sustainable management of our existing woods and forests and the steady expansion of tree cover to increase the many, diverse benefits that forests provide.

**Sir Thomas Arnold:** Has the framework document for the new forest enterprise agency been agreed, and is there a problem with defining the specific rate of return that the agency will be expected to achieve?

**Mr. Robertson:** The framework document is actively under consideration by Ministers at the moment, and my

noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for agriculture, forestry and the environment, who is responsible for that matter, will bring forward a statement in the near future.

**Mr. Foulkes:** Is the Minister aware that vast areas of forest in my constituency in south Ayrshire would have to be destroyed if the electricity interconnector with Northern Ireland went ahead? In view of the alarm caused by the laying of the gas pipeline and the threat to the forest, as well as to the people on the south-west coast from the explosives in Beaufort's dyke, does he agree that there should be a third public inquiry into the undersea section of that interconnector before it is allowed to go ahead?

**Mr. Robertson:** I commend the hon. Gentleman for getting a question about Beaufort's dyke into a question about forestry. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) was shaking his head in complete disbelief and I think that he summed up the feeling of the House.

**Mr. William Ross:** Leaving aside for a moment the fact that electricity lines need poles, can the Minister give the House any indication of what tonnages of softwood the Government would like to see produced in this country in 35 years hence, which is the length of time it takes a Sitka spruce tree to grow to available size? What quantities and tonnages of hardwoods will we need 100 years hence?

**Mr. Robertson:** Softwood is a particular concern of my noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for forestry, and I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives a full reply from him as soon as possible.

### Highlands and Islands

7. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the economic prospects for the highlands and islands in 1996-97. [10793]

**Mr. Kynoch:** They remain excellent.

**Mr. Macdonald:** Will the Minister confirm that funding for Highlands and Islands Enterprise will be cut by £3 million in the next financial year; that funding for the three main further education colleges will be cut by £500,00 next year; that funding on housing in the highlands will be slashed next year; and, of course, that funding for local authorities has also been reduced, by some £2 million in the case of the Western Isles? When the Minister comes to Inverness next Monday, will he take the opportunity to explain to the people of the highlands and islands that all those cuts into the economic muscle of the highlands are necessary to finance pre-election tax cuts?

**Mr. Kynoch:** The hon. Gentleman refers to Highlands and Islands Enterprise. That organisation has a budget for 1996-97 of some £75 million. In the round of public expenditure settlement that we have had, that is a very fair settlement. Clearly, Highlands and Islands Enterprise has the opportunity to lever in private sector funds from industry, which it now does. It is more than capable of maintaining levels of output and improving on them.

The hon. Gentleman is perhaps unaware that we have increased funding to local government throughout Scotland by some 2.9 per cent. this year. With the reorganisation of local government, local authorities have a significant opportunity to deliver more cost-effective services. However, the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party seem intent on giving more money to local government. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) was on BBC Television's "Scottish Lobby" with me at the weekend and he said that, if the Labour party had been in office this year, it would have given an extra £200 million to local government in Scotland. Would he take that money from the health budget, the education budget or another budget?

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that, in the current financial year, some 3,200 jobs will be created in the highlands and islands, very much along the lines of previous years? Is not it about time that we talked up the economic prospects of the highlands and islands rather than denigrated them as the Labour party does?

**Mr. Kynoch:** My hon. Friend is right. I know that he is a regular visitor to the highlands as a tourist. Tourism accounts for 20 per cent. of employment in the highlands and islands and is a significant contributor to the economy. I believe that there are remarkable success stories to tell in that area. For example, Selfcare in Inverness represents a major inward investment in the area and should be welcomed. We rarely hear good news from the Labour party.

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** The Minister will be aware that the economic prospects for Campbeltown and Kintyre in my constituency will be greatly enhanced once there is a ferry link between Campbeltown and Ballycastle. He will be aware that the Secretary of State has taken a particular interest in the matter. Is he able to give any indication about when a ferry operator will be chosen? I am sure that he agrees that it will be a marvellous thing for the entire area—Kintyre and Northern Ireland—and that it would be a nice thing to happen in the new peace climate.

**Mr. Kynoch:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have great sympathy for the hon. Lady's case. My right hon. Friend must take proper advice before reaching a conclusion. At this stage, no proposals have been put to Ministers, but we will bear the hon. Lady's comments in mind when we consider them.

### Campbell's Soups

8. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the boycott of Campbell's tinned soups in Scotland. [10794]

**Mr. Kynoch:** None.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** The Minister will know that the campaign to boycott Campbell's soups and Fray Bentos products in Scotland has been extremely successful. He will also know of the appalling action taken by Campbell Soups to close down the extremely profitable Homepride factory in my constituency. Will he join me in asking those who are boycotting Campbell's soups in Scotland to buy Baxter's soups instead, which

are made in the constituency of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing)? Should not the slogan in Scotland be, "Boycott Campbell's and buy Baxter's"?

**Mr. Kynoch:** I know that the hon. Gentleman is waging a significant campaign on this issue and I read with great interest the remarks he made in the Adjournment debate on 6 November. I have a great deal of sympathy with much of what he said, but there is little that I can add to what my hon. Friend the then Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), said at that time.

**Mrs. Ewing:** Madam Speaker, you will recognise the importance attached to all our fish and food processing organisations in the north-east of Scotland and their significance to the local economy. Given that, and the remarks made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), will the Minister explain what aspect of the Scottish Office budget will be allocated to promoting those high-quality goods, especially as they employ many people who give of their best to ensure high standards so that Scotland's name is recognised in the international community?

**Mr. Kynoch:** The hon. Lady is right about the importance of the food industry to Scotland. If she looks at what we are doing with Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Trade International, she will realise that significant efforts are put in to export assistance for the food industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched a cookery promotion at the boat show in London recently—I was not aware that he was an expert.

We take every opportunity to promote Scottish products. We also have Scotland The Brand and I know that companies in the hon. Lady's constituency—they have already been mentioned—have been involved. I believe that the local enterprise company in her constituency, Moray Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise, is also involved. I participated in a promotion in Regent street just before Christmas. I believe that the Scottish Office is making every effort to ensure that the best of Scotland is promoted and exported in the interests of everyone.

**Scottish Council (Development and Industry)**

9. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) to discuss the trends in the Scottish economy; and if he will make a statement. [10795]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I met representatives from the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) shortly after I was appointed and following my invitation to organisations throughout Scotland to meet me to discuss their concerns.

**Mr. Salmond:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the 250 job losses at Buchan Meat in Turriff doubled local unemployment at a stroke? In a community the size of Turriff, it is the equivalent of thousands of job losses in an urban conurbation. Does he recognise that he should respond to that problem as a matter of national priority and not simply leave it to local agencies? Is he aware that the workers action committee in Buchan Meat is keen to advertise the fact that there are many excellent, expanding and profitable product lines in the factory, not least Boeuf D'Ecosse, a new packaged product that was to be trial launched on the French market in a £1 million venture this week? There are many products in that factory which would prove extremely attractive to alternative investment.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the message is that alternative investment in the people and products of the area will be warmly welcomed, but that those interested only in asset-stripping—removing machinery, products or jobs from the factory—will be as fiercely resisted in Turriff as they are in Workington?

**Mr. Forsyth:** I am sure that all hon. Members are well aware of the difficulties created in Turriff by the liquidation of Buchan Meat. I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that Scottish Enterprise will be involved. Indeed, it and the local enterprise company tried to prevent the liquidation, albeit—unfortunately—unsuccessfully. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the impact the loss of jobs could have on Turriff and the surrounding areas—not least the farmers and others who are shareholders in the company.

I shall be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss what can be done. I shall ask Scottish Enterprise to pull out every stop—I know that it will—to try to ensure the continuation of local employment. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are great difficulties, but I am sure that, on this matter, we can be of one mind and share a single-minded determination to do what we can to prevent further job losses in his constituency.

**Mr. Stewart:** When my right hon. Friend next meets the Scottish Council (Development and Industry), will he ask it to carry out a full and objective economic analysis of the effect of a tartan tax on the Scottish economy? In particular, will he point out that the reason why Scottish Labour Members are so fanatical about a tartan tax is that they would not have to pay it? They would be at Westminster, on full pay, with nothing to do except speak on English matters—with no liability to pay the tartan tax.

**Mr. Forsyth:** I do not know whether this is correct, but I am told that even the people who work in Labour's research department in Scotland would not have to pay the tartan tax because they are paid from Walworth road. My hon. Friend has pointed out an anomaly—*[Interruption.]* I say to Labour Members who laugh and jeer about the tartan tax that it is not a joke. In the unlikely event of Labour ever getting into power to set up its tax-raising Scottish Parliament and introducing the tartan tax, the result would be £6 a week extra in tax for the average family. It would mean losing the family holiday and I do not think that most people in Scotland are prepared to give up their holidays to give politicians an opportunity to be put out to grass in Edinburgh.

**Mr. Home Robertson:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that IBM is transferring the manufacture of its computer keyboards from LEMAC in Haddington to the far east, thereby destroying the jobs of 252 of my constituents? Why are the Government allowing that multinational giant to have free access to the European market without accepting responsibility for the low-paid

employees of its contractors in Scotland? When the right hon. Gentleman next meets the council, will he discuss what the Government intend to do to create more jobs for my constituents in east Lothian?

**Mr. Forsyth:** The first thing that we are doing is resisting idiotic proposals such as a tartan tax, the social chapter or a minimum wage—all of which would add to employment costs. If the hon. Gentleman has begun to realise that jobs are mobile and that we must fight like tigers to get them, we may be making some progress with the unfortunate circumstances that exist in his constituency. When I met IBM recently to discuss inward investment, it became clear to me that we are in a fiercely competitive market and that we need a low tax, low regulation economy. The hon. Gentleman, with his support for a tax-raising Parliament, is the enemy of jobs in Scotland.

### Violent Crimes

10. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of reported crimes of violence have been committed by re-offenders in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [10796]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Information is not available in the form requested, as not all reported crimes of violence result in a conviction. In 1994, 17 per cent. of persons convicted of a crime of violence—which category includes serious assault, sexual assault, robbery and possession of offensive weapons—had been convicted of a similar offence in the previous five years.

**Mr. Gallie:** What steps will my hon. Friend take in respect of crimes of violence committed by youngsters? There still seems to be a problem with the carrying of knives. Will my hon. Friend consider introducing legislation to prevent the sale of knives to young persons under the age of 18? Will he also consider introducing legislation to prevent the consumption of alcohol in public places by youngsters under 18?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** It is illegal to sell alcohol to under-18s, and a large number of councils have adopted byelaws approved by the Secretary of State to prevent the consumption of alcohol in public places. We will consider, in co-operation with the Home Office, any proposals that my hon. Friend has—but we must be certain that proposals are enforceable by the police. We believe that the Health Education Board for Scotland should spearhead health enhancement among the young.

As to the carrying of knives, there have been a number of successful campaigns, such as Operation Combat. The number of attempted murders involving the use of knives fell by half as a result, which every police force should bear in mind.

**Mr. McFall:** Does not the Minister's answer reveal the total failure of the Government's criminal justice policies? With friends such as the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who needs enemies? The present policy clearly does not work. At Glasgow district court a few months ago, 7,000 criminal cases were dropped because of lack of resources. Apart from that being a kick in the teeth for the victims of crime, is not it the case that the several thousand villains who are out and about in Scotland regard the Government as their friends?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The dropping of that large number of cases was the responsibility of Glasgow district council, which refused to make available the necessary facilities. The hon. Gentleman should direct the strength of his criticism to that council. I am proud to be associated with my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who introduced a necessary provision to allow prosecutors a right of appeal against sentences that are too lenient. That right has been used successfully, and such offenders have been subjected to heavier sentences as a result of the measure for which my hon. Friend fought. He was right to fight for it, and that measure is greatly to his credit.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Does my hon. Friend recall previous law and order Bills and the Opposition opposing measures that the Government wanted to introduce? Does my hon. Friend remember the speeches made about stop and search, which has produced remarkable results? Does not that measure show that Conservatives are tough on crime, whereas Labour supports not the victims of crime but the persons who practise it?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My hon. Friend is right to remind the House that, originally, Labour Members opposed the right of police officers to search persons whom they suspected of carrying weapons. Despite that opposition, the law was changed. As a result, the number of persons who commit crimes involving knives is considerably lower than it would have been.

### New Towns

11. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to encourage employment opportunities in Scotland's new towns; and if he will make a statement. [10797]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies recognise their responsibility to maintain economic development in new towns.

**Mr. Hogg:** Would I be absolutely right to say that new towns and their staff had an excellent track record of creating jobs and attracting inward investment to Scotland's new towns and that the new towns have led inward investment in Scotland since the second world war? That being the case, would it not be appropriate for the Minister to ensure that the employment of those staff is cared for in the transition from the development corporations to the new unitary authorities? Will he ensure that everything possible is done to guarantee their future employment?

**Mr. Kynoch:** There seems to be a game of trying to get us to say, "You are absolutely right." I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments. He raises some valid points. Over the past five years, in Cumbernauld, for example, which is obviously of great interest to him, Locate in Scotland has recorded 36 planned inward investment projects, involving planned investment of more than £87 million associated with the expected

creation or safeguarding of more than 2,000 jobs. I am anxious to ensure that we continue the process of inward investment into the new towns. They are of course no longer new towns, which is why the new town development corporations are being wound up. Locate in Scotland has been in regular contact with the new town development corporations and I am very confident that the positive efforts that have been brought about remarkably successfully by many people through partnership will continue in future.

**Mr. Neil Hamilton:** Does my hon. Friend agree that Scotland's recent record on job creation, compared with that of other parts of the United Kingdom, has been excellent, but that all those encouraging gains would be set at nought if we had a tartan tax, the extra imposts on employers that the social chapter would bring, and a minimum wage? Is he aware of the budget announced yesterday in Germany? The German Government are now well aware of the job-destroying consequences of all their foolish decisions over the years, which have loaded employers with huge costs and will only reduce the wealth-creating potential of the country.

**Mr. Kynoch:** My hon. Friend draws attention to Germany, where unemployment is rising, whereas it is falling consistently in this country. Not only are the taxes to which my hon. Friend has referred important to the future competitiveness of Scottish industry in particular; the costs of labour in Scotland are important too.

If new Labour is all about trying to go forward, having stakeholding and involving the unions more closely on factory premises, I should like to know whether it disassociates itself from what Mr. Bill Speirs, the deputy general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, said yesterday. He demanded that the working week be reduced to four days and expected no reduction in earnings. That would mean an effective increase in wages of some 25 per cent., which would be catastrophic not only for Scottish businesses but for British business. All the successes and records being set daily by industry in Scotland would be for nought.

**Sir David Steel:** As the Minister responsible for industry, does the hon. Gentleman agree that employment opportunities are directly linked to the quality of education and training in Scotland? Is he aware that, yesterday, Borders regional council had to withdraw free transport for people aged between 16 and 18 attending day-release classes at further education colleges as one of 30 cuts in education in the region? How can the Secretary of State tell the shadow Secretary of State that there have been no cuts in education? Will Ministers stop fantasising about tartan taxes and deal with the situation on the ground?

**Mr. Kynoch:** The right hon. Gentleman should be aware that, in fact, there has been a 2.5 per cent. increase in education spending this year. It is up to local councils to decide how to spend their funds. Local councils have asked for more responsibility for, and more choice in what they can do with, the funds that they are given, and they are being given both. We are consulting on areas in which they can take on greater responsibility. They must stand up and be responsible for what they do. They have the opportunity to decide how to spend their money. I hope that they will give priority to the areas to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

**Mr. Donohoe:** The Minister will recall that, last year, I asked a question about the effects of £11 million for urban development being lost from Irvine new town because of the closure of Irvine development corporation. He said that the money would be distributed to local enterprise companies. Why, then, must the LEC in Ayrshire put up with a cut of £2.5 million? In those circumstances, how can industry be promoted in the new town beyond the life of the development corporation?

**Mr. Kynoch:** The difference between the hon. Gentleman and his party and the Government is that we recognise that LECs, as with Scottish Enterprise, have levered in a ratio of 3:1 of private funding to public funds. They clearly believe that they can exist with less funding and maintain, through efficiency improvement, the same output—and, indeed, improve on it. If the hon. Gentleman spoke to his LEC he would understand how successful LECs have been. Rather than running down the Ayrshire economy, he should tell the positive stories about Irvine, inward investment into Irvine, and the successes of Ayrshire.

## NHS Staffing Costs

12. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on NHS staffing costs. [10798]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Resources available to the NHS for staffing and other costs continue to be higher than ever before. Since 1980, the number of nursing staff has increased by 15.5 per cent., the number of hospital doctors by 21.5 per cent. and the number of general practitioners by 18.7 per cent.

**Ms Squire:** Does the Minister agree that the Government's market approach has led to rock bottom morale among NHS staff and a two-tier service for patients? Will he condemn the approaches made to consultants at Glasgow Royal Infirmary NHS trust to give preferential treatment to patients of GP fundholders? Will the Government, for once, stop telling fibs and admit that the NHS is certainly not safe in their hands? *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) seems to be a little perplexed. The Secretary of State used the word fib earlier in a similar context and I allowed it.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The hon. Lady can be assured that the health service is absolutely safe in the Government's hands. Expenditure has increased substantially. I can give her the reassurance that she seeks in relation to Glasgow. We are absolutely committed to treating all patients equally. All that matters is the recommendation of the clinician as to whether the patient requires urgent treatment. If he or she so recommends, the patient must receive it. The Scottish Office guidelines are

clear. The same waiting time guarantee must apply to every patient. I understand that the trust accepted that it issued its questionnaire in error.

**Mrs. Fyfe:** Being guaranteed a maximum waiting time is not the same as being told that someone will not be put behind in a queue if a GP fundholder seeks priority. Has the Minister been in touch with Glasgow Royal Infirmary NHS trust today to tell it that it is out of line? If not, why not?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** If the hon. Lady had listened to what I said, she would have heard that I was making it absolutely clear that we do not accept in any circumstances a two-tier health service. Every patient must receive the same priority according to the determination of the clinician concerned. That is stated in our guidelines and that position must be followed. The NHS trust admitted that its questionnaire was issued in error.

**Mr. McAllion:** If the Minister thinks that the Scottish Office guidelines are clear, he is the only one who does. Has he read the letter, issued on official notepaper bearing the crest of Glasgow Royal Infirmary NHS trust, in which the medical advisory committee states that it has agreed to take the opinion of all consultants on whether factors other than clinical need should significantly affect the handling of patient care? Does he understand the point that is made in the letter—that the pressure from his imposed internal market and from GP fundholders and other purchasers who are demanding significantly better treatment for their patients has led the trust to consider abandoning the principle of treatment in accordance with medical need? Will he send a clear instruction to every NHS trust in Scotland that patients can be treated in accordance with medical need, and only in accordance with medical need? If he will not do that, both he and the Secretary of State for Scotland should do what one of the Secretary of State's constituents—Mrs. Bowie—called on him to do today in the press and resign, because neither of them, nor any of the other chancers on the Government Front Bench, can be trusted with our NHS.

**Hon. Members:** Oh!

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Guidelines have been issued—*[Interruption.]* The position is absolutely clear—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Obviously I have missed something. Will the Under-Secretary of State tell me what he is shouting about?

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Is "chancers" parliamentary?

**Madam Speaker:** Chancers?

**Mr. Robertson:** The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) used the word "chancers".

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I did not hear what the hon. Member for Dundee, East said. If the hon. Gentleman said something that might have been unparliamentary, I expect him to develop the point that he made so that I understand completely what he said.

**Mr. McAllion:** Madam Speaker, I used a word from Glasgow patois—"chancer". It means that we do not really trust the person who is described as a chancer. I think that it is parliamentary.

**Madam Speaker:** I live and learn every day, especially from the Scots. Thank you very much.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there is no element of chance about the fact that more than £30 million has been allocated to the NHS trust in the hon. Gentleman's constituency for an extension to Ninewells hospital. NHS trusts in Scotland represent a remarkable success story in helping to bring down waiting times. As for the Secretary of State's constituent, although because of confidentiality I cannot comment in detail, I understand that she wanted to be treated more quickly than would have been possible on the NHS. There is no reason to suppose that she would have had to wait longer than the guaranteed maximum period for patients. Only clinicians can judge individual need. NHS resources must be made available for those in greatest need.

### Glasgow International Airport

13. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what analysis he has made of the impact on the economy of the west of Scotland of the development of Glasgow international airport. [10799]

**Mr. Kynoch:** I believe that the airport makes an important contribution to the west of Scotland economy, and that is why, as my hon. Friend knows, we support the Glasgow airport initiative, which seeks to maximise the economic benefits of the airport's expansion.

**Mr. Stewart:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that positive and helpful reply. Does he agree that two key infrastructure developments are crucial to the airport's future—first, the M74 northern extension and, secondly, an eastbound on-ramp for the M8? Can he give an unequivocal commitment to the House today that both those developments will go ahead as soon as possible?

**Mr. Kynoch:** I compliment my hon. Friend on his involvement in the setting up of the Glasgow airport initiative in 1992. In answer to his two questions about the roads, I assure him that we shall consider those matters positively and will try to take them forward at the earliest possible time.

**Mrs. Adams:** Will the Minister join me in congratulating Glasgow airport on bringing 5,000 jobs to my constituency, but will he also recognise that that is no substitute for the loss of 85 per cent. of the manufacturing jobs in my constituency—about 20,000 jobs—over the same period? Will he now consider investing in manufacturing industry, with the aim of helping the airport to further its business?

**Mr. Kynoch:** I am glad that the hon. Lady recognises the contribution that the airport initiative has made. I have

seen a similar initiative in the United States—the Washington airport task force, which has contributed towards a good joint venture arrangement between software houses in the United Kingdom, including Scotland, and in Virginia. I believe that the Glasgow airport initiative has been ably set up to develop similar arrangements.

As for manufacturing, the hon. Lady may be aware of the jobs that have been created by Locate in Scotland in the past year. About 12,300 jobs have been created, involving 97 projects and £1.1 billion in capital investment. The transformation of the Scottish economy from some of the traditional industries of the past towards the industries of the future—we now produce about 11 per cent. of Europe's semiconductors, 35 per cent. of its personal computers, 50 per cent. of its automated banking machines and 60 per cent. of its workstations—is all positive information about successes for the Government and for our policies.

**EC Council of Ministers**

14. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has recently attended a meeting of the EC Council of Ministers. [10801]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** My right hon. Friend attended a meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 26 October 1995, and I attended on 21 and 22 December 1995.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** When my hon. Friend returns from the next European Council of Ministers meeting, will he go on a special tour of Scotland to remind all of those who are selling the idea that Scotland will be able to cast itself adrift from the UK and that all the tax money that is spent and the trade that is conducted in Scotland by the rest of the UK could be replicated and replaced by Europe are talking utter nonsense? Would not such a course lead to bankruptcy and higher taxation?

**Mr. Robertson:** I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend and all my Scottish Office colleagues regularly travel to all parts of Scotland. Indeed, my right hon. Friend has just returned from two days in Shetland at the Up Helly-a celebrations. My hon. Friend is right to suggest that Scotland punches well above its weight in the councils of Europe and the world as a full and equal partner in this United Kingdom. That is in stark contrast to the immediate belittling of Scotland that is on offer from the SNP or the gradual marginalisation that is offered by Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

**Mr. Maxton:** When the Minister and the Secretary of State attend meetings of the Council of Ministers, do they discuss with their Spanish, German and French colleagues the development of regional government within these areas and the importance of devolution to their economies?

**Mr. Robertson:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we discuss those matters—our Spanish counterparts are most concerned about having one of the worst unemployment rates in the EU.

## Points of Order

3.30 pm

**Mr. Norman Hogg** (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have noticed that question No. 175 appears on the Order Paper today in the name of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw). The question appears to have been placed on the Order Paper to elicit the result of the inquiry to which the question refers. This is a matter of immense importance that should have been dealt with either by a statement to the House or by an oral answer from the Secretary of State for Scotland. All Scottish Members are here and, while we have plenty to do, we could hear the answer to that question orally. Is there a procedure whereby that question can be answered now so that we can debate the matter now?

**Madam Speaker:** There is no procedure whereby the hon. Member can secure an oral answer to that question. I have not heard that any Minister is seeking to answer it orally or to make a statement on the matter.

**Mr. Bill Walker** (North Tayside): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I rise to draw your attention to the fact that the European Commissioner for Transport has today approved the expenditure of £440 million of public funds in aid to the state airline of Spain, Iberia. This will have a damaging impact on UK airlines. Is there any way in which the House can debate this matter, because British taxpayers' money will be used to damage British interests?

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman may like to raise the matter with the Leader of the House during Business Questions if he is seeking a debate on this or other matters.

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It has been widely reported today that senior judges—including a former Master of the Rolls—have criticised the Home Secretary for playing politics with the administration of justice. Given the gravity of these accusations, has the Home Secretary indicated to you whether he intends to come and give an explanation to the House?

**Madam Speaker:** No. As I said earlier, I have not heard from any Minister that we will be having a statement today on any of those issues.

**Mr. Brian Wilson** (Cunninghame, North): Subsequent to the point of order of my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg), Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman and the House know that once a point of order has been dealt with, it must rest there. I have given my answer to that point of order.

**Mr. Wilson:** It is a different point of order.

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman said that it related to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. He cannot have it both ways.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) might like think about a different point of order while I deal with the hon. Member for Linlithgow.

**Mr. Dalyell:** While it is quite right, Madam Speaker, to say that there is no procedure available in such cases, used there not to be a convention that—at least as a courtesy to the House—Ministers who knew that controversial statements were due to be made placed them in the Library at two o'clock at the latest?

**Madam Speaker:** That is a decision for Ministers to make, not one for the Speaker.

**Mr. Wilson** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Is it a different point of order?

**Mr. Wilson:** Yes, Madam Speaker. I used the word "subsequent" in a purely chronological sense.

The question on the Order Paper refers to a specific local authority. I was under the impression that, according to a convention of the House, any such specific reference should be made by an hon. Member representing the area concerned. The fact that the question was tabled by the hon. Member for Dover—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. That is not a point of order for me. I think that the House knows the answer to that one.

## BILL PRESENTED

### Protection of Privacy

Sir Patrick Cormack presented a Bill to make it an offence to sell or to buy tapes or transcripts of private conversations otherwise than with the consent of both parties; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February and to be printed. [Bill 50.]

## Regulation of Funding of Political Parties

3.35 pm

**Mr. John Spellar** (Warley, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to regulate the funding of political parties.

The Bill would require the disclosure of the source of donations, prohibit donations from overseas sources and require the publication of accounts.

Once again, the funding of political parties is on the agenda, put there by no less a person than the Prime Minister. Only last Thursday, at Prime Minister's Question Time, he raised the question of Labour party funding when he said:

"We know who pays 50 per cent. of the money that the Labour party gets."—[*Official Report*, 25 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 476.]

He was quite right: we do all know.

The Prime Minister seems very keen to publicise the source of funding of the Labour party—and why not? It is no secret. Party accounts make it quite clear, and the law makes strict provision with regard to the operation of trade union political funds. Unfortunately, no such transparency applies to the funding of the Tory party. Shrouded in mystery and obscurity, a host of secretive companies and organisations were created after the war to funnel secret loot into the Tory party, and our Prime Minister seems to want to keep it that way. What a perfect example of saying one thing and doing another.

The Bill is a simple measure. It has three main aims—to prohibit donations from foreign nationals not normally resident in this country and from overseas companies and Governments; to ensure the recording and publication of donations above a certain limit—I am not tied to a particular figure, but the limit would probably be about £1,000; and to require political parties to publish full income and expenditure accounts in the same way as companies and trade unions.

The issue is so unremarkable that in 1949 the House passed a motion requiring parties to publish accounts. Unfortunately, it has not yet been properly activated by the Tory party. We know that the matter is of considerable concern not just to Opposition Members but to many members and supporters of the Tory party. It may also be of interest to those who do their business with the Royal Bank of Scotland, which seems to have allowed the Tory party a huge overdraft—at one stage hitting nearly £16 million. My Scottish colleagues may wonder whether small businesses that bank with the Royal Bank of Scotland receive such helpful treatment if they encounter cash-flow crises in their day-to-day affairs.

Publication might also help the Prime Minister, who was very confused about the sources of Tory funding a couple of years ago. He now ducks questions about the use of Downing street for Tory party functions. I have here an invitation to the winter ball in aid of Conservative party marginal seats, which states:

"You will shortly be receiving (or may already have received) an invitation to the launch reception at 10 Downing Street."

The Prime Minister has even less idea of what is going on around the country. When I raised the point with him at Question Time on 19 October 1993, he said that he must let me into a secret:

"There are a great many secret sources and they are all cheese and wine parties up and down the country."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1993; Vol. 230, c. 144.]

One wonders how much wine and cheese the Tories stuffed into that fugitive from justice, Asil Nadir, who, as they have now admitted, donated more than £400,000. One wonders whether they will pay that money back to the unfortunate people who lost heavily in the crash of Polly Peck. One also wonders why they could not confirm the donation immediately, and why they were careless enough to dump the records of donations so that they were unable to provide the receiver with facts and figures. And one must wonder whether they will repay the money donated by ex-Nissan boss Octav Botnar, who is currently hiding in Switzerland to evade the attentions of the Inland Revenue. What about Mr. Virani—another heavy donator to Tory funds who ended up inside? Who are the real villains' friends here—Botnar, Virani and Nadir?

There might also be concern as to how much foreign business men, particularly Greek shipowners, have donated. We could then match the figure with the amount lost to the Treasury each year through the tax loophole that benefits them—foreign domicile tax status. It is an interesting provision and such an unusual arrangement that we are one of only four countries in western Europe to have it. The others are Switzerland, Luxembourg and the Channel Islands, which are all well-known tax havens.

It would also be instructive to find out how much money has come from Hong Kong. It appears that the Tories have still not shaken off that habit. Even this year, it is reported that the Foreign Secretary attended fund-raising meetings during his recent visit, even though one presumes that his trip to Hong Kong was funded by the British taxpayer. One wonders whether, following the deterioration of relations between China and Britain, Hong Kong business men were as generous with their donations as they have been, but that will not stop that lot trying to get money from them.

What is remarkable is that legislation forbidding foreign donations has been in place in the United States, Germany, Canada and other countries for some years and is accepted as normal. The British public have a right to know whether one of the main political parties is in hock to foreign business men, companies or, indeed, countries.

The publication of donations was introduced a number of years ago in the United States, which was followed by other countries, including Australia. It does not seem to provide any particular difficulties for them. Is not it surprising that the Conservatives are so keen to invoke the right to silence in this case? Of course, they might be following the precept that they chant regularly from the Dispatch Box that, "Those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear." Perhaps they are concerned that people might detect—how can I put it delicately—a strong statistical correlation between donations to the Tory party and the provision of knighthoods, peerages, and now, places on quangos, let alone ministerial access for companies.

That highlights the problem that the Tories face. They are kept together only by their monopoly of patronage through honours, quangos and political favours. They are a narrow oligarchy clinging to central state power, propped up by a few high-spending companies and individuals and by foreign interests. More and more, their previous supporters in industry and construction are deserting them, as they realise the harm that is being done to their businesses by Government policy.

Even Lord McAlpine, the previous treasurer of the Tory party, said only this week that the construction industry must

"explain to the government how its handling of the British economy has, over the past five years, systematically destroyed Britain's construction industry, and that this has to stop."

Even that industry is deserting in the face of the Government's actions. Frankly, the Conservative party is knackered.

It was most instructive to watch the programme on Tory wives the other month. Look at what happened when they held constituency functions. Nearly all the participants were pensioners. That graphically illustrated what has been reported in the press, particularly *The Daily Telegraph*—that the Tory party is an elderly and aging party with an average age of 60. New blood is not coming into the party. Lots of those who stay do so only to belong to Conservative clubs, which reputedly have the best snooker tables. The Young Conservatives, which was once the largest youth movement in Europe outside the Komsomol, is down to 5,000 members and half of them are barmy. That is why the Tory party has had to cancel its youth conference. Meanwhile, the young Labour movement is at 25,000 and roaring ahead.

At councillor and Member of the European Parliament levels, Tory representatives are becoming an endangered species. That is why the Tories have to seek out and cover up the supply of dodgy money. The Bill is aimed at cleaning up the financing of British politics and ensuring that British parties are not up for sale. It would be considered normal in our fellow democracies and will be considered common sense by the voters of this country and I commend it to the House.

3.43 pm

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): I oppose this Bill on the regulation of the funding of political parties. It contains more than a whiff of hypocrisy. The stench of hypocrisy surrounding it is much like that of the sewers before we privatised the water companies.

One objective of the Bill is to move Britain towards the state funding of political parties. That would be extremely damaging but Labour would like to do it. It is not about regulating those who financially support political parties but about keeping secret the millions of pounds of trade union support to Labour that would fall outside its terms. It is a classic case of Labour saying one thing and doing another.

Labour talks about disclosure of party funding and openness. The hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) said that there is no secrecy about Labour party funds. That statement is not true. There is a lot of secrecy when one starts to look at Labour party accounts. The Labour party makes many statements about disclosure and openness, but it says one thing and does another. The hon. Gentleman's entry in the Register of Members' Interests shows that he receives trade union funding from two sources but there is no disclosure of or openness about the amount of money that he gets from them. He is guilty of saying one thing and doing another.

The Conservative party's openness is revealed by the extent of the information that the hon. Member for Warley, West has been able to find. As he knows, we in the Conservative party go to a lot of wine and cheese parties and chicken dinners. Sometimes the cheese is not up to scratch; sometimes the chicken is not as nice as we would like it to be. But we know that we are raising an honest penny for the Conservative party's coffers. We do not pick up the phone, as does the Labour party, to call a friendly trade unionist to get thousands of pounds. We do the hard work of going around the chicken and cheese circuit to get money for the Conservative party.

I invite hon. Members to look at the Labour party's national executive committee reports. In the 1986 report they will find an advertisement by Robert Maxwell—funding the Labour party. If they look again, they will find an advertisement for a Soviet book shop—funding the Labour party. There was no reference in the speech of the hon. Member for Warley, West to the member of the other House who sits on the Labour Front Bench and who took £250,000 of pensioners' money three weeks before Robert Maxwell jumped overboard. That is how the Labour party and its Members fund themselves.

There is worse than that. The latest accounts of the Labour party reveal that 57 per cent. of its funds come from the trade unions. However, that is 57 per cent. of what we are told about. There are many entries in the Labour party's accounts that cannot be reconciled. For example, I have here some leaked minutes of the National Trade Union and Labour Party Committee. Donations called affiliation fees from trade unions add up to £3.6 million. The Labour party's accounts give the figure as £6.6 million. There is a lot of difference between £ 6.6 million and £3.6 million. Where is the £3 million?

**Mr. Bruce Grocott** (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Shaw:** Where are the extra affiliation fees that the Labour party does not disclose in its accounts?

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I have a point of order.

**Mr. Grocott:** The hon. Gentleman is clearly arguing in favour of greater disclosure of party funding details, which is exactly what the Bill is about. He is making a speech in favour of the Bill which masquerades as one against it.

**Madam Speaker:** I do not interpret the speech of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) in that way. He is keeping himself in order. He has another minute or two in which to finish.

**Mr. Shaw:** I am grateful for your support, Madam Speaker.

If we consider the trade union figures, we find no openness and disclosure. The minutes of the meeting say that Unison's donation to the Labour party is £700,000, but, when one goes to Unison's accounts—buried away on a page that is difficult to find, somewhere in the middle of a 50-page document—one finds that the figure is £1,989,000, equivalent to one sixth of Labour party expenditure.

That is not the whole story. The Labour party receives more money from Unison than is disclosed in that figure. Another £94,000 is disclosed as being for parliamentary activities. Once upon a time, we were told that the Labour party would disclose how that figure is made up, and that we would find out which Front-Bench Labour Members

*[Mr. Shaw]*

are receiving the money, but no such disclosures have yet been made. In that regard, Labour Front-Bench Members are guilty of saying one thing and doing another.

The Labour party does not disclose five other funds in its central accounts. The Industrial Research Trust, once mentioned in disclosures of the Leader of the Opposition and the deputy leader in the Register of Members' Interests, has now been excluded from public view and taken out—another example of saying one thing and doing another. No details are available for public scrutiny on the Labour leader's office fund—another example of saying one thing and doing another.

There are no disclosures of what the Lionel Cooke Memorial Fund is, of the details, of donors and of the size of donations. There are no disclosures of the details of the National Trade Union and Labour Party Committee funds, of the donors and of the size of donations. That is an example of the Labour party saying one thing about openness and disclosure, but doing another. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hypocrisy"] My hon. Friends may say the word "hypocrisy": I could not possibly comment.

The Labour party is in trouble. If we consider its membership and the NEC report, we find that the Labour party boasts an 85 per cent. retention rate. If we turn that statistic around, however, it means that 15 per cent. of the Labour party membership are either dying each year or are failing to renew their membership. The Labour party retains its members only for about six years on average and then they get fed up with the Labour party. The NEC report says:

"The party's growth in membership"

has brought

"little financial benefit centrally".

There is still a high dependency on the trade unions in Labour party financing.

The Bill should be opposed because it is full of hypocrisy by the Labour party. In his speech, the hon. Member for Warley, West, in common with his Front-Bench colleagues, has been saying one thing and doing another.

*Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 163, Noes 62.

**Division No. 41]** **[3.52 pm**

**AYES**

Adams, Mrs Irene
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Harry Barnes and**
**Ms Angela Eagle.**

**NOES**

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Beggs, Roy
Booth, Hartley
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
McCrea, The Reverend William
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Riddick, Graham
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Paul Marland and**
**Mr. Jaques Arnold.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Spellar, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Mr. David Winnick, Ms Angela Eagle, Mr. D.N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Gordon McMaster, Mr. Chris Mullin and Mr. Denis MacShane.

## Regulation of Funding of Political Parties

Mr. John Spellar accordingly presented a Bill to regulate the funding of political parties: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 April and to be printed. [Bill 51.]

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the substantial majority in favour of my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) being given permission to bring in the Bill and bearing in mind the importance of the subject—which we have been debating on and off for the past 12 to 18 months—can the Nolan Committee be notified of the House's decision? It is an important point and I see no reason why the views of the House, as expressed just now, should not be relayed formally to the Nolan Committee by the Clerks.

**Madam Speaker:** The Nolan Committee has its own terms of reference to which it works, as I am sure the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is aware.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. May I point out to the House that the Division figures are unbalanced by the fact that parliamentary private secretaries cannot vote?

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I am not in the habit of allowing one point of order to run on and become a debate. I can accept another point of order only if it is on a different matter. It is a waste of the House's time, if they are not points of order.

**Mr. Bruce Grocott** (The Wrekin) *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Does the hon. Member for The Wrekin have a point of order on another matter?

**Mr. Grocott:** My point of order is about the credibility of the Division figures.

**Madam Speaker:** We do not need to know about the credibility of the figures: they are there for all to see. A majority of one constitutes a win in our democracy, and that is the end of the matter.

# Orders of the Day

## Local Government Finance

4.5 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer):** I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 164), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the National Parks Supplementary Grant Report (England) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 167), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 166), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (No. 16) (House of Commons Paper No. 165), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

On 30 November, I issued my settlement proposals for consultation. They included the total provision for local authority spending, the level of central support for that expenditure, and my proposals for calculating standard spending assessments—the SSAs. I also announced provisional capping criteria. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary also announced his proposals for police specific grant on 30 November.

Since then, my colleagues and I have received written representations from 250 local authorities, and have met delegations from 84. We have carefully considered all the points that were raised with us during consultation. Our final decisions in respect of grants and notional amounts are embodied in the reports before the House today. I will also remind the House today of my provisional capping criteria.

**Mr. Jeff Rooker** (Birmingham, Perry Barr): The Secretary of State has made great play of the enormous consultation process that he has undertaken, and I do not criticise him for that. However, I must raise two points in relation to the city of Birmingham. The first concerns the extra population from Frankley Beeches and fact that the deprivation index for the county of Worcester and Hereford rather than that for Frankley Beeches was used, which has cost Birmingham £1.6 million.

My second point concerns the way in which capital financing is examined in the standard spending assessment. A notional amount rather the actual capital debt of an authority is taken, which has apparently cost Birmingham city council £30 million. Those points were raised with the Secretary of State during the consultation process. Why did he not take them on board?

**Mr. Gummer:** There have been three delegations from Birmingham, and I had the pleasure of meeting the leader of Birmingham city council and talking through the matters. The point about the estate that was transferred from Hereford and Worcester to Birmingham was raised with me. However, in later discussions, it was discovered that the figures were not as the hon. Member for cited, and in fact Birmingham felt that our suggestion was the better answer.

I do not think that it would be sensible for the hon. Gentleman to press the matter, as the figures were based on something that did not proceed. The transfer arrangements are agreed between the Government and the local authority association, so the hon. Gentleman would find it difficult to pursue the matter.

I told Birmingham that, if it wanted to continue, and if it could persuade the local authorities to propose a change, I would not be averse to altering the system. The system is agreed between local authorities because it is about the transference of amounts between local authorities and not about the total amount, as the hon. Gentleman would agree. I made that offer to Birmingham, but in retrospect the council decided that it would not be better.

**Mr. Roy Thomason** (Bromsgrove) *rose—*

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale) *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) has asked me two serious questions with which I wish to deal. I should be grateful if my hon. Friends could wait a minute.

We have been discussing notional amounts for some time. I am sure that the hon. Member for Perry Barr understands that, if one local authority—I cast no aspersions—spends a great deal and has built up a huge debt in the past, and another has been extremely careful and prudent, it would be unfair if the system meant that the first authority, however much it continued to spend, was bound to do better than the prudent authority, irrespective of need. That is why we fix notional amounts. That is the only fair way to cope with that genuine difficulty. We cannot have a situation in which the provident always find themselves at a disadvantage to the improvident.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr said that a local authority had lost some money. That was a curious use of the word "lost", because the authority never had that money. Birmingham council—I shall be direct—has a long record of spending much more money than it is able to finance. It is asking all the other local authorities to pay for that, but that is not fair, and there must be an intervening system.

**Mr. Thomason:** The area of Frankley, to which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) referred, is in my constituency. It is the Frankley estate, not Frankley Beeches.

Hereford and Worcester, the area from which Frankley has now been removed, has been left with no plus factors in the standard spending assessment calculations, except for a small sparsity factor in Herefordshire. The area is not untypical, compared with other authorities.

I do not disagree with my right hon. Friend's proposed figures, but the calculation bears hard on those areas of the country that do not have any deprivation factors which add to the distribution of grant. Those areas are left with relatively small sums, and they feel that they have missed out in the overall distribution.

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Department of the Environment intends to review the formulae and the mechanisms for distribution of grant every year on the basis of the evidence that it receives?

**Mr. Gummer:** My hon. Friend is right. Hon. Members' attitudes, irrespective of party, to the division

of grant are always affected by how it hits their areas. The deprivation factors are important, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would not want us to have a system that did not take deprivation into account.

I will confirm that, every year, we reconsider the system with the local authorities. When my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration sums up, he will describe in detail our next step. We have also agreed to have an independent review of the way in which we deal with some of the extra costs. I will cover that myself.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I have managed so far to read only the titles of the reports and two paragraphs, so I shall continue for a moment before giving way.

As I made clear when announcing the provisional settlement, all public expenditure programmes have to be rigorously examined each year. Local government spending is no exception. Within the objectives for the economy as a whole, I have looked very hard both at the pressures on local government spending and at the scope for greater efficiency and effectiveness within authorities. As in previous years, I am grateful for the practical help that the local authority associations have given in setting out and discussing issues.

I announced on 30 November 1995 a proposed total standard spending—TSS—for England for 1996-97 of £44.92 billion. In the light of consultation, we have now adjusted that figure slightly to reflect developments in the first phase of nursery vouchers and in the balance of police grant between England and Wales. The result is that the final TSS figure for England for 1996-97 will be £44.93 billion.

It is worth remembering just how much money that is. It represents a significant amount of public expenditure, and it cannot be ignored, considering the amount that the Government and local government spend from individuals' pockets. All parties are now committed—at least in words—to the restraint of public expenditure, so that amount has to be considered in the same way as any other major amount. It is, apart from central Government expenditure, the largest part of expenditure.

Local government will, of course, be able to spend more than that, because its spending accounts for a quarter of all public expenditure. Councils can spend above the TSS, up to their capping limits, and can, of course, make use of income from fees and charges and can spend from reserves.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I will give way, but I want to make clear a point that is often not understood outside; sometimes I fear that it is purposely not understood.

First, there is the TSS. As I have said, it is possible to spend more than that, up to the capping limits, by raising more on the council tax. There are other ways in which councils can spend; either from fees or from reserves. So it is always true that, at the end of the year, councils have spent more than the TSS at the beginning of the year. That means that, if we wish to compare like with like, we must compare the year end spending with the following year end spending, or the TSS at the beginning of the year with the TSS at the beginning of the succeeding year.

One cannot compare one set of TSS figures with one set of spending figures. Those of us involved in local government know that, but sometimes that mistake is made. I want to ensure that it does not occur in our discussions, because it shows a lack of understanding of the local government system. I do not want to accuse anybody of that, but sometimes that is the basis for argument.

**Mr. Elliot Morley** (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The Secretary of State is talking about comparisons. What happens with a new unitary authority where making comparisons is difficult? For my new authority of North Lincolnshire, the standard spending assessment will mean cuts across the board—an 8 per cent. cut in education, for example—and a substantial increase in council tax. That authority inherits no balances, and is very much dependent on the standard spending assessment laid down by the Department of the Environment.

The Secretary of State has received delegations from the authority, which made the not unreasonable request for capital borrowing over three years to mitigate the cost of the reorganisation, as well as to help deal with the problems of establishing itself as a new authority. That request has been refused. In those circumstances, does the Secretary of State accept that the education cuts are a direct result of his Department's policy, and have nothing to do with North Lincolnshire, which is a brand new authority with no track record?

**Mr. Gummer:** There are difficulties when one is transferring from an authority such as Humberside, which has a long history of excessive expenditure. It is difficult for one or two such authorities to move to the new structure without carrying something with them. They carry the history of a lack of efficiency in the services taken over. That has disadvantages, but it has an advantage, in that it may be possible to make significant savings in the running costs.

There is a whole range of provisions. One of the reasons for notional amounts rather than historic figures is that they take into account problems such as those raised by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). There is a damping grant should the council tax become excessive.

I am happy to look again at any of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman. The system is designed to help, but I must tell the hon. Gentleman that his circumstances are made worse by the previous management, which was one of the worst in the country—it was recognised as such. Humberside is an unlamented lost county.

**Mr. John Greenway:** May I move my right hon. Friend slightly further north, to deal again with reorganisation? I thank my right hon. Friend, the Ministers and the officials for the helpful way in which they have considered how best to redistribute money in North Yorkshire out of the creation of the new York unitary authority. The county council has done rather better than many of us feared. That must be put on record.

However, is my right hon. Friend aware that we still have a problem with Ryedale district council, which has a notional amount that is almost £750,000 more than the SSA? My right hon. Friend mentioned the use of reserves. Is there any way at this stage in which we could bridge

*[Mr. John Greenway]*

that gap without the whole cost falling on the council tax payers in Ryedale, because the sums that they will have to pay are substantial?

**Mr. Gummer:** My hon. Friend is perfectly right. I would look sympathetically at a request from Ryedale district council to capitalise some of those costs, which would help it considerably. Unfortunately, it has not yet made such a request, and I cannot respond to a request that has not been made. I hope that my hon. Friend will remind the council that it is a perfectly reasonable way to do things—indeed, the way we expect them to be done. If the case can be supported, I shall consider it carefully.

**Mr. William O'Brien** (Normanton): I appreciate being given the opportunity to intervene. Will the right hon. Gentleman take account of the position in my constituency, where deprivation is severe because of the closure of the mining industry and the ancillary works that supplied it?

Wakefield district council has brought in fees and charges over the past five or six years because of the restrictions imposed by the Secretary of State. It cannot simply keep charging local people, who can ill afford to pay because of problems such as unemployment. Will he reconsider the problems, so that we can be allowed to provide the services in education and community care that people demand?

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman knows that I have a reasonable knowledge of Wakefield, and I recognise the problems in the area. I am sure that he will agree that, in recent years, we have given Wakefield and the surrounding area extra help in a number of ways. Of course I will examine the points that he has raised. Although we have reached a conclusion on these matters in a number of areas, I am happy to reconsider, because I recognise the problems to which he referred.

Within the system, a significant amount of money is being diverted because of the factors that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. That is why some areas, such as Wakefield, do better than other areas where the resources and opportunities are greater. I shall consider the particular points that he raised.

**Mr. Richard Tracey** (Surbiton): In my right hon. Friend's introductory remarks, he mentioned his joint responsibility with our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for the police service, but he did not mention the fire service. He is aware that worries have been expressed in various quarters about fire cover for London, and the possibility that the reduction in the fire service's SSA will disadvantage its ability to provide cover.

Will my right hon. Friend give a categorical assurance that fire cover is wholly adequate in London, and that that will in no way be disadvantaged by the reduced SSA?

**Mr. Gummer:** As the Minister with responsibility for London, I naturally consider these matters very carefully. I today responded to a Labour Member who has written to me on the very issue my hon. Friend raised.

The fact is that, next year, the authority's SSA will increase by more than £1 million, to £253.6 million. It will have by far the highest SSA per head of any single-purpose fire authority. London does better than any other single-purpose fire authority. Other areas throughout the country note that London has been given additional resources.

The proposed capping limit would allow the authority to increase its budget by more than £5 million compared with this year, which would take its budget more than 2 per cent. above its SSA. The authority's decisions will be very much in its own hands.

About 22 per cent. of the authority's work force are support staff behind the front-line services, Perhaps it could look for ways to make savings there. Perhaps it could look more closely at some of its accommodation and resources that are not being used. There is a wide range of things that it can do. The money provided to the authority certainly ensures that it can give fire cover. Indeed, it would not be allowed to close any installation without my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary being sure that there is still fire cover.

I reassure my hon. Friend on the matters that he raised by pointing to the facts that the authority has been allocated extra money and that London is specifically advantaged by that provision.

**Mr. Frank Dobson** (Holborn and St. Pancras): Does the Secretary of State accept that the London fire brigade's standard of performance over the past few years has risen substantially? The brigade transferred to computerised call-out with no problems, and changes to its management structure and working practices have made the brigade a credit to London, its management and other employees. That is in marked contrast to the London ambulance service, which fails every national standard, is grotesquely mismanaged, and is run by a quango—unlike the board, which represents people from London boroughs and has been so successful in improving the London fire brigade.

**Mr. Gummer:** I would not have made that comment about the London ambulance service, especially as I—like the hon. Gentleman—depend on it for emergency services. His comments do not characterise the people who work for the ambulance service.

There are evidently two classes of people in society. There are the people whom the hon. Gentleman thinks will not vote for him, so he is rude about them. There are the people from whom the hon. Gentleman thinks that he might get a vote or two, about whom he is always polite. I do not think it right to attack the London ambulance service in a blanket way, as the hon. Gentleman did.

The improvement in the London fire brigade is creditable, but only what one would expect of a properly run organisation. It is doing its job properly, and will continue to do so. If it becomes better and more efficient, it will have more resources to spend on things that really matter, which are front-line fire services.

The TSS figure of £44.93 billion represents an increase of £1.42 billion—3.3 per cent. over the 1995–96 figure. That substantial increase reflects the importance that the Government attach to education and to the care of the vulnerable and elderly. We have provided for a 4.5 per cent. increase in provision for education and 6.9 per cent. for personal social services, including £418 million transitional community care special grant.

When we talk about priorities, we are concerned that the money made available is used for the proper purposes. It concerns me that there are already signs that local authorities, instead of spending money on education, are seeking to use the money for other purposes.

I have a letter from someone who calls himself the "chair" of Hertfordshire county council's education committee. He is Bob Mays, who leads the Labour group for that purpose. Writing to fellow governors, he began his letter, "Dear Comrade". That would have gone down a bit oddly in Hertfordshire, so the complete salutation reads, "Dear Comrade/Colleague". I am interested to know whether "comrade" is old Labour and the "colleague" new Labour, or whether that form of address is to get everybody involved.

**Mr. Dobson:** The right hon. Gentleman would prefer "Dear Sir/Madam".

**Mr. Gummer:** That would be polite, and at least it would not upset the people who received the letter.

I object to the rest of the letter, which shows that, far from extra money being spent on education in Hertfordshire, education will have to make savings. Extra money has been made available, but still savings will have to be made. Much of the money will be used for other purposes.

Local authorities asked to spend more money on education. They said that sufficient money was not made available last time, and that central Government should make sure that it was available this year. We have made additional provision, but Hertfordshire admits that it intends to pinch the money for some other purpose.

**Sir Anthony Grant** (South-West Cambridgeshire): Is there not another factor in the equation? Not only does Hertfordshire seem unable to run its affairs properly, but it benefits from the area cost adjustment, unlike Cambridgeshire just over the border. Although Cambridgeshire is not a particularly efficient Lib-Lab coalition, or whatever it is called, at least it has the excuse of not receiving an area cost adjustment. I hope that my right hon. Friend will refer to that difficulty.

**Mr. Gummer:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on finding yet another way in which to refer to the area cost adjustment. I shall refer to it later, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration will take the point further.

It concerns me that it appears that, all over the country, Labour councils and Liberal-Labour coalitions are taking for granted the figures that their officers give them. They think, "My goodness, we must spend this, that and the other to stay level." They are therefore not accepting that spending is all about priorities. They said that they wanted to spend the money on education, and that they would be responsible in doing so. It will therefore be a real test of whether they say one thing and do another. We shall see.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): Is the Secretary of State aware of the extreme anxiety in Cambridgeshire over his provisional statement that capping in the county would be set at the level of the standard spending assessment? I think that it is only one of two shire counties that have been penalised in such a way.

I should like to quote Mr. Peter Downes, the head teacher of Hinchingbrooke school in the Prime Minister's constituency. The right hon. Gentleman may be aware of the case. Mr. Downes said:

> "We are not very far off melt-down—we are getting to the point where there is extreme anxiety whether we can actually keep children in school for the full time."

I am worried about that, and I hope that the Secretary of State is also prepared to express his concern.

**Mr. Gummer:** The message that the hon. Lady must take back to her area is that Cambridgeshire has the resources to improve its education. If it does not spend them on education, it will be because the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party have misused the money. I understand how difficult it is for her. I would not like to be shackled to the Liberal Democrats. None the less, she is, she chose to be, and she will therefore suffer as a result. Authorities worse run than those run by the Liberal Democrats are difficult to find. I know how hard it is, but all she has to do is give them up. They are not worth associating with.

**Sir Peter Emery** (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend consider Devon county council, which is a prime illustration of the terrifying behaviour of Liberal Democrat county councils? It is being given £17.5 million extra, yet in its provisional budget it is allocating only £1.5 million to schools. The rest will be gobbled up by the county council. Is that not disgraceful?

**Mr. Gummer:** It is not only disgraceful but contrary to what I understand to be Liberal Democrat policy, although I know that that is difficult to define. Although the Liberal Democrats have said that their prime priority is education, they are not planning to use the extra money to fund it. They are planning to use it for a range of other things.

I do not yet know what Suffolk will do, because, like most other Lib-Lab pacts, it has been very careful not to tell anybody in case the schools notice too quickly. I understand that, although it has an allowance of £11.5 million, which it could spend on education, it is planning to spend only £8.4 million on education. I suppose that the rest will go on yet more road signs, since that is the main interest of my local council.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster): As my right hon. Friend knows, Lancashire is a very unpopular county council, and it does not devote anything like as much as it should to education. Unfortunately, although it has received much more money to spend on education this year, it is not spending it on education. Worse than that, money within its education budget does not even go to schools; it goes to staff at county hall.

**Mr. Gummer:** My hon. Friend makes a fair point, which no doubt she will want to take up with every school in her constituency and in Lancashire as a whole.

Lancashire appears to have a great deal of money to spend on lawsuits. I wonder whether it should spend some of that money on education, rather than on its continual attempts to use the law courts to implement policies that have not been accepted by the generality of the people.

**Sir Irvine Patnick** (Sheffield, Hallam) *rose—*

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I give way to my hon. Friend, and then I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that, once again, Sheffield states that it will spend more than its standard spending assessment on education, and claims that its 2.1 per cent. is lower than those of the other three districts in South Yorkshire and much lower than metropolitan councils?

**Mr. Gummer:** I am aware of that, but, on a list of councils, one is bound to be lower than others. I try to apply these objective criteria—*[Interruption.]* The Association of District Councils agrees that they are objective. The methodology is agreed with all three Labour-controlled councils.

County councils would like to place more emphasis on one part of the methodology than district councils, because they do better out of it. District councils would like another shift, whereas metropolitan councils or the London boroughs would like a different one. That is perfectly reasonable.

The only people who disagree are Opposition Front Benchers, and I think that only one of them does so. That Opposition spokesman does not understand the system, which is why he finds it so difficult to accept—*[Interruption.]* I shall just have a word with the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), who has not been responsible for this subject for very long. I remind her that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr Dobson) is always—*[Interruption.]* I would like her to listen, because I always thought that she was fair-minded, but she has obviously joined the giggling fraternity.

Westminster city council did very much better under the system that applied when Labour was in power than it does under the present objective system. Labour's system was devised by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who used, with considerably greater power, to perform the job that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras now does.

We accept that the system is objective. Sheffield has rather less than others only because the measurement of its need has been lower than that of its neighbours. If only Sheffield was not saddled with the debts that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) and his predecessor, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), landed it with, it would be able to spend its money on other matters; but despite that, Labour Members tell us how we should run national finances.

**Mr. Clapham:** The Secretary of State said that the TSS figure of £44.923 is a 3.3 per cent. increase. He will be aware, however, that, when that is deducted from the cost of local government reorganisation, community care and the police, it falls to 2 per cent. As the Government's forecast for inflation is 2.75 per cent. for next year, that works out as a decrease of 0.75 per cent.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that we certainly expect some savings to be made—the idea that they cannot be made is largely a Liberal one. I visited Liberal-controlled Richmond, which said that it had already made enormous savings and challenged me to see whether I could find further savings. The Liberal leader of Richmond council gave me an exhibition of slides on the wall. The first one was designed to show the enormous savings that it had made. In fact, it showed that, year on year, it had made budget increases—the savings were not there at all. When I asked him what he defined as savings, he said, "Not doing something that we used to do." Then they take the money and spend it somewhere else—and that is counted as a saving. The slides designed to show how the council had cut, cut and cut again, showed instead how it had spent, spent and spent again.

When I went through the savings that could be made, it turned out that the council had not even considered the possibility of collecting the rubbish from front doors rather than back doors, or of going out to private contract in many areas in which it was not forced to do so. It had not even looked at a whole range of mechanisms whereby expenditure could be reduced.

The authority really needed to consider those savings, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) has said, it has a real problem, in that it has entered into a very long-term contract for waste disposal, giving it less flexibility there. I only wish that it had found the flexibility elsewhere, instead of saying that it had got everything right and tickety-boo. Even Ealing, unlike Richmond, has discovered some of those savings. That man had been in power in the authority for 13 years, yet he had failed to find even those fundamental and simple mechanisms.

During our discussions with local authorities, we have agreed to add to the figures that I have mentioned additional funds that they will receive through a special grant to offset the income lost through changes to capital disregards for community care provision. The arrangements for that special grant will be laid before the House in due course.

**Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I must continue for a while.

As part of the consultation exercise, we asked local authorities for their views on the need to address, through a special grant rather than through SSAs and RSG, the localised pressure on a few authorities' social services budgets arising from the provision of care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The hon. Member for North-West Durham should pay attention; I am sure that she would like to know about unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Such children will need particular help in certain areas, so we accepted the strong representations making a case for a special grant, and the fact that no one wanted the money to be paid through the RSG. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will therefore lay before the House in due course a special grant report for that purpose. The grant will be cash-limited to £3 million in 1996-97, and will provide a better distribution to meet the needs of the authorities concerned than would have been possible within the RSG. The resources remain within TSS.

The total of aggregate external finance—AEF—for England will be £35.65 billion. The revenue support grant element of that total will be £18.02 billion. That is slightly

higher than the figure announced in the provisional settlement, as a result of changes to police grant, and the changes in total standard spending and RSG that I mentioned earlier.

The increase in AEF over 1995-96 is 2.8 per cent.—less than the increase in TSS—because we take the view, which I believe the Opposition share, that council tax payers should properly fund a slightly larger proportion of the costs of their local services. But the level of council tax is a decision for each authority, and will depend upon the level of service that it chooses to provide, the improvements that it can make to efficiency and effectiveness, and how well it collects what it is owed. When the taxes are set, local people will be in a position to judge the performance of their councils.

Before all that was set up, I received many requests for a relaxation in the capping limits. I was told that, if that happened, great responsibility would be shown, which would prove to us that all such limits are unnecessary. Authority after authority told me that it would be extremely responsible.

However, I am afraid that, immediately the limits were announced, the leader of the metropolitan authorities went on the radio to say that councils would use the whole lot up—no question. I hope that local councils recognise what that means. If it happens, no Government will have any alternative but to keep that very large amount of Government spending within controls. That is a particularly disappointing attitude, and I hope that it will not be copied throughout the country.

**Mr. Burden:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Ms Joan Walley** (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** In a moment.

We have listened to the case put to us for more resources for education and social services, and we have allowed more. We were told that these were the top priorities, and there was something of an orchestrated campaign to that effect. There is some sign, however, that that will not be the case, and it is unlikely that education and social services will be the priorities that we know they should be in some authorities. The Government and local people must look carefully at whether the money ends up in the schools—and not education generally—because that is where people believe the money ought to go.

**Sir Dudley Smith** (Warwick and Leamington): My right hon. Friend has mentioned a huge amount of money today that is part of the settlement. Does he agree that all local authorities throughout the country should, more or less, try to match their spending with the level of inflation? If they did that, they would be able to regulate their affairs much better. That is a lesson that could be learnt by the Labour and Liberal Democrat councils up and down the country, including the teacher-led Warwickshire county council. They cannot spend more money than is available, but there is more than enough money available.

**Mr. Gummer:** One can go further, and say that, unless there is an inflationary society, no business can possibly proceed by spending more on overheads and putting up the price of its goods every year.

In a society where inflation is under control or is falling, local authorities must do better than match inflation. They must find ways in which they can provide the same services while getting better value for money. If they do not do so, they are not helping people to get jobs, they are not helping the nation to become more wealthy, and they are not helping businesses to expand. Local authorities must do that as part of their economic regeneration contribution. We must press county councils such as Warwickshire to take that step.

I shall be happy to place in the Library a letter that I received from Hertfordshire, which starts off by stating that inflation does not count with that authority because its rate of inflation is higher than the national rate, so inflation is bound to be higher there. I believe that no local authority should approach the job in that way.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall give way in a moment.

It is necessary for parents, school governors and those concerned with care in the community to insist that their share of the extra available resources comes to them. It will be necessary, therefore, to make savings elsewhere, and to continue to improve efficiency.

Here, I must point out to the House that the idea that one ever finishes making oneself more efficient or finding new ways of getting better value is totally foreign to every organisation outside the public service. We all know that councils must find new ways of making the money go further every year if they wish to take on other responsibilities or improve some of the services they provide.

I should like to refer to the distribution of grant.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I should like to move on, and then I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

We have worked closely with the local authority associations to achieve a distribution methodology that is simple enough to be understood, robust enough to be able to cope with the changes, and complex enough to reflect the real differences in need. Local government knows, and the Government know, that we can never iron out every local wrinkle, but the system is open to scrutiny, and it is clearly objective.

I know that councillors and hon. Members are concerned about the resources of their local authorities, and I must stress that the Government do not look with favour or disfavour upon any individual authority, as the system makes that absolutely impossible. The previous system allowed one to do that, but now the Government can only alter the distribution by classes of authority, and not by individual ones.

**Mr. Burden:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I will give way to my hon. Friend, and then later to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** Does my right hon. Friend recall that he gave the Liberal-dominated Gloucestershire

*[Mr. Clifton-Brown]*

county council one of the highest increases in education SSA—some 5.3 per cent., amounting to more than £9 million? Was not the council's immediate response that it needed £24 million to spend this year? Does my right hon. Friend recall that Gloucester cut the individual school budgets last year by between 4 and 7 per cent.? Will it not be a disgrace if the bulk of that money this year does not go to the individual school budgets?

**Mr. Gummer:** It would be a disgrace, but then it is always difficult to know what a Liberal Democrat council will do, because there is no connection between what such councils say in public and what they actually do.

I am aware that that embarrasses the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who no doubt will speak later. I note, however, that not many Liberals are present to stand up for their county councils. I think that that is because they know just how bad Liberal Democrat-dominated councils are, and how few of them plan to hand the money on to schools. We shall watch them very carefully, and, if they do not hand the money on, we shall know that their words and their deeds do not coincide.

**Mr. Burden:** I listened with interest to the Secretary of State's reports of his discussions with various local authorities, including Birmingham city council. I was particularly interested in the issue of Frankley, and the right hon. Gentleman's statement that the city council had accepted that the deprivation indices used for Hereford and Worcester were appropriate for that area.

Further investigations have been made in the light of the right hon. Gentleman's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). It is clear that Birmingham still objects to the use of those indices for an inner-city area of Birmingham that suffers from extreme deprivation and high unemployment, and has many needs. May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to return to the answer that he gave my hon. Friend, and reconsider the issue of Frankley? If he does not, Birmingham will probably be short by about £1.5 million, the capping limit will be wrong, and the people who will suffer are the people of Frankley.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. Birmingham city council wanted to discuss two issues relating to Frankley. It wanted us to treat primary and secondary school children differently, and, in that connection, presented me with a figure for the large loss that it expected to make. When we examined the position in more detail, however, the council agreed that the action that it had proposed would not result in the savings that it had identified. It acknowledged that, in that instance, the methodology did not have the effect that it had assumed it to have.

More generally, the council wanted a complete change in the system, to overcome the difficulty encountered when we move from one year to another at a time of boundary changes. One area has to be moved into another, as it were. To do that, we would have to change the method that we have agreed with the local authority associations. We cannot act unilaterally, because that would be wholly contrary to the way we operate. We have told Birmingham city council that, if the local authority associations felt that there was a better way of dealing with the matter, we would adopt it if we possibly could; but the local authorities feel that difficulties are involved in moving at such speed.

This is not a matter on which the Government should act unilaterally. Like previous Governments—I claim no particular credit for it—we have acted after lengthy negotiations with local authorities. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) should address his question to other local authorities, and, if they support the methodology, we can make progress. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North-West Durham can moan as much as she likes, but that is not only my view; it is shared by many Labour local authorities, as she will gradually come to realise.

**Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe) *rose—*

**Mr. Toby Jessel** (Twickenham) *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** No, I will not give way. I wish to continue my speech.

We pay heed to local government in considering possible changes in the various methodologies. Most of this year's proposed changes flowed from suggestions from those in local government. They encouraged us to make distinct provision for rent allowances and for levies of the national parks; they asked us to look again at the way in which we reflect special educational needs and support services, following the ending of recoupment last year; and they asked us to look again at the pensions element in the formula relating to the police.

We have responded to those representations, and also to the concern expressed in many areas outside the south-east about the area cost adjustment. The review that we set up, chaired by Professor Elliott of the university of Aberdeen, has already begun discussions with local government. Tenders have been invited for research specified by the review team. We have asked the team to report by June.

**Sir Peter Hordern** (Horsham): Reverting to education, what does my right hon. Friend think of the conduct of the Liberal Democrat-controlled West Sussex county council, which wrote to the governors of every school in West Sussex, long before the revenue support grant settlement had been announced, telling them that their spending would have to be cut by £25 million in the next two years? It did so without any evidence. When the settlement was announced, it was found to be far more favourable than it had predicted, but it made no apology, nor has it approached any of the schools to tell them about the improvement that the Government announced in the revenue support grant, which should go straight to the schools.

**Mr. Gummer:** The only thing I have to say about West Sussex Liberal-controlled council is that it did not undertake much independent research on the matter, but merely took the whip from Liberal-controlled councils throughout the country. There was nothing special about that. A deal was done that they would frighten parents and governors in advance by writing such a letter without any basis.

They did so early enough for a basis not to have been possible. Often, they used examples of how many teachers might have to go, how many books could not be bought and what would be the effect of cuts of 5 per cent. in each school. Stereotype letters were sent to Members of Parliament. They were handed out to Liberal Democrat activists and to some Labour people—happily, some of the latter felt that the letters were a little extreme, even for them.

I have heard of no example of a Liberal Democrat-controlled council that has since written to the governors to say, "We are sorry there was undue alarm. The figures are as follows, and we are hoping to passport this through to you as rapidly as possible, and that you will be able to use it effectively." I will happily give way to the hon. Member for Newbury, if he can cite a single case in which Liberals have apologised for the letter that was sent out, or for the letters that went out from Labour councils.

**Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): Perhaps the Secretary of State would like to tell me how many of those authorities are already spending more than the Government now say they should spend.

**Mr. Gummer:** The interesting thing is that the hon. Gentleman does not explain that any of those authorities has written to apologise. They all said that there would be large cuts. That will not take place, unless the Liberal authorities do not pass on the money that is now available to them.

**Mr. Jessel:** On the subject of spending by Liberal Democrat-controlled councils, when my right hon. Friend visited Richmond on Thames and was shown the slides about which he was kind enough to tell us, did he notice a rather small, new town hall called a civic centre—the building is rather small for a town hall—on which the Liberal-controlled council spent no less than £12 million, as it is of extremely extravagant design? The people of the borough are still paying the hire purchase on that, which is one reason why, in the last council elections in the London boroughs in May 1994, the Liberals lost four seats to the Conservatives in Twickenham.

**Mr. Gummer:** I was surprised at some of the things that were included in the slides. Now, I am even more surprised about some that were excluded. Although no doubt the Liberal-controlled council is proud of its new town hall or civic centre, it did not feature. No photograph was included, nor was there any reference to the cost. Indeed, it was not mentioned during the discussion. No doubt my hon. Friend would like to give me further information, so that I can ask for a few more particulars.

**Mr. Betts:** The Secretary of State has attacked virtually every Labour or Liberal council in the country. How does he respond to the chairman of a council policy and resources committee who told the Government:

"we found that government spending restrictions were forcing us into cuts that would damage services to the people"?

He wanted another £2 million to spend on education. On top of the cuts, it seems that that council will have to increase council tax by up to 9 per cent. to make up the shortfall in Government grants. That was the chair of the policy and resources committee of Buckinghamshire county council, one of the few—endangered—Tory county councils left.

**Mr. Gummer:** No council can escape the need to make savings and run itself efficiently. The money that has been provided for Buckinghamshire, as for the rest of the country, is consonant both with its needs and with what the country can afford. There is no other way. *[Interruption.]* I am even-handed, unlike the hon. Gentleman, in what I say, whatever party is involved.

Local government has received a significant increase in the money that is available. That money needs to be spent on education rather than elsewhere. The hon. Member for Attercliffe is almost the last person in the House to lecture anybody on running local authorities. His local authority is an example of appalling local government. He was in charge of a local authority that could not teach anybody anything about running authorities except how to run up debts. He must not address the House as if he knows anything about the matter.

During the consultation period, we have received representations from authorities about our proposals, and have considered them carefully. We have responded to many of the representations about the data that we propose to use in the calculation of SSAs. Some of those representations brought to light the need for amendments, and in those cases, we have been able to make corrections. We shall continue to discuss SSA methodology with the local authority associations.

I said in November that I would continue to pay a special grant to compensate authorities that have lost more than 2 per cent. of SSA as a result of methodology changes for 1996-97 or from 1994-95 and the incorporation of 1991 census data. That is a fair arrangement that recognises the special problem of a sudden drop in SSA, while also recognising the need to phase out such support, so that grant can be redistributed elsewhere. The Special Grant Report (No. 16) will establish that grant for 1996-97, and some £128 million will be distributed to local authorities in that year.

I announced a scheme last November to damp unacceptable increases in council taxes directly attributable to local government reorganisation—a point that was raised earlier. I do not propose any changes to the scheme, which will apply to areas where the direct council tax effect of reorganisation exceeds £104 in band D. Taxpayers in North Lincolnshire will therefore benefit from a grant of about £2.18 million. I shall lay regulations to implement the scheme before the House in a few days.

The capping of local authority budgets is the means by which Government ensure that local authorities play their part in controlling public expenditure. I set out in my statement in November the capping criteria that I had in mind to apply for the coming year. I have now considered carefully the representations made by authorities, and I wish to reaffirm that I still intend my original criteria to apply. A table of provisional cap limits based on those criteria will be available in the Vote Office after I sit down.

Capping is an essential tool for retaining effective control on overall spending. It is an open secret that I would like to be as free as possible with capping, but the reactions of local authorities so far make that stance difficult to maintain. We shall consider carefully how to deal with that.

*[Mr. Gummer]*

The capping criteria are necessarily provisional.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No, I must finish.

I cannot take my decisions on capping until authorities have set their budgets for 1996-97. When I come to take those decisions, I shall of course take into account all relevant considerations, to ensure that any cap set for an authority will be reasonable, achievable and appropriate. The House will, of course, have an opportunity to debate any orders that cap individual authority budgets.

I am also specifying a base budget in the relevant notional amounts report for authorities that are being reorganised or are subject to a boundary change. That will allow me to make a fair comparison between years for capping purposes.

I now turn to other aspects of local authority finance. Hon. Members will recall that I told the House in November that the Government wished to build on the successes we have already had with challenge funding of local authority spending. In particular, we want to explore whether that approach offers a better and more efficient way of funding authorities' capital expenditure and attracting private capital to supplement public money.

In my November statement, I promised that we would publish a discussion document on taking forward challenge funding in the near future. I am pleased to tell the House that, yesterday, my Department sent a consultation paper on this subject to English local authorities. This outlines proposals for a capital challenge fund that would provide support for the best capital spending proposals submitted by local authorities. We propose that our ideas be tested—

**Mr. Betts:** That is local authority money.

**Mr. Gummer:** It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman says that it is local authority money. It is the taxpayers' and the people's money. The proposals would bring in more private money, so that, for every pound that the local authority spends, at least £1, and probably £2 or £3, more will be brought in.

The Labour party thinks of only one stakeholder—the local authority stakeholder: it is not the people's money, it is local authorities' money. They say "our money" like they say "our schools". They mean that they are longing to get their fingers on what they think is their money. That money is earned by men and women, who want to make sure that every penny is spent properly. If we can get an extra pound from the private sector, we can provide something much better. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North-West Durham ought to know that.

That shows what is different about Labour. It wants to talk in modern terms, but has the same atavistic view of everything that happens. Labour Members say, "It's our money, and we are going to spend it. We don't care about partnership when it comes to getting more money for the things that really matter."

That is why the outline proposals for the capital challenge fund will enable us to have a better system, which will ensure that the money goes not only where it is needed but where the schemes to meet those needs are the best, and where they can bring in more money from outside, so that what can be done can be better done. We propose that our ideas be tested by a pilot scheme that will be run in the 1997-98 financial year.

The scheme that we propose would give local authorities a clear lead in deciding on local priorities for capital spending. The best, most imaginative, authorities will be given an incentive to work with local people and businesses to create and implement a local strategy for investment. That would target resources at the areas where they can do most good.

Consultation on those ideas finishes in mid-March. I anticipate announcing our conclusions and the next steps shortly after that. In the meantime, I look forward to a positive and constructive response to the consultation paper because it will mean more money for the very capital projects that all of us want—those that are best fitted to the needs of the people.

I have dealt with the main issues that are covered by the four reports before the House. This year's settlement will help local authorities meet the needs of their citizens in education and other key service areas, but authorities will need to continue to get better value for every pound they spend. They will be watched most carefully by the public to see what their priorities are and whether they are spending that money on the things they said the public most wanted. I commend the settlement to the House.

5.7 pm

**Mr. Frank Dobson** (Holborn and St. Pancras): The central message from today's debate is that, in the coming year, council tax payers will end up paying more and getting less. As happened last year, there may be a few parts of the country where the council tax does not rise or where services to local people are not reduced, but in most places the council tax will go up and services will come down; local people will have to pay more, and will get less.

Last year, our initial estimate was that the council tax would go up by about 6 per cent. The average turned out to be 5.2 per cent. but before the Secretary of State starts crowing in one of his mini-raves, I remind him that the council tax increase in his constituency was exactly as I had predicted, 6 per cent; in the Prime Minister's constituency it was 8.5 per cent; and in the Deputy Prime Minister's it was 7 per cent.

This year, on the basis of the Government's original statement, we predicted similar increases. It now seems that, even according to the Government, the average increase may be quite a bit higher. When the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave evidence to the Treasury Select Committee, he let the cat out of the bag. He admitted that the Treasury was working on the assumption that the average council tax rise would be 8 per cent., showing that I was guilty of the serious political offence of failing to exaggerate.

If the average council tax rise is 8 per cent., that will cost council tax payers some £780 million. That is equivalent to adding about half a penny to the standard income tax rate. If the Chief Secretary is right, therefore, the Government's promised 1p reduction in the standard rate will be immediately halved in value by the council tax increase. That is a perfect example of the Government giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

it does not stop there. Budget documents show that the Government expect council tax payers over the next three years to cough up an extra £3.5 billion, equal to almost 2p on the standard rate of income tax. That was recently confirmed by the head of local government finance at the Department of the Environment, who said that the Government were aiming to increase the council tax payers' contribution to council expenditure from 21 per cent. to 26 per cent. He added:

"That represents a view by Ministers that the council tax can take more of the strain of paying for local services."

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** Let me finish the quotation. The official said:

"It is not a huge change, but nevertheless it is a trend that present Ministers want to see. The downside is that your taxes go up quite sharply".

**Mr. Pickles:** Is the hon. Gentleman familiar with the publication "Renewing Democracy: Rebuilding Communities", which advocates on page 18 that local democracy would be more responsible if a much higher proportion of money to be invested and spent was raised locally? It appears therefore that the Labour party is proposing exactly what he is condemning the Government for.

**Mr. Dobson:** As I wrote every word of that document, I am quite familiar with it and it does not mean anything that the hon. Gentleman thinks that it does. The Labour party is saying that, for a start, it would return the business rate—which the Government nationalised, just as they nationalised the water industry—to local control. If he is so concerned about tax rates, he should remember that, if his local authority received from the settlement the same amount of help to provide local services as Westminster city council, rather than paying council tax, people would receive a £489 rebate this year. If Essex county council received the same amount of help per pupil as Westminster council, it would be able to take on 5,350 extra teachers.

**Mr. Gummer:** As the hon. Gentleman feels that the Government are not giving enough money to local authorities, will he tell us how much more a Labour Government would have given, and how much more of taxpayers' money it would give to local authorities? We want to know how.

**Mr. Dobson:** The Secretary of State took one hour and two minutes to try to tell us his settlement is. We are now going to question it—that is what we are here for today. The settlement that I am talking about is part of that process. *[Interruption.]* The object of the debate is to consider the Government's proposed settlement and to find out whether it is adequate. As I always say to the Secretary of State, come the general election, we shall make things clear. We shall not make any promises, as the Tories did at the last election, when they said they would reduce tax and then put it up. We shall not make promises to protect people with mortgages and then take that protection away. We shall make sensible, careful promises. When we go into the general election, people will know what we shall do, and when we win, we shall do it.

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry):** The hon. Gentleman has said that he will return the business rate to local communities. That must mean that some will win. Those with a large business infrastructure will presumably gain; others will lose. In places such as Liverpool, where will the strain be taken: on the council tax or on increased Government grant? How will he deal with that redistribution problem?

**Mr. Dobson:** As the hon. Gentleman knows—so he should not be getting up and asking daft questions—when the business rate was in the hands of local councils, various schemes existed to equalise it between different regions. Those schemes, or fairer variations on them, would obviously be necessary. He, too, is one of the authors of the settlement. If he ensured that the local council that he represents—Craven district council—received from the settlement the same amount of help per head of population as Westminster city council, his council would not need to levy any council tax. It would be able to pay a £528 rebate to everyone. He then asks me about the consequences of our promises.

**Mr. Gummer:** I should genuinely like to help the hon. Gentleman. Does he accept that his comments on the settlement would be a great deal more credible if he told us his alternative to our proposal? Does he not understand that, by merely saying that sometime, some place, somewhere, he might tell us, he removes his right to make any comment about the settlement? Therefore, I ask him again: what would he do?

**Mr. Dobson:** The Secretary of State has taken the best part—no, the worst part—of an hour and a bit to try and explain his position, and we are going to analyse what he said and what is in the settlement. If he does not like it, he will just have to lump it. After all, he receives a Secretary of State's salary and a chauffeur-driven car for the privilege of listening to us. I might add that he is responsible for the settlement and that, if his local council, Suffolk Coastal, received from the settlement as much help per head of population as Westminster council, his electors would receive a rebate of £591. If Suffolk county council received the same help per pupil as Westminster council from the settlement, it would be able to take on an extra 2,700 teachers without increasing the council tax.

This year's local government spending level set by the Government does not make full allowance for inflation and for pay increases, such as those needed to attract teachers to inner-city schools. Nor does it allow fully for the cost of educating an estimated 86,000 more schoolchildren; extra contributions that are needed for pensions, police and firefighters; and meeting the costs of new laws on the environment and, rightly, requiring the installation of seat belts on school transport—a measure for which my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) worked so hard and successfully.

The spending level does not meet the cost of local councils having to pay to central Government the landfill tax, which will cost them more than £70 million. Nor does

*[Mr. Dobson]*

it meet adequately the cost of meeting other environmental requirements that have been placed on local councils.

The level that the Government have set for the coming year is £1 billion lower than the amount councils are spending this year, before taking into account inflation. The Government assume that councils will make up the difference partly by using their balances and their reserves, but many councils have been drawing down heavily on balances for some years. In some cases—for example, Hounslow, Newcastle, Tower Hamlets and the Merseyside police authority—the district auditor has warned that their balances are too low. Councillors there and in many other places will be faced with the dilemma of cutting services or facing the wrath of the auditor and possibly the courts.

In his Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave the impression that the Government were increasing their grant for education over and above the amount councils were already spending on schools. That misleading impression has been repeated by other Ministers, including the Prime Minister, and Tory Members have written to school governors and head teachers in an effort to give even wider currency to that myth.

Local education authorities would like nothing better than to have more money to spend on schools. That is why, between them, they are already spending more on schools this year than the Government target for their spending on schools next year. Local council education spending on schools this year is £872 million higher than the Government's target for their spending. If those authorities were to spend next year the amount that the Government want them to spend, their spending on schools would not increase. They would have to cut it by a figure that works out at a reduction of £40 per pupil—so much for the extra money that is available for education.

Publicly, the Government speak about increasing spending on schools—while Tory Members of Parliament write letters to school governors—while furtively setting targets that are lower than current spending. That might be described as saying one thing and doing another.

Local education authorities will do their best to meet the hopes of parents and the expectations that the Government have falsely raised, but it will not be cost-free. Extra spending must come from somewhere. It is likely to result in cuts in other services for children; in price increases for school meals, for meals on wheels and for home helps; and in cuts or price increases for services for elderly and handicapped people, such as those who use day centres or luncheon clubs.

Education authorities must cope with the needs of an extra 86,000 schoolchildren, with the cost of installing seat belts and with the need to provide more money for children with special educational needs.

In many parts of the country, another vital service will be placed in difficulty as a result of the settlement—the fire service. That service is under pressure. Cuts have been made in services almost everywhere, but especially in London and the other metropolitan areas, where fire brigades are run by separate authorities. Those are under even greater pressure. Cuts will be made of more than £4 million in the West Midlands brigade, £2 million in the Tyne and Wear brigade and more than £9 million in the London fire brigade.

For years, those fire brigades have been cutting staff and postponing the renewal and updating of equipment; now they are expected to do it again. They also have difficulty in funding pensions, which take an increasing share of their budget. The trend cannot continue without weakening the service to the public and endangering firefighters by reducing the number of firefighters available to fight each fire and allowing equipment to deteriorate.

In London, the process may lead to the closure of four fire stations, the reduction of 22 fire engines at other fire stations and massive cuts in control room staff. The response times of fire brigades throughout the country may be lengthened—surely something that no one could seriously contemplate, but that the Government apparently do.

Special problems have arisen this year for some of the less urban new unitary authorities that have resulted from the break-up of the counties of Cleveland, Avon and Humberside. Higher-than-average increases in council tax may be needed to maintain anything resembling the present service. That refers to those unitary councils that have already been established, and that take over the running of services this year.

Equally significantly, the settlement fails to provide money to meet the costs of the change to unitary status by the new unitary districts approved by the Secretary of State or recently recommended for that status by the Local Government Commission. Failure to push through those changes in time for elections to the new authorities in May 1996 will increase the costs and uncertainties of staff and of people living in the area. Such delays will almost certainly lead to council tax increases and to cuts in services in years to come, which might have been avoided by finding the extra money now.

**Mr. Pickles:** The hon. Gentleman's colleagues in local government, Labour leaders of councils, have suggested that the settlement is inadequate to the tune of £3 billion. Does the hon. Gentleman endorse that figure?

**Mr. Dobson:** I do not endorse anyone's numbers but my own, and the hon. Gentleman is not getting one from me. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I explained that earlier. In case the Conservative simpletons did not notice, that was what one of my earlier responses meant.

**Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): My hon. Friend mentioned the move towards unitary authorities. Have not some orders yet to be laid, and do not shadow authorities that should start in May 1997 need elections in May 1996? Is there not a suspicion that the Government are cherry picking which orders will come through? Why has no commitment been made that the order in respect of Nottingham will be laid before the end of February?

**Mr. Dobson:** In fairness to the Secretary of State—it strains my good nature—I should point out that Nottingham was held back because the newly reconstituted Local Government Commission was considering the proposed unitary status of other districts in Nottinghamshire, so it was considered reasonable to hold Nottingham back until that issue had been resolved.

As the commission has recommended that there should be no further unitary districts in Nottinghamshire, however, Nottinghamshire should go ahead, as should

Devon, where both Torbay and Plymouth have long been recommended and no further additions are proposed, along with Leicester and Rutland, to which the Minister has already made a commitment. I hope that he will respond to that, but not necessarily today.

The way in which the central Government grant is allocated is as important as its overall size. The Government claim that the allocation is the inexorable product of impeccably objective criteria. That claim is plainly false; no one believes it. The allocation of grant is a racket, designed to secure the Government's political objectives. I have no objection to a Government trying to secure their political objectives; I simply wish that they would accept that that is what they are doing.

One of the basic building bricks of the grant system is the Government's assessment of deprivation, which is not made independently but is carried out by officials at the direction of Ministers. It is a racket that favours a few areas at the expense of most others. Nothing better demonstrates the scale and nature of that racket than the Government's treatment of Westminster city council.

According to the Government's fantasy finance, Westminster is the fourth most deprived place in Britain, while Barnsley, after a score of pit closures, lurks in 313th place. According to the Government, only three places in England are worse off than Westminster—Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Islington. Everywhere else in England is less deprived than Westminster.

As the Duke of Wellington said:

"If you believe that you will believe anything."

**Mr. Gummer:** If that is wrong, why did Westminster do better comparatively when the Labour party was in power, when it was seen to be more deprived proportionately than many of the places that the hon. Gentleman mentioned? Why did it do better when the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) did the figures than it does now, when they are calculated objectively?

**Mr. Dobson:** If the Secretary of State inquires, he may find that the council tax—or, as it was then, the domestic rates—in Westminster was roughly comparable with those everywhere else. Westminster's council tax payers are now being subsidised by those everywhere else. He knows it; everyone knows it. It was the object of the exercise.

That was why, when the poll tax was being introduced, Lady Porter said in a memorandum that the man who is now the Secretary of State was more acutely tuned into the political consequences of the original proposal for the share-out, because it would have hammered Westminster and Labour authorities in London would have done better. He knows that it is political and always has been.

**Mr. Curry:** I should like to help the hon. Gentleman with his analysis. The last Labour Government, as my right hon. Friend said, was more generous to Westminster, and that was on the basis of a needs analysis. Westminster's need per head was 486 compared with 327 for Liverpool—a difference of 49 per cent. In 1996-97, the SSA paid in Westminster will be £1,265, and that for Liverpool will be £944—a difference of 34 per cent. On the needs analysis, the Labour party gave greater support to Westminster than the present Government do.

**Mr. Dobson:** Will the—

**Mr. Gummer:** Come on, answer.

**Mr. Dobson:** This week, we have had to put up with three amazingly lengthy performances by the Secretary of State and, if he does not mind, I wish to make my speech in my own way and give my answers in my own way. If the Minister of State, who rushes to the aid of the Secretary of State, wants to give the full picture, will he tell us what the rates were in Liverpool, Westminster and the other areas? The sole object of that exercise has been, and is now, keeping down the poll tax and then the council tax in Westminster.

I admit that there are deprived parts of Westminster, such as the ones where Westminster city council housed homeless families in asbestos-ridden blocks of flats. That is not half the story. The Westminster protection racket does not stop there. Massive benefits flow to Westminster from the way in which the grant system treats visitors. For grant purposes, the Government deem that Westminster's resident population increases by 81 per cent., the residents being augmented by commuters and other day and overnight visitors. So Westminster receives more money to meet the needs of those visitors.

Those same visitors add not only to Westminster's costs but to Westminster's income, in particular through parking charges. The income from parking charges is in excess of £20 million a year, which is more than about half the district councils in this country have available to spend in a year. That £20 million excess is not offset against the extra grant for visitors. It is added to it. Westminster receives the extra grant and the income from parking charges. That allowance-for-visitors fiddle does not end there—it becomes even more amazing.

For grant purposes, the Government assume that the visitors to Westminster, like the residents of Westminster, are also the fourth most deprived people in Britain. So, for example, 12 per cent. of the people staying at the Ritz or Savoy hotels tonight will be deemed to be severely overcrowded, thus qualifying Westminster for extra grant. That is the truth of it. All that of course makes no allowance for the £7 million that Westminster received in the past for spending on flood defences, which were never built, or for the £2 million that it received towards the cost of the English National Opera—£2 million that the opera company never received.

It is no good the Secretary of State trying to deny it. The chief executive of Westminster city council accepts that it is true. In an internal memorandum, he said:

"We are vulnerable to the criticism that we receive double compensation for these costs; firstly, via the SSA formulae and secondly, via the generation of parking income . . . Although the use of this is restricted by law, we are able to contribute some £20 million per annum towards our budget requirements (eg off-street parking, highways, street lighting and concessionary fares for the elderly and the disabled). This contribution is equivalent to a Council Tax of £197."

**Ms Walley:** Some months ago, 14 people from Staffordshire came down to Westminster as visitors to lobby the Secretary of State for Education and

*[Ms Walley]*

Employment for more money in the standard spending assessment for Staffordshire, so that we could have extra teachers in our classrooms. Those people looked with envy at the buildings in Westminster. They also looked with envy at the extra 4,800 teachers available for pupils in Westminster—at the expense of teachers in Staffordshire.

**Mr. Dobson:** The awful thought for my hon. Friend is that, if those visitors came down by road, they almost certainly contributed to increasing Westminster council's funds. One of the great ironies is that, every time people come by road to lobby the Secretary of State, they help to make the racket an even bigger one.

To be fair, the special help for Tory areas does not begin and end with Westminster city council. Depending on how they are defined, there are only 13 or 14 Tory councils in the country, which makes it easy for the Government to target help on them. It could be described as precision-bombing with money. That is what the settlement has done. According to the Government, Runnymede—I repeat, Runnymede—is the 38th most deprived place in England. It is more deprived than Liverpool, Knowsley or Warrington and more deprived than Easington or Wakefield—which includes Hemsworth—after the pit closures.

According to non-Government assessments of deprivation and wealth, Runnymede is not the 38th most deprived place in Britain. Quite the opposite, it is the 40th most wealthy place in Britain, if judged in terms of realities such as the proportion of households with three or more cars, the size of the house or the number of households in which average pay is above the higher tax-rate threshold. I do not say that those criteria are perfect, but they are much nearer to reality than the Government criteria, which are the reverse of reality, that are applied to some areas.

According to the realistic criteria, another Tory area—Surrey Heath—is the best-off place in Britain. If one knew the area—it is near Camberley, Chobham, Bisley, Windlesham—one would have to conclude, from the visible evidence, that Surrey Heath was pretty well-off. However, it is not well-off according to the criteria that the Government used in calculating their grant to local councils. According to those criteria, Surrey Heath is more deprived than 83 other councils in this country, including Barnsley, Allerdale, Bolsover, Ellesmere Port and Warrington.

If we shift a little to the north, Huntingdonshire, which is represented by the Prime Minister, according to the realistic criteria that I have spelt out, is the 43rd most wealthy place in England. However, according to the Government, it somehow qualifies for a higher deprivation rating than all the councils that I have just mentioned, apart from Barnsley. The Prime Minister's Government recognises that Barnsley is just marginally more deprived than Huntingdonshire. I do not know what that says about what the Government have done to Huntingdonshire during the past few years.

It is almost impossible to spell out the scale of the financial gerrymandering that the Government have used to bail out their friends on Westminster council. Some time ago, when we made these points, Ministers suggested that there was some independent back-up research, from Bristol university, for placing Westminster fourth in the deprivation scale. The Minister of State nods. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you look at the table produced by Bristol university, it contains even more bizarre rankings than that which places Westminster fourth. According to the table that the Government want us to accept, the Scilly Isles are ranked third. I do not think that the Scilly Isles are more deprived than Barnsley, and Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not suppose you do either.

On the next page of the tables that have been worked out by the people at Bristol university, it shows that Westminster is ranked 96th. It is clearly just a racket. It is the grants-for-votes scandal. The scale of the scandal is difficult to exaggerate, so I shall not even try. I shall rely on the Government's own figures, which show that if every council in the country received the same grant per head as does Westminster city council, 94 per cent. of councils would not have to collect any council tax at all. Instead, most of them would be able to pay out rebates. Seventy per cent. of them would be able to pay out rebates of more than £500, and nine councils—including Southampton, Portsmouth, Redditch, Stoke-on-Trent, Tamworth and Wellingborough—would be able to pay out rebates of more than £900.

Let us examine the education SSA for this year. If Kent received the same help per pupil as does Westminster, it could have taken on an extra 4,600 teachers; Staffordshire could have taken on 3,250 extra teachers; Essex could have taken on 5,650 extra teachers; Nottinghamshire could have taken on 2,500 extra teachers; Warwickshire could have taken on 1,400 extra teachers; and Shropshire could have taken on an extra 890 teachers. Wakefield, which includes Hemsworth, could have taken on an extra 1,470 teachers. However, those councils could not do that. Instead, they were forced to make cuts and increase class sizes. That is what happens in other parts of the country. Even that—

**Mr. Pickles:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I will not.

Even that is not the end of the story. Westminster council clearly needs central Government help to make up for the funds which it has lost through fraud and mismanagement. The district auditor is about to issue his final report on the homes-for-votes scandal, which he said has cost £29 million. To get that huge sum—£29 million—into perspective, hon. Members should understand that, of the 365 district councils in this country, 261 have total budgets of less than £29 million. Therefore, 261 councils in England have less to spend on their citizens in a year than Westminster has unlawfully squandered in just one of the many financial scandals for which it has been caught out.

It is not only the scandals that consume public money in Westminster, but the grotesque expense of the services that the council provides. According to the Audit Commission's figures—I always use official figures—Westminster spends £53 per head on refuse collection and disposal compared with Camden, which spends £24 and St. Helen's, which spends £18 per head. Street cleaning in Westminster costs £37 per head. In Camden, it costs £14 per head and in St. Helen's, it costs just £2.28.

Westminster's administration of housing benefits costs £226 per claimant—that is the highest figure in the country, like so many others that I have cited—and only

62 per cent. of applicants receive their money within two weeks. In the neighbouring borough of Camden, which has similar problems and a fairly similar population, the equivalent figure is £103 and 95 per cent. of applicants receive their money within two weeks. That is why the Government gave Camden's benefits section a charter mark.

However, the Tory Government never say a wrong word about Tory Westminster council. We can only conclude that it is because they approve of every single thing that the council does. The Government's problem is that they do not have to answer only to the voters of Westminster—although, with the boundary changes, they will lose one Member of Parliament to Labour in Westminster at the next general election. They also have to answer to the people in the rest of the country.

The people know that the Government are furtively pushing up council tax and cutting local services, while at the same time publicly and repeatedly drawing attention to the 1p reduction in income tax. In other words, the Government give with one hand and take away with the other. As a result, local people all over the country will be forced to pay more and get less. That is why the orders are wrong and that is why we shall vote against them tonight.

5.41 pm

**Mr. Michael Alison** (Selby): As a Member of Parliament who represents a northern seat, I found it bizarre to hear the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) focus so obsessively on Westminster. It is quite impossible to follow the debate, which has serious implications for the whole country, when the hon. Gentleman dwells obsessively on Westminster.

I cannot understand why the hon. Gentleman is so obsessed with Westminster. Is it simply because his constituency is situated near Westminster? Are there rival football teams? Is lacrosse at the root of his obsession? What is the explanation of his extraordinary obsession with Westminster? Why did the hon. Gentleman not mention a word about Holborn and St. Pancras so that we could, perhaps, get to the root of his obsession with the city of Westminster?

The hon. Gentleman compared the cost of street cleaning in Westminster with the same service in St. Helens but, in so doing, he was comparing the sun with the moon. What conceivable parallel could be drawn between the cost of street cleaning and sweeping in St. Helens and in Westminster? A vast number of people from every part of the country often gather to protest in the City of London and in Westminster.

**Mr. Betts:** To protest about the Government.

**Mr. Alison:** It is true that they sometimes protest about the Government, but that is an occupational hazard that we readily accept—it is part and parcel of being in government. People come to protest for many other reasons. For example, Turkish citizens may protest about events in Bosnia. I hope that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) welcomes the fact that many people, including overseas visitors, come to protest outside the Home Office—quite irrelevantly—about the persecution of Turkish minorities in Bosnia.

Has the hon. Gentleman seen the muck and the rubbish that accumulates in all sorts of central London locations—near embassies and so on—when a large number of people gather to protest and object? That is why there is a little disparity between the cost of street cleaning in St. Helens and in Westminster.

**Mr. Betts:** Are the right hon. Gentleman's constituents happy to subsidise Westminster in the way my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) so clearly described? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that it is fair that there should be a double subsidy—as the chief executive of Westminster city council pointed out—in terms of the standard spending assessment on day and night visitors and car parking income? Should not one subsidy be offset against the other? What would the right hon. Gentleman's constituents think about that?

**Mr. Alison:** I must be careful how I respond to that intervention as I hope to bend the ear of my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration about certain improved transfers to the Selby district. I hope to gain his sympathy in that regard.

As to the hon. Gentleman's question, I simply refer him to the intervention that my hon. Friend the Minister made during the speech of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. My hon. Friend pointed out that the situation was worse when Labour was in power: Westminster received more subsidy and more help. The idea that the present arrangement is a Government racket geared to improve the lot of Westminster voters does not stand up to analysis, as my hon. Friend said earlier. I should like reassurances from both parties as to what will happen if there is a little money to spare, as I am particularly concerned that the Selby district should benefit.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras referred also to the old, pernicious and damaging system of the business rate. I am very proud and happy to represent the Selby district. The area has a gigantic industrial base, which includes the Drax and Eggborough power stations as well as the whole of the Selby coalfield. If we were to return to the old business rate system, we would have a bonanza, but how much would we then lose in rate support grants? How would the balance be adjusted?

What would happen to the wretched neighbouring areas which have no industry? Some of them—particularly Merseyside—have no industry precisely because the business rate system drove it out. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a return to the old business rate system is a great leap forward to modernity? If that is Labour's policy come the general election, we shall be happy to debate it.

**Mr. George Stevenson** (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, if my local authority in Stoke-on-Trent had increased expenditure by anything like the percentage by which the Government have jacked up the business rate, it would have been capped three times over?

**Mr. Alison:** I should have received notice of that question. I shall ponder it in my bath when I am in a reflective mood, having carefully read the hon. Gentleman's intervention in *Hansard*.

**Mr. Gummer:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend will recall that the business rate may not be raised by more

*[Mr. Gummer]*

than the percentage increase in the cost of living. He will probably also recall that, when the business rate was in the hands of local authorities such as Sheffield, it was used as a mechanism for taking huge amounts of money from business with the result that almost all businesses in Sheffield would have moved out if they could have sold their premises.

**Mr. Alison:** I entirely accept my right hon. Friend's reminder. It is bizarre that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras poured such acidic wit and criticism on the attempts that local government associations have made, in co-operation with the Government, to produce some sort of objectivity in the analysis of need.

The hon. Gentleman showed, mockingly, using various lists, how implausible that seemed to be, but he is offering to go back to the weird system of raising the business rate in an entirely irrational and undifferentiated manner, which depends entirely on the location of historic industrial premises and those that have been swept to new locations as a result of the Labour party's battening on to the fatted calf in certain areas. He gave us a wholly inconsistent critique. He criticised my right hon. Friend's attempt to be objective, but then proposed a return to the old system of business rates.

While I have the attention for a brief second of my right hon. Friend and of my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration—and I cannot hold it much longer—I wish to refresh their memories of the peculiarly Procrustean torture that befalls local authorities that have large chunks of their old district removed as a result of structural or boundary changes.

My hon. Friend the Minister was kind enough, at the end of October 1995, to allow me to bring Selby's chief executive, Mr. Chris Edwards, and chief finance officer, Mr. Martin Connor, to meet him to explain the problems that have arisen because the district has suffered a loss of resident population of nearly one third. That is a big chunk—from 92,000 to 72,000. Selby has lost some 20,000 of its resident population through the boundary changes associated with establishing the new neighbouring York unitary authority.

We told my hon. Friend the Minister, and he was kind enough to listen with great patience and perception, that—alas—local government services and their costs cannot be cut precisely to match the transfer of outgoing population. Procrustes had a bed which unwary wayfarers were made to fit. If they were a bit shorter than the bed, they were stretched in an agonising rack; if they were a bit bigger they had bits chopped off.

My hon. Friend the Minister has unwittingly imposed the perversion of that fearful torture on the Selby district—a combination of chopping and stretching. The chopping happens because lots of local government officers have to be chopped off after a big loss of population—which amounts almost to one third. In the case of Selby, that will produce a redundancy bill of £1 million which, considering our grant from central Government is only £4 million, is a large proportion of extra costs. The stretching happens with the services that are left behind—they have to be stretched over a large, but thinner, district. We will have fewer local government officers, which produces redundancy obligations, and probably a poorer standard of service. We cannot cut precisely to match the loss of council tax paying population.

When we met my hon. Friend the Minister on 26 October 1995, the provisional SSA figures were just about to be published. On 30 November 1995, only a few weeks later, my hon. Friend published his provisional SSA figures. I found that Selby's provisional SSA figure was £6.513 million and I thought that, as a result of meeting my hon. Friend at the end of October, we would see some evidence of recognition of our Procrustean dilemma when the definitive figures appeared.

I was appalled to discover that the SSA has fallen from the provisional sum which was published just after I met my hon. Friend. I can only conclude that we in some way offended or outraged him. That is why I am doing my very best today to offend and outrage the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras—so that I may win the enthusiasm, support and friendship of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

It is certainly true that the so-called relevant notional amount in the case of Selby has been raised to £7.19 million, but that simply means that our capping limit has been adjusted upwards to take account of the problems with local government structural and boundary changes. The sum still has to be funded and financed by the local council tax payer. That will mean, for example, that the estimated council tax for band D, which is now £92.67, is likely to go up—if we go to the full new capping limit of £7.19 million—to £105. That is an increase of 13 per cent. or more.

I just caught the wisp of an indication from the conclusion of the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that there might be some help for Selby—and north Lincolnshire—in the new limit that he has established to give special help to local authorities with severe boundary and population movement changes. I shall consider carefully what he has to say. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends realise that if we have to spend up to the new capping limit to accommodate £1 million of redundancy money, we will have to do exactly what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras accused the Government of doing overall. I dispute and repudiate his accusation, but in Selby, because of a unique and non-recurring phenomenon, we will have to charge people more for reduced local government services. People will get a poorer service, but they will have to pay more for it.

**Mr. Curry:** I hope that I may assist my right hon. Friend. He mentioned the redundancy and transitional costs that will be especially important for Selby, given the size of the area which is being removed. As he will know, for 1996-97, Selby made an extremely low bid—of £100,000—compared with many other authorities. We met that in full. The 1996-97 bid did not include provision for redundancy and compensation payments, but we expect that that will be included in the mid-year bidding round and further allocations could be made at that stage. I shall bear in mind my right hon. Friend's remarks at that time.

**Mr. Alison:** My hon. Friend is very kind not to force me to wait in agony and expectation until he speaks later for that little expression of hope and encouragement. It is

very much appreciated. I hope that my hon. Friend will continue to focus on the needs of Selby. There will be a problem if the extra demands have to be paid for purely by local council tax payers and not through the agency of some sort of redistributive mechanism.

**Mr. Dobson:** In the same spirit, and to save my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) making the point later, may I say that the right hon. Gentleman has made a good case? Selby is in unique circumstances and the help that the Minister mentioned would not breach any principles, or set any precedents for anywhere else. The Opposition would be happy to support any efforts that the Government, the council and the right hon. Gentleman can make to sort out the problem, because Selby has been battered twice rather than just once by the changes.

**Mr. Alison:** I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman for that helpful contribution. I know that he has some geographical and personal knowledge of the Selby district. I hope that I can end my speech on a note of constructive harmony in the expectation that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will listen carefully to me and to the Opposition spokesman and ensure that everything possible is done. I can see other colleagues nodding in every part of the House. Perhaps we can have a general agreement that something special should be done for Selby and that my right hon. and hon. Friends will do their best to secure it.

6 pm

**Mr. Peter Hardy** (Wentworth): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), who is a fellow Yorkshireman. I hope that the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) will prove helpful. When the right hon. Gentleman retires at the next election, we shall be looking for his successor to come from the side of the House that we will occupy—although I, too, shall have retired.

This is not the first time that I have participated in a debate on local government finance. I have not done so for the past two years, but I did so frequently before that. Today, I found the Secretary of State to be courteous, although he was rather cutting about the Liberal Democrats. He took a great deal of time and gave way frequently, but it was not until my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) intervened that he clearly and specifically accepted that local government spending this year is so inadequately supported by central funding that council tax will go up substantially.

Many experts believe that, on average, council tax increases throughout the country will exceed the rate of inflation by a factor of two and, if certain eventualities such as higher settlements, greater costs and more urgent crises assail local government, the burden will be even higher. Some key services will be threatened, as will some of the non-statutory activities normally undertaken by local government.

For example, the Government are supposed to be keen on combatting crime. In the past few months, they seem to have detected a slowing in the rate of increase in crime. In fact, it has much more than doubled since 1979. Many of the villains are not in prison because the rate of convictions has fallen in actual terms. Many local authorities, mine in particular, are keen to see measures to discourage crime, but there will not be any capacity to do that adequately.

I do not believe that the lot of police authorities is particularly pleasant today. The fire services, which have been put under great pressure, have been mentioned. The Minister might like to recall that the number of calls to which fire services had to respond during the drought months created serious problems for those authorities.

I am concerned about education. I welcomed the Chancellor's reference to education in the Budget—he announced that almost £800 million extra for education would be directed to local authorities—but many local authorities are already spending above the level on which the Chancellor's calculations were based. A further 83,000 children will enter our schools and they will have to be catered for from an increase that may well be more fictitious than real.

There is another problem. The Minister will be aware of it because he has visited my constituency on a number of occasions in the past year or two. We have enormously high unemployment. A vast proportion of our young people see no opportunity for employment and a great deal of effort is put into seeking to ensure that they stay on at school or enter further education—anything other than hanging about the streets. The number of young people who have stayed on beyond the normal school leaving age recently has presented serious problems for an education authority that seeks to be sensible and realistic. The Government might say that other authorities have been treated more severely, but I do not believe that we have been given the assistance or the resources necessary to save money.

The same argument applies in respect of old people. People are living longer, but going into care costs a great deal of money. It is sensible to give local authorities the capacity to sustain elderly people in their own homes because the alternative is more expensive. The number of people who reach 90 or even a century has increased appreciably in my area.

Not long ago, I wrote to a couple who I thought had been married the longest in my area—they were celebrating their 65th wedding anniversary. I wrote to them because I know their son-in-law. I congratulated them and reminded the old man that I had seen him by a reservoir not long before. His daughter telephoned me to say that I have in my constituency a couple who have been married for six years longer—that fact did not get into our observant local newspaper.

People are living longer and they need the sustenance and care that can be provided by a local authority. They will not get it if local authorities remain docile and seek to keep council tax down to avoid offending their tax payers and the Government.

This will be a difficult year for local authorities. It has become increasingly difficult for local authorities to bear their burdens while the flagship of the Conservative party has been supported for the past eight years. Seven years ago, I gave the House a detailed comparison between my authority and Westminster. I reviewed the comparison the following year. If my authority had been treated in the same way as Westminster during the past seven years, none of my constituents would have had to pay any council tax, we would have been able to provide twice as

*[Mr. Peter Hardy]*

many old people with free meals and several hundred more home helps every year and every person in the Rotherham metropolitan borough—man, woman and child—could have pocketed more than £1,250.

The argument advanced in support of the enormous assistance given to Westminster is that it is part of the capital city and has to sustain the responsibility of the centre in promoting national culture, art, music and so on. In fact, the vast majority of provincial local authorities spend a larger proportion of their budget on those purposes than does Westminster. I challenge the Minister to deny that. The average local authority provides a higher level of support for art, culture and music than does Westminster city council. The situation is so bad that the national lottery has to use my constituents' contributions to fund the extravagant schemes and to provide those central responsibilities that the Government assume Westminster bears.

If the authority was efficient, I would not mind so much. During a debate in the House a few years ago, I mentioned an old-age pensioner in my constituency who had not set foot in London since 1955. He received 14 parking tickets and a summons in Westminster for parking a car that had never been there. [*Laughter.*] Oh yes. It just so happened that the car with false number plates was discovered on the morning of my debate. The person involved was never prosecuted. The car was a large blue Rover. I do not have a blue car for obvious reasons and I suspect that the person involved may have been closer to the political sympathies of Conservative Members.

If my local authority had done anything like that, there would have been demonstrations such as those mentioned by the right hon. Member for Selby. There would have been protests about the incompetence of the council. Yet the Tory flagship must continue to sail. I hope that, after the next general election, we will see rather more intelligence and a greater sense of justice pervading decision making in the Department of the Environment.

Seven years ago, I argued that there was grossly inadequate weighting for the unemployment factor in the determination of central support. The Government decided that it was a good case and there has been some improvement since then. However, I still consider that there is grossly inadequate consideration of the factors of poverty and low pay.

If a community suffers from low earnings and the average household income is therefore extremely low, that has a serious effect. I take the view—and have done so for a long time—that that factor is not given sufficient weight. Any improvements that the Government may have made have been grossly inadequate. There is a strong case for an independent assessment of and arbitration on such factors in the determination of central grants. It is a serious argument. My authority and others in South Yorkshire, which contribute to the Dearne valley city grant scheme—over which the Minister has a watching brief—are areas of real poverty. Jobs have been destroyed and the wages of those in work have fallen in real terms. It is a grossly inadequate that that economic reality is not taken into account in the determination of grant. That must be dealt with immediately.

In 1979, Graham Page, the former Minister with responsibility for local government finance, described his task as flying around England in a helicopter dropping bags of money on town halls. That may have been an inefficient system, but it did not matter so much then because, in those days, the rates provided a much smaller share of local government income than does council tax now. *[Interruption.]* It is true.

Once Lady Thatcher decided that the burden had to be shifted from the taxpayer to the ratepayer, people became a great deal more sensitive to the problems. The Government then became a great deal more critical of local authorities that did not do exactly what they wanted. Local government must serve local needs. It should not depend on a Government who exercise excessive pressure through such measures as capping. Sometimes, local government knows best. Indeed, local government is often more careful in its stewardship of public money than the Government Departments that so often criticise it.

6.12 pm

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): It is a great pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). He gave us a lesson in how to charm the Government. As many of us have thought for some time, he is an old smoothie.

It is also a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). I read his speeches in *Hansard* before I came to the House. I wish him well in his future retirement. I am sure that it was a slip of the tongue, but the hon. Gentleman said that under Lady Thatcher the proportion of grant raised locally was increased. In fact, it was decreased. Perhaps he was confused by the fact that the gearing was changed.

It is wrong of Labour Members to say that the standard spending assessment figures have been fiddled. No one seriously believes that. They have been examined by the Audit Commission and by such luminaries as Tony Travers from the London School of Economics. All the reports say that the way the methodology works is satisfactory and fair. No one can point to another system in the world that is more fair.

**Mr. Barry Field** (Isle of Wight): My hon. Friend's long list did not include the Environment Select Committee, which also found the system to be entirely objective.

**Mr. Pickles:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that additional information.

Labour Members have drawn comparisons between Wandsworth and Westminster. If Wandsworth received the same grant as Tower Hamlets, it could give back £1,000 to each council tax payer. Unless my geography is terribly wrong, Tower Hamlets is not exactly a safe Conservative borough. It is certainly not part of some supposed Tory plot. Sooner or later, Labour Members will have to produce reasoned arguments.

The reason why Labour Members say that the SSA figures are fiddled is that they do not want to answer two basic questions. First, if the grant is inadequate, how much extra would Labour be prepared to provide? Secondly, what proportion would be raised locally?

**Mr. Betts:** The hon. Gentleman said that the Audit Commission had accepted the methodology. Is he aware that the Audit Commission commissioned a report by Price Waterhouse on the issue of capital financing, which

my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) mentioned? It rejected the idea of notional debt as part of the capital financing arrangements within the SSA and suggested a system, albeit an adjusted one, based on credit approvals. Why do not the Government take up that suggestion, which would help authorities such as Birmingham and Sheffield?

**Mr. Pickles:** The hon. Gentleman knows that in April the way in which local authorities can deal with capital financing will change because of the private finance initiative. That will give them many opportunities, in partnership with private enterprise, to renovate schools, libraries and leisure centres.

There is a certain carnival atmosphere about the debate. The *Evening Standard* last night said that it was like a ritualised dance. The Opposition come and say that the grant is inadequate and that the world as we know it will come to an end. The Government come and say that the grant is generous and reasonable. The Opposition say that there will be many redundancies among teachers and council staff and that it will be the end of services as we know them.

This year, the Opposition say, "We are not crying wolf. There will be deep cuts in local government services." Of course, that never happens—and why not? Let us take one standard assessment. The largest part of any local authority budget is staffing. Local authorities have to deliver education and social services, which tend to be reliant on high numbers of staff. Compared with last year, there has been a reduction of 1.5 per cent. in the staffing level. However, if we deduct from that all those employees who have transferred to private companies through compulsory competitive tendering or who now come under the arrangements for grant-maintained schools, the figure shrinks considerably.

Hon. Members may say that that is just one year, but comparisons with 10 years ago show that about the same number of people are employed in local authorities now as they were then—despite compulsory competitive tendering and the various new functions that have been introduced. It is simply not true to say that vicious cuts are being imposed.

At the time of our debate last year, one authority screamed loudly about the number of teachers and other staff that it said it would have to make redundant. I am referring to the late, but not very lamented, Avon county council. When it was finally wound up and its reserves were examined, there was an unexpected balance of £54 million. That is enough to absorb the total budgets of five or six district councils. The spokesman for the council said that the balance was larger than had been anticipated. That is a bit like the late Emperor Hirohito saying that the second world war had not gone entirely to his satisfaction.

Mention was made of Westminster city council and other Tory authorities. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is no longer in his place—he is a busy man and no doubt has other things to do. It was a bit rich of the hon. Gentleman to lecture Tory authorities when Camden council ended the 1994-95 financial year with £180 million of uncollected debts. For many years, the majority of that council's staff enjoyed terms and conditions of employment that were described by their chief executive as reflecting unique generosity to the point of illegality. That council spent £1.5 million on computer equipment, then failed to use it. That council lost £300,000 worth of computer equipment for four years. That council was described as having no coherent children in care policy. It was more than a bit rich of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to shroud-wave about education cuts, saying that children would miss out, when his own council in Camden took more than £4 million from its education budget in 1994-95 to cover bad debt and interest rate swaps, which had nothing to do with education.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras questioned the mix, and expressed concerned that the amount of money that would have to be raised locally will increase. As I pointed out, a Labour document suggests that that will happen. The hon. Gentleman said that he wrote every word of it. On page 18 of "Renewing Democracy, Rebuilding Communities" the hon. Gentleman stated:

> "We believe that it would be better for local people to make a healthier democracy if councils were responsible for raising locally a much higher proportion of the money they invest and spend."

The hon. Gentleman said that he did not mean that exactly but that the business rate should be repatriated. That would increase the amount of money raised locally. If that is what Labour Members mean, why not say so? Why use obscure wording when it would be simpler to say, "We will ensure the return of the uniform business rate." Then everyone would understand. This is a clear example of Labour running from a policy that it now perceives to be unpopular.

**Ms Hilary Armstrong** (North-West Durham): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has read the whole document—in fact, his copy is annotated. He will be familiar with its statement that the first thing that Labour wants to do in terms of denationalising Tory policies is to restore the uniform business rate, but Labour is consulting businesses and other interested parties on how to achieve that effectively. We want to make sure that those other interests are involved. That is why we are not prepared at this stage to fling numbers about. If Mrs. Thatcher had behaved that way, the Conservative party would not have wasted £4 billion.

**Mr. Pickles:** I have read the full document, and very enjoyable it is too. I did not miss out any sentences. I did not fiddle the words to mean something different. It is clear that the document is referring to the uniform business rate, but it says something extra. It says that the proportion should be increased. When Labour consults, it will no doubt be told by business men, "We remember a time when people took roofs off factories, to avoid paying exorbitant business rate." The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) will no doubt remember, because that occurred in his own metropolitan district council. The hon. Lady is not on a winner. If this is the only denationalisation—*[Laughter]*. I mean, renationalisation. Those words are so old that we tend to forget them. It is like a journey into the past. If this is the only renationalisation that the Opposition propose, it is not even old Labour.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): Does my hon. Friend recall that Labour members of Labour-controlled authorities were on to what they believed was an electoral

*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]*

winner—and it probably was, for them? The bills were paid by the milch cows of business, which had no votes, while the rates of people who had votes were disguised as part of their rent. Labour was able to destroy businesses and jobs. The figures are on record. Businesses voted with their feet and moved out of Labour boroughs. The hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) plainly wants that situation to return.

**Mr. Pickles:** My hon. Friend said that the voters did not appear to pay, but rightly pointed out that they did. They lost jobs, investments and opportunities. That was the price paid by people when they decided for narrow, sectional interests to impose ideological policies on local councils.

**Mr. Betts:** I will give the hon. Gentleman two examples of raising money locally. Sheffield city council raises extra income from local sources by opening the town hall car park on Saturday. Secondly, all the internal roads for Meadowhall shopping centre were designed by the council's own engineers and received commendations from Meadowhall's owner, Eddie Healey, for doing a job as good as any private firm. Local authorities are restricted by the vires rules that the Government inflicted on local councils, which prevent them from earning money in the ways that I described.

**Mr. Pickles:** No doubt the hon. Gentleman went round that centre with his personal plumb bob and spirit level, to examine the roads. I do not understand his point. Nobody is suggesting that all the work done by local authorities is bad. We are arguing that heaping debts on the back of local business is not the best way to be involved in the local economy. If the hon. Gentleman wants to involve and to work in partnership with the private sector, and to relieve himself of an obsession with municipal ownership, the people of Sheffield will welcome that approach.

This year, local authorities will receive £900 million, which is greater than expected from last year's statement. Arrant nonsense was talked about local authorities suffering different rates of inflation from the rest of the country. That is a hoary old chestnut. That was true in the late 1970s, but it has not been true for the best part of 20 years. Against the background of additional money, it is only right for the Government to focus on the priorities of education, social services, and law and order.

I share my right hon. Friend's concerns about relaxation of the capping rules. Removing capping is like getting off the back of a tiger. One is safe until one tries to dismount, and then the problems start. With local authorities, the tiger has been smiling through its beard and saying, "It is going to be all right. You can trust us, we are responsible and we will do the right thing." Yet the very moment capping is relaxed, we hear statements like the one made by Sir Jeremy Beecham.

Like many hon. Members, I received a briefing note from the three local authority associations—which are soon to be one—in which Sir Jeremy Beecham said that

"the settlement did not match what councils were spending."

What a daft idea that it should. Indeed, there would something wrong with the settlement if it did match spending. In no other sector would the wish list of an organisation suddenly become its spending plans. The idea that the best way in which to solve a problem is to appoint an officer is entirely wrong. In my experience, the best way in which to solve a problem is to disappoint an officer.

Local authorities use a strange language of compliance. We hear councillors say that as the capping level has been relaxed they will spend up to the new level—just because the Government say that they can. When the Government say that it is possible to raise the level of spending, they are by no means advocating that such a level should be reached. Just because the standard spending assessment has gone up or just because the cap has been relaxed, there is no compulsion to increase total spending.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras seemed rather excited about what the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said about expected levels of council tax. I should think that the Chief Secretary, by his nature, has a rather jaundiced expectation of human nature. There is no reason for council taxes to increase by about 8 per cent. Indeed, some councils are planning to cut their council tax next year. We should expect, however, local authorities to start to address priority.

Clearly, we are giving education a high priority this year. In my county of Essex, the total sums available for education are being increased by almost 5 per cent—an increase the size of the allocation for two or three district councils. We have already heard that the Lib-Lab coalition on the council is determined not to pass on those extra resources to schools. All we will see as a result is a further flood of schools opting for grant-maintained status. Every secondary school in my constituency is already grant-maintained. They offer enhanced choice and diversity in education, whether in language or technology.

I would, however, like to take a leaf out of the book of my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby and make a special plea to my hon. Friend the Minister, because we have worries in the Brentwood area. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] They are real worries and I hope that the Opposition will support me in my plea. Our schools are so good and so attractive that we are desperately worried about the prospect of an influx of children of members of the shadow Cabinet. We are not entirely sure that we can take such a number of children, but we will do our best. Should Brentwood schools be favoured by Opposition spokesmen, will my hon. Friend look kindly on the wish to build a number of extra classrooms in our secondary schools to accommodate them?

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** At least the hon. Gentleman has no need to fear an influx of children of Conservative Members, since they all send their children to private schools.

**Mr. Pickles:** We are very proud of some of the children who went to private schools in Brentwood, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) being a prime example. We often see him at old boys' reunions. As someone who did not come from a privileged background, it is always nice to see the toffs doing well on the Opposition Front Bench.

It is also important to concentrate on social services. Along with the rest of my hon. Friends, I have become increasingly worried about the way in which the Lib-Lab coalition on Essex county council has been abusing its

position over care in the community. Essex is virtually unique in so far as it has received the largest allocation of special grants and SSA on personal social services. Unfortunately, it has a bunch of old-fashioned, municipal councillors who simply want to organise and control everything. They have ended the Conservatives' modernisation programme of old persons' homes, they have ended the modest charge for home helps and reduced the service, and they have taken money from social services to introduce stress officers for their staff—no doubt so that their staff can explain to the rest of the population why the service has been reduced.

The Conservatives had introduced a scheme whereby a series of old people's homes, whose structure and decoration had been neglected, were offered for sale in the private sector. The controlling group on the council has stopped that process and essentially reduced the amount of money available to help old people get into private homes.

In my constituency a home called Brook House, which is owned by the county council, was threatened with closure just before the last general election. Despite many protests from the local Liberal Democrats, who said that the proposed closure was a disgrace, the home was eventually closed. I had the pleasure of reopening it. Virtually the same staff work there, but in new conditions.

Instead of looking like some kind of poor house or somewhere where old people are sent to be forgotten about—I am talking about the basic surroundings not the quality of the staff—the home now looks like a hotel. That says to our old people that we recognise the work that they have done, respect them and want them to see their last days out in some dignity. We know that it is cheaper for the county council to place elderly people in private sector homes instead of its own homes, yet it does not do so because of ideology.

As I said to the hon. Member for Attercliffe, the private finance initiative is likely to come into being next year. It will enable county and district councils to use some of the disciplines of the private sector in renovating their libraries and schools.

We must ensure that local authorities behave responsibly with their new responsibilities and flexibility. My council of Brentwood is controlled by the Liberal Democrats. The local leader was in the paper saying what a disgrace the settlement was, how the council could not manage on it and how there would be a massive hike in council tax to compensate for it. He predicted large council tax rises and said that it was all the Government's fault.

Sometimes we politicians can be taught a lesson or two by members of the public who say the obvious and cut through much of the political froth. I am grateful to my constituent Mr. Michael Pointer who wrote to the *Brentwood Gazette* to comment on the local leader of the Liberals blaming the Chancellor for the prospective increase in council tax. He said:

"In fact the Chancellor is increasing the cap by 1.75 per cent., but that does not mean our councillors need spend it."

He points out that in 1992, the council took £4.2 million from the reserves and spent it on revenue, in 1993, it took £2.5 million and spent it on revenue, in 1994 it took £2.7 million and spent it on revenue and in 1995 it took just short of £2 million from the reserves. What the gentleman says in his letter is that the day of reckoning has arrived. Brentwood has a badly run council that has not applied basic housekeeping rules. Frankly, it has been deserted.

**Mr. Rendel:** I thought—perhaps I am wrong—that the Government were trying to persuade local councils to use up their reserves, on the grounds that that is the best way to keep council services going.

**Mr. Pickles:** The problem that my local councillors have is that they rely on the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) for advice, which is the road to ruin. The Government are saying, "We don't mind you using your reserves, but we want you to do so in a way that will get your budget down." It is no use substituting measures and hoping that one day something will turn up. The hon. Gentleman has let those councillors down terribly, because he produced an alternative budget that proposed not a penny-piece extra for district councils. He is saying to the Liberal district councillors in Brentwood, "Sorry, chaps. I've deserted you. We want to make education a priority."

I appeared on a television programme with the hon. Member for Newbury. He is very nice to be on television with; he is a very nice man indeed. When I put the point to him, he looked shocked. I do not know whether he was let down by his hon. Friends in his Treasury team—

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** Nobody told him.

**Mr. Pickles:** My hon. Friend suggests that no one told the hon. Gentleman. I suspect that that is true. If it is, I do not think that that was fair. He should have been told.

I had an opportunity to talk to my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who told me about his Liberal-controlled council, which has been given an extra £1.5 million for its education budget. It did not want to give that money to schools, so there was a tremendous row—Liberal against Liberal, shouting at one another. Eventually it offered a compromise: it will keep £300,000 and let schools have the rest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight and I say, "let the schools have the money that has been allocated to them." We shall judge the settlement by whether the money is passed on. Will priority be given to education and social services? If Opposition Members do not do that, we will not, under any circumstances, allow them to forget it.

6.41 pm

**Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): The Chancellor pledged in his Budget speech last November that an additional £878 million would be made available for investment in education in 1996-97. Of that amount, £770 million was to be channelled through local government. We now have the finalised local government settlement, but we do not have the additional £770 million that was pledged. The total amount of external finance for local authorities has not risen in real terms. That is the important point. All that the Government have done is to raise the standard spending assessment for education by 4.5 per cent.

To make that increase meaningful, the Government have at least raised the capping limits for many authorities this year. As we heard from the Secretary of State earlier,

*[Mr. David Rendel]*

however, the Government have refused to do what many hon. Members have called for and to remove capping limits altogether. If the Government are serious about local democracy, it is time that capping went.

**Mr. Barry Field:** I wrote in my local newspaper on the Isle of Wight that the council and the Liberal Democrats had campaigned for capping limits to be raised or abolished, but they said that they had never asked for that and tried to suggest to school governors on the island that that was not Liberal Democrat policy. I should be obliged to the hon. Gentleman if he would emphasise the point so that I can take it back to the Liberal Democrat councillors on the Isle of Wight.

**Mr. Rendel:** I am delighted to underline Liberal Democrat national policy. I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman precisely what was said on the Isle of Wight, but I can tell him, happily, that it is also Conservative party policy, as passed at the last conference, although the Government have not yet taken that on board. Only when capping has been removed can people really hold their councillors to account, because only then will councillors face making real choices about the provision of services and how to fund them. With capping in place, it is not the local electorate who decide what value to place on education for their children but the Secretary of State in London.

There are two ways of looking at the line taken by the Chancellor and the Secretary of State. We could assume that the Government are recommending that councils stick to the SSA for education. If so, it should be noted that last year local authorities spent more than the Government recommend that they spend this year. If we assume that the Government really want councils to stick to their SSAs, that will lead to a cut in education spending, not an increase. If, however, the Government are urging local councils simply to spend 4.5 per cent. more on education regardless of whether they were above SSA last year, with no additional funds from central Government, they are calling for a substantial increase in council tax, coupled with a programme of cuts in other local authority services. Even then, it will not be possible for many education authorities to boost spending by the amount that the Government suggest.

I realise that Conservative Members may be unwilling to take my word on that, so I will quote the words of the Treasury Select Committee, which published its report on 15 January. That Committee, which has a Conservative majority, revealed the extent of the Chancellor's con trick when it said:

> "This increase in spending does not, however, have quite the substance the Chancellor claimed for it."

It went on:

> "Moreover, when the increase in spending is placed in the context of local authority resources, it seems less likely that, whatever the expectations of parents, local authorities will be able 'to carry that funding through to school budgets.'"

The Committee concluded:

> "There seems little doubt that some local authorities will be unable to pass on any increase in spending, and that some schools may neither perceive nor receive any increase in resources."

The Government have told us throughout the debate that that would be entirely the local authority's fault, but the Treasury Select Committee has pointed out that it is inevitable, given the Chancellor's Budget.

Clearly, any increase in education spending will be a matter of too little too late. It will not even be enough to cover the £191 million needed to cover rising pupil numbers. Nor will it be enough to cover the £131 million required for additional costs in the provision of special needs education. It takes no account of the 8 per cent. reduction in schools' capital grants and credit approvals.

Let us consider what it will mean to one education authority. In Cambridgeshire, the SSA for education in the current year was £226.1 million. Next year, it will rise to £237.3 million—up by 4.9 per cent. Generous, one might think. But Cambridgeshire, one of many shire counties no longer controlled by the Conservatives, has already decided to spend £241.1 million on education this year, because the present authority places a much higher value on education than the Government do. That is already some £4 million more than the Government suggest that the authority should spend next year. The extra resources this year have been found partly from reserves and partly by raiding other areas of spending, which have consequently been starved of funding to a level below even that which the Government think appropriate. As was bound to happen, the reserves have effectively run out.

The Government are providing less money than Cambridgeshire was already spending. The authority has no money left to make up the difference. It has increasing pupil numbers and demands for special needs. Moreover, of course, it is not allowed to raise any extra funds because it is capped. In anyone's book, that can add up to only one result: cuts in education.

It is no wonder that the teachers and governors of Cambridgeshire are up in arms. Those figures were produced not by some party political body, but by a combination of the primary governors group, the secondary governors group, the primary heads forum, the local education authority secondary heads, the Special Schools Heads Association and the National Association of Governors and Managers.

I have used Cambridgeshire as an example, but I have received briefings from many other county councils showing that almost exactly the same is happening all over the country—in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Berkshire and Hampshire. The list continues across the country.

**Mr. David Harris** (St. Ives): The hon. Gentleman mentioned Cornwall. Will he cast his mind back to what was said in Cornwall a year ago by all his Liberal Democrat colleagues—that Cornwall would face horrendous cuts in school budgets, and that teachers would be laid off right, left and centre? They did a survey and produced bogus figures just before the local elections. Does the hon. Gentleman know how many teachers were actually laid off in Cornwall last year? They were fewer than the fingers on my hand.

**Mr. Rendel:** I am delighted to hear that confirmation of how well Cornwall is being run now. The council has managed to avoid cutting a lot of teachers' jobs despite cuts in Government funding. That is a wonderful example of how well Liberal Democrat councils have managed.

When the Conservatives have succeeded in infuriating such huge bodies of opinion in the way that I have described, is it any surprise that they have lost the confidence of the country?

I realise that statistics will abound in the debate, but there is one that is especially well worth recalling in view of the Government's claim that they are doing so much more for our schoolchildren this year. Since the general election the standard spending assessment per secondary school pupil in England has fallen by 9.5 per cent. in real terms.

Time and again, the Government have raised parents' hopes that their children's education will get the funding that it deserves, only to dash those hopes when it is revealed that Government promises are nothing but a lot of hot air. Their attempt to con parents is motivated by the desperate desire to win votes, but they will soon realise that the British public do not take kindly to a Government who seek to pull the wool over their eyes, especially where the education of their children is concerned.

The Secretary of State continues to play the Chancellor's fiddle. Yet he and the other Conservative Members are already gearing up to criticise local authorities which respond in the only way possible—by cutting services and increasing council tax. We have already heard such criticism in the debate.

The Government themselves produced figures in the Budget Red Book showing that they expect a 10 per cent. increase in council tax revenue this year. That translates into an additional bill of about £61 for the average household. For the Government to cut income tax one day and then reimpose that tax burden in a less fair way the next is nothing new, but it is still dishonest: it is still an outrageous Conservative sham.

**Mr. Pickles:** The hon. Gentleman talks about dishonesty; would he care to tell us why not one penny piece of additional money was allocated for district council functions in the Liberal Democrats' shadow Budget?

**Mr. Rendel:** As I hope has become entirely clear—indeed, I believe that the hon. Gentleman himself made it clear in his speech—the Liberal Democrats' priority now is to increase education funding and spending, because we believe that to be in the long-term interests of the country. We have made it clear that where necessary we shall raise income tax to pay for extra education spending. That is where our priority is, and that is where it will remain.

Local Government finance is about more than council tax—

**Mr. Barry Field:** I am interested in the Liberal Democrats' policy on education. I have seen a copy of the resolution passed at their conference which says specifically that the additional penny in income tax that they have said for some time should go to education would be spent on education for the over-16s and under-fives, which would not be relevant to this education debate at all. The resolution is quite clear.

**Mr. Rendel:** I understand that the motion that the hon. Gentleman mentions was on nursery education and did not cover the whole gamut of what we expect the extra money to pay for.

Local government is about more than council tax: it is about local services that are vital to the quality of life of ordinary, decent people. While local authorities have attempted to shore up funding for education, it is inevitable that other services have suffered. If local authorities now try to boost education spending by the proportion that the Government suggest, other services will have to be squeezed even further. The adjusted spending assessment for social services has been cut by 2 per cent. in real terms, so it seems that the Government regard social services and the vulnerable people whom those services exist to protect as expendable.

The neglect shown by the Government in their funding of social services naturally manifests itself in some sad examples of how vital services have declined. I will give the House the opportunity to hear about two of them.

I recently received a letter from a doctor in Hungerford, in my constituency, referring to what he described as the "sorry state of affairs" that the underfunding of community care has brought about. His patient had been trying to secure bath aids through social services. The House will appreciate that providing handles to enable somebody to get in and out of the bath safely and comfortably can be an essential ingredient in maintaining that person's independence. It is a vital safety measure, and may even save money in the longer term by enabling an elderly person to remain at home rather than having to go into residential care. The response from social services was that the gentleman would have to wait for up to a year—not to obtain the aids, but for a care manager even to visit his home to assess his needs. Goodness knows how much longer it would have taken to have the bath aids fitted. But the real sting in the doctor's letter comes in the last sentence, which reveals that the patient is 90 years old.

Another case was brought to my attention by a special school in Hampshire which caters for a constituent of mine. The boy is described as

"a very vulnerable pupil at our school which provides 52 weeks a year education and care for children with the most challenging behaviour associated with autism. The challenging behaviour can be life threatening."

The young man is now approaching his 19th birthday, and once he is 19 he must move on from the school and will no longer be funded by Berkshire education authority. Responsibility then shifts to social services, which must find a suitable placement.

The school has been pressing social services to place the young man for the past 12 months, but social services have been unable to do so. Meanwhile, the school has provided a place for the boy at a community care home and merely wants social services to agree to fund the placement. But social services have been unable to confirm funding for the placement, on the grounds that they need to find something cheaper. The interests of the young come second to the rigours of an underfunded budget.

In the words of the school:

"With Government pressure on education, care and health budgets, these children and young people are now the victims of a bureaucratic 'ping-pong' between Education and Social Services pre-19 and Social Services and Health post-19 as they argue about who will provide what proportion of funding for their placements."

Those two examples are but the tip of the iceberg, but both show how the Government have put short-term tax bribes before the provision of essential services. In the long term their policies will lead to greater expense, and the tax increases that we have witnessed since the general

*[Mr. Rendel]*

election. The Government have failed to provide the funding for local authorities to make community care work.

That is not the end of it. The Government are also cutting the funds for highway maintenance. I understand that Somerset, for example, is so desperate to safeguard education spending that it has imposed a cash freeze on highway spending, despite increasing numbers of claims for damage to vehicles, and to human beings as a result of falls. There is more: the Government are also cutting the funds with which local authorities attempt to protect the environment.

Those cuts in every area of local government services will be the prime concern of most ordinary people. In many areas, people will have to put up with cuts in services combined with steep increases in council tax. A further problem is that in calculating spending assessments no account has been taken by the Government of the burden of the landfill tax this year. I hope that local authorities will reduce their use of landfill, and as an incentive to that end I welcome the landfill tax, but in the short term many local authorities will face a considerable burden in terms of the landfill tax.

In Gloucestershire, for example, the impact will be £740,000 in the financial year 1996-1997. Where do the Government believe that cuts should be made to find that money? In a full year, the impact will be about £1.5 million. Even with the change in national insurance contributions promised for April 1997, the impact on Gloucestershire will still be well over £1 million.

What cuts do the Government recommend to find the money for the new tax? Should cuts be made in education? The county's spending on education is over the SSA, yet it has had to make significant cuts in school budgets for the past five years. Should cuts be made in social services? Only today, a demonstration took place outside shire hall in Gloucester about possible cuts in services, including child care provision and adult opportunity centres.

It is frustrating for us all that the Secretary of State has still not rectified the iniquity of the area cost adjustment. I was glad to hear the right hon. Gentleman say today that there is a possibility of future adjustments to the scheme, but that has not happened yet. It makes no sense to place a higher value on the educational needs of children living on one side of the Hampshire-Dorset border than on the other. After all, teachers' salaries are effectively identical in both areas.

The Government are simply starving local authorities of resources, and they are doing so deliberately. They are gambling for electoral gain. The Conservatives' strategy is clear: hammer local government to help pay for tax bribes and, if there is any backlash, blame the Opposition parties who run most councils anyway. They are making one last desperate effort to stop the Liberal Democrat tide sweeping the Conservatives from power right across the south of England in the May local elections, but it will not work. Nobody trusts the Conservative Government any more. Sleaze, incompetence and downright dishonesty have all taken their toll.

It is ironic that the party which promised tax cuts but delivered tax increases now attacks the Labour party for saying one thing and doing another. Tory Members who want to see evidence of what is happening need only look towards their own grass roots. The Conservative party's grip on local government has been decimated, not least by the Liberal Democrats, who have turned the political map yellow from Cornwall to Norfolk, from Cheltenham to Worthing and from the Isle of Wight to Harrogate.

**Mr. Curry:** The hon. Gentleman has his party's Treasury spokesman, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), sitting beside him. As he has given a long catalogue of the deficiencies of the settlement—in social services, community care, education, environment and highways—perhaps he would like to suggest by how much he thinks the Government's grant to local authorities is deficient. If there is to be a "Liberal Democrat tide" people will want to know how much it will cost.

**Mr. Rendel:** The Minister should have heard by now that we want to put a penny on income tax to pay for increased funding for education. That is our clear priority, and always has been. We have also said that we wish to release housing receipts to enable local authorities to spend more in other areas, but particularly on housing. We also want to change the whole method of financing local government by introducing a local income tax and by removing the cap.

Last May, the Liberal Democrats relegated the Conservatives to third place in local government—not just in terms of the number of councillors we have across the country but, more importantly, in terms of the number of councils we control. When will the Conservatives get the message? They are not trusted to run local authorities and in a matter of months it will become clear that they are not trusted to run central Government either.

It is ironic that a key factor in the breakdown of trust in Conservativism at every level of Government will be the way in which the Tory Government have treated local councils and local services. The Conservatives will deserve all that they get in the local elections in May and in the general election whenever it comes. But even that will be poor compensation for the rundown of local services over which they have presided. It certainly offers no immediate solution to my 90-year-old constituent who cannot bathe in comfort or safety, or to the parents of the autistic young man for whom a sufficiently cheap placement cannot be found. This financial settlement is a disgrace, and the fact that Ministers and other Conservative Members have the gall to commend it to the House shows how shoddy their politics have become.

7.5 pm

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The speech of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) was interesting, but I shall not be led down the route that he would have taken the House. The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that there have been no vicious cuts. I hope to be able to show him that there are cuts, but that they have been well hidden by the Government's presentation of the settlement.

In November, the Secretary of State for the Environment announced in Parliament the Government's financial settlement for 1996-1997, along with proposals for expenditure and capping-related matters. The

Secretary of State today confirmed the announcement. I want briefly to examine the main direction of the national settlement, and look at the implications of that settlement for my local authority, Barnsley metropolitan borough council.

The local authority associations told the Government in July that there was an ever-increasing gap between the demands placed on local authorities by central Government and what the local authorities are allowed to spend to meet those demands. That puts in a nutshell the dilemma in which local authorities find themselves.

In July last year, the local authority associations informed the Government in two comprehensive papers that increased demand plus the new priority requirements for spending would mean that local authority spending needs, as far as total standard spending is concerned, would be some £47.97 billion for 1996-1997. The Government proposal that we have heard today, however, is for £44.923 billion. The Secretary of State claimed at the Dispatch Box today, as he did back in November, that that represents an increase of 3.3 per cent. on the previous year.

The Minister will agree—the Secretary of State did not in any way challenge me when I raised this point—that that 3.3 per cent. is not, in effect, an increase at all. When the figure is adjusted to take account of the provision for local government restructuring, community care and the police, the adjusted increase is 2 per cent.

Given the Government's forecast of an inflation rate of 2.75 per cent. in 1996-97, that means an overall decrease of 0.75 per cent. rather than an increase. That is a clear example of the Government saying one thing and doing another. Local authorities will be in an horrendous position next year. Moreover, as the local authority associations pointed out, authorities had calculated that they would require £3 billion more than the Government propose to provide.

There are three ways in which local authorities can deal with the problem. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said that many authorities could use reserves. Others, however—including mine—have no reserves to use. Because Barnsley's SSA is only 1.9 per cent. above the capping level, we cannot take that route, either. Therefore, like many other authorities, we are left with the option of cutting services year on year, and that has begun to affect people's quality of life.

Barnsley metropolitan borough council has again been asked to make large cuts. Following last year's cuts, which amounted to £10 million, it is estimated that this year's will come to about £7 million. Barnsley's provisional SSA for 1996-97 is £159.335 million. I admit that that is 6.5 per cent. higher than the 1995-96 figure, but, after adjustments for community care and rail support funding, the underlying increase is just 2.8 per cent. Given that Government inflation forecast of 2.75 per cent. for next year, it becomes a freeze in real terms.

Barnsley is now 31st in the SSA league table, whereas last year it was 32nd, but we are still at a considerable disadvantage in comparison with most other metropolitan boroughs. In other boroughs, the average SSA per head is 12 per cent. higher than ours, which is £687. The average is £770.

Furthermore, as in previous years, the level of tolerance of spending above SSA varies widely. It is generally accepted that this method of calculating local government finance involves considerable imprecision, and that is borne out by the fact that some authorities with SSAs implausibly higher than Barnsley's are allowed to exceed them by 12.5 per cent. Barnsley is permitted an excess of only 1.9 per cent.

The average level of tolerance for metropolitan boroughs is 5.5 per cent. Barnsley, however, is restricted both to a low SSA and to a low level of tolerance. The Minister will, I think, accept that any rational system would allow authorities such as Barnsley a much higher level of tolerance, so that they could be flexible in meeting local demand. As that is not built into the system, however, there is some irrationality.

The equation for education spending is somewhat imbalanced. The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) gave the figures. The education SSA is purported to have increased by £740 million, but the overall SSA has increased by only £677 million. If the Secretary of State's equation is to be balanced, it will have a far-reaching effect on local authorities. Resources will have to be siphoned from other essential services in respect of which—as I have pointed out—there is a negative inflation provision. In Barnsley, many services provided for elderly people will be hit.

Barnsley makes the delivery of effective education a priority—it spends 45 per cent. of its budget on education each year—but its position is very similar to the national position that I have described. Increases in education spending that match the purported increase in the education SSA will rob other essential services.

Barnsley is probably more deprived than most other metropolitan boroughs of a similar size—

**Mr. David Clelland** (Tyne Bridge): More deprived than Westminster.

**Mr. Clapham:** Indeed.

More than 8 per cent. of adults of working age are registered permanently sick, compared with a national average of 4 per cent. Because Barnsley is traditionally an area of heavy industry and contains an aging population, a large proportion of the adult population are informal carers—12 per cent., according to an estimate that I saw last year. The pressure on social services and care in the community is greater than it is in most other districts, and the Minister should ensure that that is taken into account in the allocation of resources.

Between 1981 and 1991, total employment in Barnsley fell by 19 per cent; over the same period, there was a national increase of 3 per cent. In the decade between 1984 and 1994, more than 15,000 jobs were lost, and the gross domestic product in the Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council area is estimated to be 41 per cent. below the national average. Factors such as that should be paramount in the allocation of resources.

The Minister will be aware that Barnsley and hon. Members representing South Yorkshire have raised the issue of the supertram time and again. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) will be discussing the subject in his Adjournment debate on Monday, so I shall not go into the subject in too much detail. I understand that the debate is a matter for the Secretary of State for Transport, but the Minister may want to ensure that one of his colleagues is present.

**Mr. Curry:** The hon. Gentleman will know that I have had extensive exchanges on the supertram with Mr. Mike

*[Mr. Curry]*

Bower, the leader of Sheffield council. Equally, the other districts that are part of the transit authority have made representations. We are seeking clarification of some of the actions that might be possible and continuing that discussion with the authorities concerned—there has been a useful defining of options.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Adjournment debate on Monday will hopefully give an occasion at least to clarify those aspects that fall within the remit of the Department of Transport. I shall continue to pursue the matter. The hon. Gentleman will acknowledge, as will all the local players, that the number of people using the tram has been disappointing. The fundamental problem has been that the take-up—the number of passengers carried—has fallen below the estimates. That is the heart of the matter, and we could discuss it at some length.

**Mr. Clapham:** I welcome the Minister's response. I will not take the issue further, other than to say that it has caused unexpected damage to services in the district. That has been all the more disappointing because we understood that assurances had been given.

The real challenge for an area such as Barnsley is trying to restructure after the enormous dislocation caused by colliery closures. It is a problem that the council is determined to overcome. We must recognise, however, that Barnsley has a narrow industrial base, which needs to be expanded and diversified. Traditional industries, such as coal mining, placed too little emphasis on personal development. Upgrading skills and educational attainment is a necessity and has become a key objective for the authority. The rebuilding of infrastructure, much of it worn out, is crucial if we are to attract investment to sustain the area.

Those are formidable challenges for the local authority, but each year, as we start to come to terms with some of the issues—I accept that city challenge money has helped to restructure the local authority—local residents find that their quality of life is worsened because of the system of central Government finance, which is, to say the least, not sensitive to the characteristics of the community. I ask the Minister to review the finance mechanism for local authorities, to ensure that authorities such as Barnsley, which are in most need, are adequately assisted to move forwards.

7.22 pm

**Sir Peter Hordern** (Horsham): There was a leak from the Liberal Democrat Whips Office the other day. I am glad, therefore, that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) is here. Perhaps he can confirm some of the things that were leaked from that office. For example, on Liberal health policy, the document said:

> "Liberal Democrat policy on GP fundholding is found to be 'at best, confused, at worst duplicitous'.
>
> Their policy to put councillors in control of local health authorities is 'a barmy idea'."

On local government it states:

> "Noting that some of the parties' councillors are 'potentially a liability', the Liberal Democrat policy staff also believe that: 'Under the Lib-Dems local income tax you would pay income tax twice.'"

**Mr. Rendel:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me a chance to reply. He will realise that the point of that leaked document was to bring out the misrepresentations of our policy that we expected other parties to produce. That is precisely what he has done, exactly as expected.

**Sir Peter Hordern:** I have heard some pretty good Liberal Democrat stories in my time, but I have never yet heard them put out a policy for the sole purpose of arousing Conservative comment, which they can then dismiss. That is remarkable.

To turn to the subject of West Sussex, it is true that the Liberal Democrats have not held office before, and that they have had to play the part of opposition for more than 100 years, which can be a baleful exercise—*[Interruption.]*—as the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) knows from experience.

Last year, West Sussex had an extremely favourable revenue support grant settlement—the second best in the country—and the highest increase in standard spending assessment in the country. Not content with that, the Liberal Democrats proceeded to raid the balances, spend the cash and increase spending by more than 5.5 per cent. in one year. They did it in the knowledge that that sort of thing could not conceivably go on for ever. The public expenditure White Paper forecasts the likely flow of public spending for three years. Nevertheless, they behaved like children let loose in a sweetshop, and started to spend as if there were no tomorrow.

The results are there for all to see. The balances of West Sussex have been run down, and now the Liberal Democrats complain that the outlook is difficult. They complained months before the revenue support grant settlement was reached and wrote to the governors of every school in West Sussex complaining that school budgets would have to be cut by £25 million in the next two to three years—a specific figure.

Naturally, my colleagues in West Sussex were deluged with letters from very concerned governors and parents. There was no basis for their concern. I see that the hon. Member for Newbury—a Liberal Democrat—takes credit for that. It is exactly the kind of behaviour that people in West Sussex will never forget—a false alarm based on duplicitous behaviour.

West Sussex has received another reasonable settlement for the coming year, and it will be interesting to find out just how much of it is spent on education.

Nothing is more annoying to Members of Parliament than to find that, although a settlement is favourable for education and all local authorities are told that they should spend their money on education, they spend it not on that but on other things; and that, where they do, it goes to the local education office and not to the schools. My hon. Friend the Minister and his hon. Friends in the Government will have to find some way of ensuring that the money that Parliament proposes should be spent on education is spent on schools and I hope that he will mention that in his reply.

I do not know the best way to secure that aim, but it is important. One has only to consider the vast disparity between the amount of money that goes to schools and that which is kept by the local education authority in the different authorities. I hope that the Minister will look into that matter, and that, next year, when we return to the revenue support grant, some method will be found of ensuring that the money actually goes to schools.

There is, of course, no more important authority in the country than Horsham district council. Horsham is a totally blameless authority, with low spending. For many years, it was well below its SSA.

The population of Horsham has increased, and the level of Goverment support has been reduced. I do not complain about that, but matters become difficult if the cap is reduced in line with spending. It is difficult for a local authority to plan its future when it knows that the population is increasing, if it cannot take the total support from the Government in one year as the base for another. If it cannot do that, it is lost in the whims of the total SSA calculation, which no authority can accurately compute.

I do not complain about the SSA system, but low-spending authorities, typically those spending rather less than their SSAs, should not be penalised by the formula and the capping mechanism. My hon. Friend the Minister should examine that.

There is one other small point that appears to be inequitable. What if a council appeals against the business rates and finds that, due to the Inland Revenue revaluation, they are higher than originally expected? Horsham council—correctly, in my opinion—decided that the money should be returned to the council tax payers. After all, they should receive the benefit of a more accurate valuation.

It seems hard that Horsham council should be penalised because it has returned the money to the council tax payers rather than hanging on to it. Assessments should be based on the most accurate estimate of business rates, as corrected by the revaluation exercise. If there is a deficit for that reason, it should be made up in the revenue support grant. Horsham council acted properly in returning the benefits of the revaluation exercise to council tax payers. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider that, especially in determining the SSA for Horsham council next year.

Many hon. Members—especially those outside its scope—are concerned about the area cost adjustment. They say that it is disgraceful. I think that the area cost adjustment is much maligned and fully justified. Not enough of my colleagues from the south of England stick up for it. It is an excellent refinement that accurately reflects the extra costs of West Sussex and other parts of the south. I notice that the chairman of the review body comes from Edinburgh. I trust that he will remember that he is a Scot—at least, I hope he is—and therefore strictly neutral.

**Mr. Curry:** I hope that my right hon. Friend will forgive me, but the chairman is an Englishman, working in Scotland. The other members of the review panel are a Scot and an Ulsterman. Local authorities in England had difficulty in agreeing on an Englishman to serve on it.

**Sir Peter Hordern:** It would have been much better if a member of the review panel had come from Sussex. It should be strengthened by someone whose area gets the area cost adjustment. The panel will naturally proceed on its way with all due academic detachment, but it would have been better if it had been able to take into account the views of local authorities in the south which benefit from the admirable instrument of the area cost adjustment.

7.33 pm

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): I want to discuss the standard spending assessment for North East Derbyshire district council. There are certain peculiarities about North East Derbyshire that need to be described. Sometimes, the worst case should be considered to test a formula. The SSA formula is inadequate and hits North East Derbyshire in almost every respect.

One problem with the formula is the shape of North East Derbyshire. It is a sort of C-shape that wraps round Chesterfield, which creates problems. It is accepted by the boundary commission as a sensible and viable authority, but the formula creates some difficulties. For instance, the head offices of North East Derbyshire district council are in Chesterfield, which is in another district. That means that standard spending assessment drifts into Chesterfield, even when the councillors and officials of North East Derbyshire work there. That shows that the formula is nonsense.

In North East Derbyshire, many of those fortunate enough to be in employment go to neighbouring authorities such as Sheffield and Chesterfield to work. The net outflow of population is 18 per cent., which is high. We have heard that Westminster has a net inflow of 81 per cent. and gets all sorts of SSA moneys as a result. We are at the other end of the spectrum but there does not seem to be any link between the figures that are taken into account for what is called enhanced population and the services that have to be provided.

The services of a district council chiefly involve people who live permanently in that district, although they may travel for work or entertainment to other areas. Council planning, housing, refuse collection and other costs tend to relate to the services that are provided not for the transient population but for the fixed population.

North East Derbyshire is a socially mixed area. There is a clear distinction between the western and eastern sides. The east end is more working class than the west end. Classically, when Conservatism was strong, the west of the constituency was a strong Conservative area and the east was strong Labour. This affects the operation of SSA because the wealthier elements on the western side are placed upon the backs of the poorer people in the eastern side when the formula is being worked out.

What my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said about Westminster has been attacked by some Conservative Members as being obsessive. That case is fascinating to us in North East Derbyshire because Clay Cross, where councillors were debarred and surcharged, is there. The scandal in Westminster involves £29 million. The Clay Cross case involved expenditure on behalf of its residents that amounted to something like £60,000. The second group of 11 Clay Cross councillors were debarred over an amount of just over £2,000. They had to be dealt with jointly and severally.

We in North East Derbyshire are very interested in what goes on in Westminster. That case involves £28 million, while the SSA for North East Derbyshire district council is £7.3 million. A bit of that, handled properly and sent to a needy area, would have been used very well by us.

The formula for the standard spending assessment is covered on page 53 of the booklet, "Local Government Finance Report (England) 1996/97". The formula first considers population, which I have already discussed. North East Derbyshire's total resident population is 99,180. That gives, under the formula, a standard spending assessment of £8.4 million. As I have said, when

*[Mr. Harry Barnes]*

the sums are worked out, the amount shrinks to £7.3 million. To start with, we lose £368,000 because of the population's movements during the daytime into surrounding areas. We receive little in terms of night stays and day visitors because, although we are near to national park territory and a bit of such territory clips the end of the district, the region is not used greatly for such a purpose. People from outside use certain facilities: they come from surrounding areas to go out for evening meals in Dronfield. Generally, however, the region is not able to supply the type of facilities that draw in such extra revenue.

The next factor to consider is population density. That is considered within "enumeration districts". North East Derbyshire is not doing as badly as it has in the past. Previously, wards, not enumeration districts, were taken into account. Because North East Derbyshire region was a C-shape and the wards cut across it, we managed at one and the same time to finish bottom of a table of population density and bottom of a table of population sparsity of comparable authorities as provided by the Audit Commission. The system made calculations on that basis, but dustbin collection is difficult both in rural areas and in highly concentrated urban areas. We probably had more problems in dustbin collection than many other areas because of the region's shape and we had the costs that went with them.

Thankfully, there has been some adjustment in both the sparsity criteria—although we are worried that some of that will be dropped—and in the density criteria. It shows that one can change the formulae to make slight improvements. Those, however, are minor compared with the Herculean task that we face when presented with the consequences of the formula.

The next set of criteria is the social index. Under that index, North East Derbyshire loses £1 million. We do not score well in terms of the proportion of persons sharing accommodation, with more than one person per room or the proportion of people living in flats. The building, especially by Clay Cross urban district council, of decent council housing in the region has meant that resources to tackle its problems are not available.

North East Derbyshire does not score either in terms of the proportion of residents who were born outside the United Kingdom, in the Republic of Ireland, the European Community, the Commonwealth or the United States of America because it has one of smallest ethnic minority populations of any district in England. I do not question the criteria of ethnic provision being considered, but we do not gain anything from such criteria, which are surmounted by other problems that people face. That is not taken into account. The homelessness provisions are based on the 1991 census, but it is getting worse. The current homelessness level is not being considered.

That loss of £1 million is serious to North East Derbyshire and is not justified by the circumstances and conditions there. There must be an adjustment in the formula.

Then there is the economic index. At one time, such an index did not exist and issues such as unemployment were not considered. In areas such as Gosforth Valley, which is part of Dronfield, and Ashover, which is a big rural area, the unemployment level is down to about 4 per cent. In Danesmoor, Clay Cross, Renishaw and Holmewood and Heath, however, it is 20 per cent.

Criteria involving unemployment and long-term unemployment, housing benefit claimants, lone parent families and the mortality rate of people under 75 score highly on the eastern side of the district, but the numbers are diluted considerably in the western area. Therefore, we lose on those criteria as well, even though strong needs exist in the eastern district.

After we work through the above calculations, we come to something like the figure that we started out from: an £8.5 million SSA. However, as with all other authorities, North East Derbyshire is subject to the scaling factor. The figures are multiplied by 0.93021227385—the scientific precision of the Government's scaling factor is incredible. It is worked out in terms of how the authority fits the formula into the total amount that will go towards the differing areas. The figure is multiplied—or reduced because the multiplication is by a figure under 1—by 0.93 rounded up, which means that the amount drops to about £8 million.

Last year, the scaling factor was 0.9979, which was reasonable. Why suddenly has the scaling factor been chopped by such a dramatic amount, leading to considerable cuts? Other cuts arise because, in the formula, amounts of money are transferred to the county council from the district council. Some extra money comes in from rent allowances and interest receipts, but, in the end, we have an SSA of £7.3 million, which is a serious cut on the level that existed the previous year. It is a 7.3 per cent., appropriately, cut on last year's figures.

That figure does not take inflation into account. At no time have the Government produced any of the figures that we are discussing in terms of their real value, comparing one year's monetary values with another. They say things about Derbyshire such as, "It has done very well in terms of education. It has had a 4.7 per cent. increase". But that is not true because the inflation rate has been 3.2 per cent. After doing the maths, the real increase is I think about 1.1 per cent. Even taking that into account, other reasons exist for criticising the Government. Derbyshire is already spending beyond that level on education. That means that, with the Government's figure, there will be no increase in the education budget, which is part of the county council's provision.

North East Derbyshire is suffering an 11 per cent. cut in its SSA—the amount that it is expected to spend. The new provisional capping levels produced in the documents today are only marginally above the SSA for last year—the figures are almost identical. That means that, even if the authority pushes up the council tax considerably, it will reach only last year's figures, which do not mean the same this year because they have been eaten away by inflation.

What are we supposed to do? We are supposed to get a bit of money from the business rate. After inflation, the business rate provision is much the same. In the connection with the business rate, the formula works in that way.

The rate support grant is down by £621,000—nearly 30 per cent., taking inflation into account. That is a ghastly position, and it is well worth contrasting with that of Westminster. If the funding formula that operated for

Westminster had operated for North-East Derbyshire, instead of charging council tax we would return £759 to each home.

What are we to do? We must try to make good the shortfall by increasing council tax. If we do so at the level that the standard spending assessment suggests, we shall nevertheless fall short by about 11 per cent.

I am sorry that I have had to produce so many figures, but they are worth producing to show the way in which the formula operates. We have known for a long time what is wrong with the formula as it applies to North-East Derbyshire. The enhanced population is a reduced population. The economic and social factors do not take into account needs in the area. Greater flexibility and movement are needed in the operation of the formula.

We suffered previously from the nonsense of the sparsity and density factors. Even if those problems had all been overcome, they would continue to affect us from the past, because all sorts of services have had to be cut or increased revenue has had to be raised by the council tax and poll tax, simply because of the pressures that existed on us. We need to be able to recover from the position in which that nonsense has placed us.

No one could accuse North-East Derbyshire of being a profligate authority. It is the successor authority to Chesterfield rural district council, Dronfield urban district council and Clay Cross urban district council. Clay Cross urban district council, which I fully supported in its battles, could be regarded as seeking to defend its community. If that council was regarded as profligate, North-East Derbyshire has not acted similarly. North-East Derbyshire has sought to operate respectably. It has been obliged to operate fully within the rules and has not at any time created any problems that might be used by the Government to denigrate its activity.

The Government denigrate Derbyshire county council with great exaggeration. I wish that I had the time now to go through the accounts of Derbyshire county council and the criteria that are taken into account when calculating its standard spending assessment, because only part of its provision is covered by what I have said. Different considerations apply to the police and education.

Police is a problem. Derbyshire police authority is asking the appropriate Minister to visit the area, because we need our certificate of competence returned and we need the resources to achieve that.

I wish to place on record the importance of North-East Derbyshire. The Government should consider it closely to rectify the nonsense of the formula that is applied to it. Although we do not have destitution throughout the area on as wide a scale as might exist in other areas, the formula does not fit us in any way and tells against us time after time.

7.52 pm

**Mr. Sebastian Coe** (Falmouth and Camborne): I am delighted to speak in the debate. I shall not detain the House for more than a few moments. I am pleased to be able to welcome the local government settlement for 1996-97. I do so for local and national reasons; it is impossible to divorce the two.

Virtually everything that we, as constituency Members of Parliament, hope for and promote—and our constituents' aspirations—depends on the way in which we consider our spending nationally. That impinges on inflation, on tax policy, on ensuing interest rate policy and—although there has been little mention of it during the debate—on the percentage of gross domestic product that the Government take out of the economy. Those issues must be considered.

I welcome the settlement in local terms because the three key beneficiaries of this year's settlement were education, health, in terms of our care in the community settlement, and the police—law and order. Hon. Members know that those three issues, especially in my constituency but in constituencies the length and breadth of the country, have considerable resonance at the moment.

I was interested in some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who spoke about the local government settlement in Cornwall and adopted a broad-brush approach. He is the Liberal Democrat spokesman. It is understandable that he will speak about the county. However, the Government's settlement for Cornwall, at more than 3 per cent., was generally accepted to be a good one. It was higher than that of any comparable county—and the national average was about 2 per cent. The education budget in the county increased last year by 5.6 per cent. That, in hard cash terms, is an extra £8.7 million going into county education against the background of a national increase of 4.5 per cent.

**Mr. Betts:** The hon. Gentleman has said that the settlement for Cornwall was more than 3 per cent. As I understand it, the SSA increase is 3.1 per cent. but the actual increase in grant is 2.6 per cent. As that increase in grant is less than the rate of inflation, and less than the teachers' pay increase award and will not cover the cost of increased numbers of children, does the hon. Gentleman advise the county council to cut education, to cut other services, not to fund the teachers' pay settlement or to increase the council tax by more than the rate of inflation? What does he advise?

**Mr. Coe:** I will not suggest any of those. I am suggesting that there are savings to be made. I am talking not about huge savings but about savings.

It is interesting that, at this stage every year, we get into this ritual dance. I have been in the House for three years. I remember exactly the same debate this time last year, prompted by Liberal Democrat Members. Bogus surveys shot around the county, demonstrating in no uncertain terms that every Cornish child was £100 worse off and more undervalued than anywhere else in the country. We woke up on the morning of the settlement to be told that there would be mass redundancies. Radio Cornwall camped outside county hall. At the end of the day, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) knows full well, there were two and a half redundancies in the teaching profession in the county. There was no mass loss of jobs in county hall.

We must move away from the meaningless argument that the index of assessment for local authorities is simply how large the increase in the internal directory is from one year to the next. We must talk about not only inputs but outputs. There must be some balance in the argument.

**Mr. Rendel:** I am not quite sure what the hon. Gentleman meant when he replied to the previous intervention. It sounded as though he thought that he

*[Mr. Rendel]*

could enable the circle to be squared, so to speak, by finding savings in unspecified areas of council spending, so that he could use those savings to increase education spending in the way that he would hope.

If that is what the hon. Gentleman meant, I would point him to the remarks made by the Secretary of State earlier in the debate. Such savings, when they are spent on something else, are not savings at all, according to the Secretary of State.

**Mr. Coe:** No. The point that I choose to make—and this is grown-up politics—is that the hon. Gentleman's county is run by the Liberal Democrats. It is, if I may say so, democracy. The council will have to decide priorities. That is no different from what Ministers do every day of the week. The priorities are simple. The hon. Gentleman must decide what the expenditure priorities are. His county was given the tools by the Government in key areas of expenditure. It is up to those people who represent my constituents at county level to determine those priorities. It is ludicrous to suggest that there is any process other than that.

**Mr. Harris:** Did my hon. Friend by any chance hear, as a number of us heard one day last week, the Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman blaming the Government on the "Today" programme for excessive borrowing and public expenditure? Does my hon. Friend have the difficulty that I have in squaring such remarks with the remarks of the hon. Member for Newbury and any Liberal Democrat spokesmen in the House? Whenever they are on their feet, they call for more Government expenditure.

**Mr. Coe:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. As he knows full well, the priorities within Cornwall at county level are those of a Liberal Democrat-controlled council. They have to make their choices and set their priorities.

I do not naively or coyly suggest that Cornwall's education settlement last year was anything other than tight. I know that it was. I and my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives and for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) have close links with schools in our constituencies. I have a parliamentary education forum and I meet head teachers from all my schools at least four times a year. I am open about last year's settlement. I was told in no uncertain terms by head teachers last year that they were pushed. They had to dig deep. They did not get rid of teachers.

I pay tribute to the quality of teaching in the county of Cornwall and the quality of governors of the schools. They had to make some difficult decisions and they made them well. Education in the county did not suffer. This year I am delighted that the settlement has been significantly more generous, in an economic climate that has allowed it.

I wish to draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister a concern that was drawn to my attention and that of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives in a meeting with Kerrier district council two Fridays ago about its settlement this year. My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that within the constituency of St. Ives lies the Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose. It is among the largest helicopter training schools in western Europe. It is a major provider within NATO cover. It is also a mainstay of the local economy. Research has shown that the defence sector supports 40 per cent. of the local economy of the Helston travel-to-work area, where many of my constituents are based. That is three times higher than the contribution of the defence sector to Plymouth. The air station contributes some £50 million to the district economy annually and to the economic well-being of west Cornwall.

As a result of the reductions in armed forces expenditure some difficult decisions have had to be taken not only as part of "Front Line First" but as a consequence of the peace dividend. RNAS Culdrose is being rationalised and the number of personnel is being reduced, not by huge numbers. Thank goodness, Culdrose has not been affected as badly as some defence establishments, but a significant reduction has been made. The effect on the local economy, which is already hard pressed, is difficult and damaging.

The area is already identified in Department of the Environment figures as the 17th or 18th worst unemployment blackspot in the United Kingdom. It is identified and highlighted in the Department's index of local conditions. In such circumstances, the rationale which purports to lie behind the SSA would dictate that the district's needs should increase to reflect the need for higher spending, greater social need and the commensurate reduction in the economic base. Instead, the reduction in the population as a result of the reduced number of service personnel, has worked right through the SSA formula to give us less support. I hope that the Minister can examine that issue. It was raised, sensibly in my view, by my local authority officials. I hope that my hon. Friend is at least able to reconsider some of the issues that are raised by that matter.

Two key features of recent Government policy can and will change the face of local provision in some important areas. The first is the private finance initiative. I hope that within the next year or so we in Falmouth and Camborne, particularly in Falmouth in the south of my constituency, will have access to a properly funded and resourced community hospital. We have a hospital, but within the local arguments and toing and froing which is always necessary, we are looking to build a new community hospital in Falmouth and Penryn.

It is my hope that that can and will be pushed forward by the PFI. It is perfectly reasonable to use that type of partnership to reduce the waiting list that often exists for money for such projects. I hope that the private finance initiative can help. I know that there is considerable local support for that.

The second feature is the city challenge initiative. I was interested to read a speech made by the Leader of the Opposition in Southwark cathedral the other night. He welcomed the city challenge initiative as one of the major factors which had helped got rid of the Hulme housing estate in Manchester. A great deal of revisionist rewriting of history takes place on the Opposition Benches. I should point out that the Hulme housing estate was knocked down as a result of a decision made back in 1991 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), now the Deputy Prime Minister, to push forward with city challenge.

I do not wish to tax the House with the mechanism behind city challenge, which involved trading companies and various other partnerships, but it is fair to say that for

the Labour party to claim that it was a huge success for either Manchester council or a new idea from the Labour party in local authority provision is—I am trying not to use the word "hypocritical". It may have been ignorance or simply carelessness. This was a decision made by a Conservative Secretary of State, supported by good, solid, Conservative policy.

I welcome the debate, and I welcome this year's financial settlement for the national reasons that I have identified and, more importantly, for the real benefits that it has brought to my constituency and the county of Cornwall.

8.9 pm

**Mr. George Stevenson** (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Despite Conservative Members' increasingly desperate attempts to cover up what is really going on, we should state quite openly what the proposals represent. They are a continuation of a Government policy that has systematically undermined local government for many years. The orders will further undermine local government's ability to provide vital services for local people. That is the reality of the situation, as exposed today in the contributions of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

I argue that that Government policy is motivated by two basic, and—I believe—flawed, political objectives. The first is a year-on-year reduction in the resources available to local government. I know that the Government would like us to believe that the world began in 1992, but some of us have longer memories than that. We have seen a year-on-year reduction in the resources available to local government, while at the same time the Government have embarked on what can only be described as a propaganda campaign. All hon. Members know that local government resources have been cut dramatically, yet the Government have tried to shift the blame on to local authorities. That is what Government Members have done this evening and no doubt the trend will continue.

The second fundamentally flawed political objective is the Government's desire to take control of local government activities. We hear constantly how Conservative Members are in favour of freedom of choice and of national and local accountability. Yet, over a period of time, the Government have taken control of the activities of local government—they have effectively nationalised local government—in a quite breathtaking manner.

The inevitable result of that systematic Government policy is the on-going crisis in vital services, such as education, social services and housing—to name only three very important areas. Central Government control of local government activities has resulted in historic blunders, such as the poll tax, for which generations in this country will continue to pay. That measure was a direct result of the Government's preoccupation with centralisation and their determination to centralise and nationalise local government activities. The Government's policy is based on the philosophy that central Government are best placed to determine local service provision.

We could compare the efficiency of local authorities, and I readily accept that many arguments could be advanced to develop such a debate. However, we should not allow such arguments to cloud the fact that the Government have made a fundamental mistake: they believe that the mandarins of Whitehall know best what the people of Stoke-on-Trent should have, what they should be doing and how much they should be spending. It has nothing to do with the Government's controlling the national economy—we accept that that is an important argument. However, when more than 80 per cent. of local government expenditure is controlled by central Government, that is not only damaging for local service provision but strikes at the heart of our constitution.

Government propaganda in the past 16 years has sought to discredit local government, and it has forced some very effective local government services into oblivion. The Government have also tried to convince people that the local authorities have caused all of the current problems, but they have failed in that endeavour.

I am particularly impressed by the way in which the Government have been hoist by their own petard. The Government have sought to blame local authorities for the successive reductions in education expenditure imposed on our schools—particularly last year's savaging of the education resource. However, parents are involved in their schools and I am sure that Government Members have been surprised by the way in which parents have turned round and said, "We don't believe the Government any more. We know what is going on here. We know that you are to blame and we are not prepared to tolerate it any longer." The parents know where the responsibility lies for the crisis in our vital services.

The local government finance proposals signal the Government's intention to continue to perpetrate an elaborate confidence trick on the public. The proposals do not suggest ways of dealing effectively with the anomalies in the system. Many such anomalies have been referred to in the debate today, but I shall refer to what I believe to be the most serious and discriminatory anomaly in the present system.

The right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) referred to the area cost adjustment and the way in which it benefits the southern counties. He argued that it should not be tinkered with. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman: it should not be tinkered with, it should be changed radically. Before I detail that serious anomaly, I make it very clear that I accept that some cost differences must be reflected; no one is arguing that the area cost adjustment should be eliminated.

I have six secondary schools in my constituency, one of which receives £340 per pupil less than a secondary school in Surrey. I do not wish to pick on Surrey, but it has more or less the same urban-rural mix as Staffordshire and it is also very comparable in other ways. When there is a difference of £340 per pupil in the secondary sector and a difference of £220 per pupil in the primary sector, I believe that the system is not reflecting the legitimate differences in the cost of providing given levels of service. It is blatant discrimination, and that abuse should be adjusted—if not removed—as quickly as possible.

I welcome the fact that the Government have established an investigation into the matter. However, I am disappointed that, after all the banging on the Minister's door for three years, he has only now been forced, kicking and screaming, to set up the inquiry. The "Local Government Finance Report (England) 1996/972" contains the education formula:

"The results of (a) and (b) are added together and multiplied by area cost adjustment for education;"

*[Mr. George Stevenson]*

That is for primary education. There is another formula for secondary education, the result of which must also be multiplied by the area cost adjustment. The same applies to personal social services, other social services, the police, fire and so on. I estimate that if that serious anomaly were addressed, in my constituency alone, some £15 million would be available for education. One has to multiply by all those other vital services. We are talking about a loss of hundreds of millions of pounds in Staffordshire alone because of such discrimination.

I hope that the Government will tackle that serious anomaly quickly and act on the report. I hope that they do not postpone matters until after the next election. I hope that my cynicism does not get the better of me. It would be a tragedy if the Government were to succumb to that cynical view and defer any action.

As I said earlier, these proposals are a con trick. For example, the Government insist that the proposals represent an increase in resources over the past year. We should examine that claim in a little more detail. According to the Government's publication, there is an increase of 4.4 per cent. in the education SSA control total—that is about £754 million. That does not replace the savage cuts of about £860 million that were imposed last year. How can that be described as an increase? It bears no resemblance to what local authorities have been forced to spend on education simply to maintain the service. Many Conservative Members have claimed that there is to be an increase of 4 per cent. but, when one takes into account the figures I have mentioned, one can see that that is not true.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) referred to local authority reserves. I nearly fell prey to the temptation of agreeing with some of what he said—I resisted. However, he made one valid point when he said that his local authority—I believe that he was referring to his authority—had been spending out of its reserves. Presumably, like many other authorities, it was simply trying to maintain services in the face of Government-imposed cuts. It could be argued that using those reserves camouflages what the Government are doing to our services. However, when the resources available to local authorities simply will not maintain those services, they have little alternative but to use those reserves.

In Staffordshire last year, the county council used £7 million from its reserves to maintain something like an acceptable education system. This year, it will face similar problems. Staffordshire county council put in a bid for £17.5 million to maintain school buildings. The Government did not deny that the county council had made a good case. However, they simply drew a pencil line through it and said that the council could spend only £2.3 million to maintain its school buildings. So buildings that desperately need to be improved will continue to fall into disrepair.

Another important point is that, by using those reserves, local authorities show that they are attempting to maintain services in a responsible manner in the face of continued Government cuts in resources. I praise local authorities that do that. Like everybody else, I know that it is no solution, but it compares notably with what the Government did last year when, after agreeing to a teacher's pay increase, they ran away from it. That was a major contributor to the problems faced by local authorities last year.

Local education authorities, schools and parents are only now beginning to realise that the Government's promise of more resources for education is nothing more than cruel deceit. The Government will be made aware of that realisation when parents begin to recognise exactly what is in store for the education service.

I want to talk about social services where, if one could believe it possible, things are even worse. The SSA control total for personal social services is, according to the Government, to be increased by 0.7 per cent.—a miserly £51 million. I accept that there is £647 million of special transitional grant. The Government are actually saying that because they do not intend to provide any more resources for social services—there is to be a cut—local authorities will have to use some of the special transitional grant money to maintain the services demanded by the local population.

Stoke-on-Trent city council is in my constituency. During successive meetings with the Minister of State and others, for which we are grateful, they have accepted that it is a reasonable, effective and efficient local authority. Despite that, its rate support grant is to be cut by 12 per cent. and its capping limit will, effectively, be frozen at last year's figure. When the Minister responds, I want him to explain why, when the Government are talking about a relaxation in capping limits, Stoke-on-Trent has the same figure as last year. That needs to be answered.

We shall ensure that the public are fully aware of who is responsible for the continuing attack on their services and they will not be conned any more by the Government's desperate camouflage. There is only one small light at the end of the tunnel, which is that these proposals, like other Government policies, will hasten the Government's destruction at the next general election.

8.27 pm

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): The nine people in the Strangers Gallery probably share the view that the Labour party's anger over this issue has seemed rather half hearted and that, if things were as bad as it has tried to claim, the debate would have been better attended. In its heart, the Labour party knows that this is really a fair settlement for local government, as it represents an appropriate level of revenue spending for local authorities for next year of £44.9 billion, which is a 3.3 per cent. increase.

It would be a good idea to look at how councils make their budgets. Twenty two years ago, when I was first elected to a council, I could not believe how they made budgets, and I still cannot believe it. I have with me Harrow's budget document. It is very pretty, contains many different colours and is very heavy. I have one recommendation to make to councillors—do not read it.

**Mr. Dobson:** Does the hon. Gentleman realise—after all, he has not been here all day—that if he votes for the rate support grant settlement it will mean substantial help for Westminster? If his borough of Harrow were to receive the same amount per head as Westminster, it could pay a rebate of £436 to each council tax payer. If it were to receive the same help per pupil as Westminster gets

from the education settlement, it could employ an additional 470 teachers this year. Is it really a good settlement for those whom he represents?

**Mr. Hughes:** That is typical of the smug cover story we hear from the Labour party; it is the only act it has. Everyone knows that the cost of running services in central London is very different from that in outer London or anywhere else. If it were not, why would so many Labour boroughs get larger grants?

If the people of Wandsworth received the same level of grant as the people of Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth could rebate £1,000 a head. In Camden, where the SSA for the coming year is £219 million—

**Mr. Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): Get to Harrow.

**Mr. Hughes:** I shall come to Harrow in a minute and deal with matters there in some detail. When the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) intervened, I thought he would explain why, in 1994-95, Camden took £4 million out of its education budget to cover bad debts incurred from interest rate swaps—an idea invented by the then Labour party local government officer who now sits in this House. That action had nothing to do with education. Will the hon. Gentleman intervene again and tell us why Camden did that?

**Mr. Dobson:** If Camden is so bad in its spending on education, why are its education results far and away the best in inner London and about 10 times as good as Westminster's? Camden came second in the Government's national league table; Westminster came about 91st.

**Mr. Hughes:** The hon. Gentleman should keep that information from his Front-Bench colleagues or they will be flocking to Camden. I know of no Labour Member who has taken his children away from a Conservative authority to send them to a school in a Labour authority, although many of them—such as the shadow Home Secretary, the shadow Health Secretary and the leader of his party—have done the reverse.

**Mr. Dobson:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Camden council, with its excellent education service, is a net importer of a substantial number of pupils, including many from the Tory borough of Brent?

**Mr. Hughes:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's figures are right, but not many people have the same rosy opinion of Camden. Of course, he has always been satisfied with his own information.

**Mr. Vaz:** What does that mean?

**Mr. Hughes:** It is clear what it means. I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Opposition Front Bench on one of his rare visits.

For people who have never been involved in the local government budget-making process, I should explain that it is a little like the notes my children send to Santa Claus. The difference is that at least their notes have pretty pictures on them. The similarity is quite stark; the budget-making process is a wish list, and everything that is not granted is described as a cut. A council thinks of something that it wants in the coming year and puts it on the wish list. When the Government say that it can have a relatively generous settlement, but not enough to cover everything on the wish list, that is translated as a Government cut. Everybody knows that that is not true.

In Harrow, the controlling Liberal group, with the support of the Labour party, has been banging on about a so-called programme for £20 million-worth of cuts. It is not true and no one believes it to be true. The Liberals are trying to frighten people and they are targeting the vulnerable. For example, they are saying that there will be a cut in the transport service that takes people to handicapped clubs and so on—at a cost of £67,000, from memory. To get people on their side, they are targeting vulnerable people and saying that the services they care about will be cut.

The Liberals are also saying that there will be a cut in the money for schools. Harrow's SSA this year is £147.9 million. For 1996-97, it will be £152.1 million—an increase of £2.8 million. No one is suggesting that that will give Harrow money to throw around, but if it cuts the money for schools on the basis of that settlement, it can only be because the Liberal group chooses to do so.

As a parent, I recognise the importance of good quality education. We all want to ensure that our children receive the best education possible. A starting point is the money that the Government allow councils to spend. For Harrow in the coming year, it will be just over £73 million, a 3.7 per cent. increase on 1995-96. I am pleased that, when money is tight, the Government are giving such a high priority to education.

It is for Harrow council, however, to decide whether to spend that additional money on schools, as I urge it to do, or to retain it at the centre. Some of the items on its great big wish list involve employing more staff at the centre. The council does not have the balance right. It is clear that the new money, as well as a larger share of the existing budget, should go to Harrow schools. It would then be for governing bodies to decide whether to purchase services from the education authority. The most important point to remember is that any cuts made to the delegated budgets for Harrow schools would be the result of the controlling Liberal group deciding to do that. I shall continue to do what I can to prevent it from doing so.

The council's story is that it already spends above SSA on Harrow schools. I am sure that that is right, but if it spends above SSA on education, it must spend below SSA in other areas.

**Ms Armstrong:** No.

**Mr. Hughes:** I am not quoting Government figures—they come from the Association of London Authorities, a Labour-controlled authority. If the hon. Lady disagrees with it, she must talk to her Labour party friends.

If Harrow spends more on education, it must spend less on other areas, otherwise it cannot get within the capping limits set by the Government last year. With the additional money, there is no reason for the Liberal group not to continue education spending at the same level.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) tried to brush over the impact of the special transitional grant for social services. The effect on Harrow is not just the 0.7 per cent. increase in the personal social

*[Mr. Hughes]*

services element of the SSA—it will have £30.7 million to spend next year, an increase of 6.6 per cent. in cash terms. That is a £17.663 million, or 92 per cent., real-terms increase on 1990-91—a large rise over a short time. In two areas that everybody agrees are priorities, Harrow has been given extra money. It is for the authority to decide how to spend the money and whether to make nasty cuts in transport for the mentally handicapped and delegated school budgets or to review its expenses.

The first act of the incoming Liberal council was to increase councillors' expenses. The council has a choice.

**Mr. Stevenson:** The hon. Gentleman made a point about personal social services which related to my claim that the Government are trying to hoodwink the public. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a 0.7 per cent. increase is a cut in real terms, and that to include the special transitional grant required to provide for services transferred to local authorities is dishonest?

**Mr. Hughes:** No, not for one moment. In cash terms, Harrow council will have 6.6 per cent. extra to spend on social services this coming year. It is fanciful to suggest that the council will have to cut certain social services. That claim is designed only to scare people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and I have been in discussion with my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, and I place on record our gratitude for the courteous way in which he listened to our points and for the action that he agreed. Our discussions related not to the coming year's SSA but to Harrow council's belief that there has historically been an underestimate of the amount that it should spend.

Harrow has a large number of children approaching the age of five and the council is concerned about the associated expense of providing new classrooms or a new school. In the 40 years following the last war, the calculation of the number of five-year-olds who would present themselves at first school in the borough was broadly right, but for the past four or five years it has proved to be a gross underestimate. Nobody knows whether we are dealing with a prolonged bulge or a trend, which makes planning difficult. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East and I made the point to my hon. Friend the Minister that that phenomenon should be taken into account in considering the money to be made available over the next few years.

Local authorities are concerned about the effect of changes to the benefit rules—which, when it is convenient to Labour, have cross-party support. Some current Department of Social Security expenditure will be transferred to local authorities. The Social Security Committee report published a week ago stated that local authority associations and the Secretary of State should quickly reach agreement, so that everybody is clear as to the source of the funding required.

Although that development is acknowledged in the SSA for the longer term, it does not take into account an influx of refugees into Harrow or any other borough. Most London boroughs, if not all, suffer from the same problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East and I urged my hon. Friend the Minister to take account of that factor and to consider what could be done to help at the front end when local authorities have to meet the cost of persons who are given refuge.

Harrow council believes that the borough has the second largest elderly population in London. There is concern as to whether the SSA takes account of that fact. The cost of children in care seems to have escalated over the past few years, and Harrow's capital calculation is undoubtedly the lowest in London. That is historical, and due to the money spent previously.

I am delighted at yesterday's announcement of the capital challenge pilot scheme, in which all local authorities will start from an even base. They will be able to bid depending on the merit of their schemes. I hope that the pilot scheme proves successful and that a larger proportion of capital will be allocated that way. If Harrow is able to make a strong and technically proficient bid, as I am sure it will, it should do well.

My hon. Friend the Minister has offered a meeting at technical level between officials and representatives of the council, to determine the factual position in considering Harrow's SSA in coming years.

People who rely on local government services and parents with children in schools should be clear about the message from the two main Opposition parties. That message is, "No more money." Opposition Members complain about Government funding and follow the rather disreputable advice that used to be given by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) when he was Labour's campaigns organiser, which was to describe Government policies in such terms as to lead the public to believe what they thought would be Labour party policy. Labour Members have been indulging in that strategy tonight. When one gets through the mire and sees through the Opposition's criticisms, it is clear that there would be no extra money from Labour or the Liberals. Labour's insistence on scrapping compulsory competitive tendering is disgraceful, and a capitulation to the unions that control the Labour party.

Even Sir Jeremy Beecham realises that substantial savings and improvements in the quality of services have been brought about by compulsory competitive tendering. It is a pity that it must be compulsory. Local government should have realised for itself the benefits that CCT could bring, but it did not and had to be compelled. Labour's irresponsible pledge to scrap CCT would increase bills, or reduce spending in other areas to compensate for the extra money that councils would have to spend on services taken back in-house.

This thinly attended, low-key debate is testimony to the fact that Labour's thin arguments have been rumbled. Everybody knows that the Labour party is embarrassed by its record in local government, that it has no strategy, that it would not put any extra money into local government, and that, after this debate, it will crawl away and hope that people will forget everything that it has said.

8.49 pm

**Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): I shall not follow what the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) said, but I admire his skill in making a little political padding go a long way. It was fascinating to watch him stretch his speech out—presumably in direct ratio to the unavailability of Conservative Members in the Chamber to defend the financial settlement.

The Secretary of State started us on the political track with a speech that was delivered with almost religious fervour. It was religious because so much that was blatantly political was put over in such a sanctimonious fashion. It was the performance of the Elmer Gantry of local government and I do not want to follow him down that road.

The Government are clearly putting extra responsibility on local government, depriving it of the financial means to fulfil those responsibilities, and blaming Labour and Liberal local government for the inevitable increase in council tax—the Chief Secretary to the Treasury estimates that council taxes will rise by 8 per cent.—while presenting themselves as benignly and beneficently cutting direct taxation. That is the tactic: it is as clear as day follows night.

I want to talk about the fate of my authority and of the new unitary authorities, which are a unique and very important feature of local government. We shall be embarking on a brave new adventure come April, to which the Government are committed. Indeed, their reform of local government has created the new unitary authorities. We in Grimsby and Cleethorpes—now North-East Lincolnshire—support that reform. We wanted to control our own destiny and we wanted a local government that was close to the people, so we want the new authority to succeed. I hope that the Government also want it to succeed.

The local government experiment—the brave new world of 13 new unitary authorities which come into being on 1 April—cannot succeed in a welter of redundancies, cuts, debts, recrimination and blame, which the financial settlement has prepared for it. The new authorities are a special case, and need to be treated as such.

I would argue that Grimsby is a special case within the special case because most of the assets of the county of Humberside that are to be divided up are on the north bank. We are trying to find accommodation for 400 council employees and are in a particularly difficult position. On the north bank there is a surplus of offices, but on the south bank, and in Grimsby especially because we did not have the county facilities, there is a dearth of offices.

I do not want to recriminate and attack Humberside. Indeed, I have come to praise it as well as—in effect—to bury it. Humberside did a good job, especially on education and social services, where spending and standards were very efficiently maintained, as befits an area with severe social problems and a high level of unemployment. It fulfilled its responsibility. We also have a high level of single-parent families and Humberside gave them a good service.

It is realistic to say, however, that Humberside has left problems—usually problems which were not its fault, such as those in education. School buildings are deteriorating faster than they can be repaired and maintained. That is no investment in the future of our children and that lack will cause real problems.

In the case of the Havelok school, which I visited recently, the county obtained a grant to remove places—and also asbestos—but the money for that was spent in other schools in other parts of the county. The problem remains, but we do not have the money and we cannot apply again. Such are the problems left in parts of the education provision.

My children went to the Hereford school in Grimsby. I liked them going there; it is the local comprehensive. One should live by one's principles on education matters. That is not at all hypocritical, unlike so many Conservative Members who talk about improvements in state education and send their own children to private schools and public schools out of the state system. The Hereford school, Grimsby is a nice title for a school because it sounds like it should be a public school, but it is a comprehensive.

It is a shame to see the Hereford school nowadays. Some of the one-story buildings that were the house bases when my children were there are deteriorating because the roof is very heavy. The roof is cracking, pressing down on the window frames, which are distorting, and glass is breaking constantly. To support the roof, they have had to put in angle frames, which in turn are cracking. The school roof has needed repair for three years. An expenditure of £200,000 is necessary to make the house bases—still used as kitchens—safe. An expenditure of about £1 million is needed to make the whole school livable in, workable and up to standard, but the money is not available. We have inherited such problems as a new authority, yet it is not our fault. We have not created them, but we have to deal with them.

The other problem that has been left, which is unique to the new unitary authorities, is the lack of balances. Grimsby and Cleethorpes between them have managed to hand on balances of about £1 million, but a local authority needs balances of about £4 million or £5 million if it is to have the necessary flexibility to run things efficiently and manage over time.

The new unitary authorities cannot control their own destiny like an on-going authority because they cannot manage their finances to ensure the maintenance of balances. We have not inherited any balances. Indeed, the balances might be negative because of the verdict on a lawsuit over school meals, which will impose costs on the successor authorities. We could not control that and it is not of our making, so it should be allowed for in the new authorities' financial allocations.

The result is close to disaster. We are inheriting extremely difficult, if not disastrous, circumstances. If North-East Lincolnshire—the merger of Grimsby and Cleethorpes—is to come under the cap limit of £129.7 million, initial calculations mean cuts of £5.9 million in the existing level of services. In other words, there will be a 4.5 per cent. cut in the budget. And that is without allowing for any working balances. That possible £5.9 million overspend is less than recent, more detailed calculations indicate. Allowing for such things as landfill tax, employer's superannuation contributions and other new burdens, the overspend above the capping limit will be £9.8 million.

It is impossible for an authority to take over responsibilities for the first time in April, welcome the new experiment, make it work and make it acceptable to people on the back of cuts of £9.8 million in spending and services. How can it be done? If the Government expect us to do that, they are being unrealistic. This is the Government's reorganisation. We wanted it, but we are partners in trying to make it work. If one partner is to be handicapped by a requirement to impose cuts of £9.8 million—in a new situation for which it is not responsible but which it has inherited—the burden will be too heavy to bear.

*[Mr. Austin Mitchell]*

What are we to do? Staffing accounts for 60 per cent. of total spending. In a budget of, say, £140 million, social services and education accounts for some £100 million. Are we to have massive cuts and redundancies? If we are to achieve such massive cuts, the number of redundancies will be substantial. The local authority has not talked to the unions yet, but redundancies will have to be made as sure as day follows night, and not in tens or twenties but in hundreds. How can a new authority start by handing out redundancy notices to teachers, employees and others who provide services? How can a reputation and decent service be maintained in that situation? Why should the Government ask us to do that? It is just callous indifference to their own reorganisation. We would have to jettison services and make massive cuts in education. If school budgets are cut less, other aspects of service will have to be cut disproportionately, or we shall have to have redundancies. What a way to begin.

When we ask for help and advice from the Government, we get various suggestions, none of them workable. We are told to involve private finance in local government activity, but that takes time; it cannot be introduced immediately. We are keen to work with local commerce and industry, but developing those relationships, particularly when it is a matter of industry investing money, cannot be done overnight.

The Government tell us that the standard spending assessment has increased, but Humberside was spending over its SSA, so that is no benefit to us. We are told that we have a good deal from the single regeneration budget—we have indeed, and we are very grateful, but we deserved it because of the problems that we had to deal with as a result of the SRB grant; the local authority, which is on a tight, limited budget, has to put up a corresponding amount to secure that grant from the single regeneration budget. If we do not get the money, it is disastrous; if we do, it is increased spending.

I know that the Minister takes our problems seriously, and he has taken time to consider the matter. I hope that he will re-examine it, because the situation is becoming desperate. The new unitary authorities must be treated as special cases. They are not a huge special case—there are 13 of them—but the extra financial help that they need will not be a huge burden. It will not create a gateway that all the other local authorities will use to make demands. The reorganisation is a joint effort by Government and the local authorities, and it must succeed. It will not succeed if the Government continue at the present rate.

The Government have approached this reorganisation in far too mean a spirit. They think that they were too lax in the previous reorganisation, that money was pouring out of the dying local authorities, but it was nearly always for beneficial purposes. Indeed, the people of west Yorkshire are grateful for the West Yorkshire Playhouse, which was one of the beneficiaries of the previous reorganisation. Money was provided by the old west Yorkshire county council. It should be called the John Gunnell memorial theatre, because that was really the source of the finance. Benefits flowed from the previous reorganisation, but the Government feel that they were too generous then, and therefore they will counteract that by being too mean this time. They want to show themselves to be tough. The result will be that new authorities will be strangled before they start.

I ask the Minister to examine the issue again, because we are in a mess. The only way out is to raise the capping limits. If Grimsby had spent to the capping limit, there would not be a substantial increase in council tax. A special case was made last year for the inner London boroughs, so it can be made again for the new unitary authorities. If there is a case for capping limits, it is as a discipline on existing authorities, but a new authority cannot manage its finances in that fashion. The discipline is of no use if there are no balances to inherit. If an authority cannot manage to hit its capping limits this year and the next, capping limits are a form of strangulation, a garrotte, rather than a necessary discipline on local authority spending. Capping limits are totally unreasonable for new authorities.

Another way out, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said, is to raise the SSAs for the new unitary authorities, because that brings in revenue support grant money. It is depressing to see the difference between the consultation SSAs for places such as Grimsby and the settlement SSA. Whereas Buckinghamshire—presumably the last Tory council—saw an improvement of 1.32 per cent., or £5 million, between the settlement SSA and the consultation SSA, we lost £500,000. We lost 0.3 per cent.—and we are a new authority that desperately needs the money. So I ask the Government to reconsider raising the SSAs for the new unitary authorities.

Thirdly, I ask the Government to allow the new unitaries, especially that for north-east Lincolnshire, the authority in which I am passionately interested, to capitalise the overspend. There will be an overspend, so why not allow us to borrow to cover it?

The Government say, and I am sure that they are right, that the reorganisation will bring financial benefits and economies to the areas concerned. They therefore want those areas to pay for it, on the grounds that they will inherit the benefits. Fair enough, but please allow us to pay for them over time, by allowing us an increase in our borrowing to finance the capital overspend. The costs will still fall on the area, and when we get the better times that will come from the greater economy and efficiency provided by the unitary authority, we shall be able to pay off the borrowing.

To allow us to borrow and to capitalise now would avoid disaster. Disaster now would alienate the people from the new unitary authorities. They will not be interested in the performance in five years' time, or in greater efficiency a decade hence; we are talking about now. We are talking about how a public, many of whom, especially the teachers, have been reluctant to accept the reorganisation, can be brought to accept it.

Fourthly, I ask the Government to give us an element of greater flexibility in the spending that is allowed for the costs of reorganisation, such as redundancies. Greater flexibility within the categories would be a small matter, but every little helps.

I have tried to avoid the political knock-about that is almost implicit when the Government begin to try to pass the parcel of blame to local authorities by saying, "Labour increases your council tax, while we cut your income tax."

That is what is happening now, but I do not want to get involved in that argument today, because the situation in the new unitary authorities is too serious for that.

The test is: will there be a seamless, efficient transfer that improves the quality of the service offered, and makes it more immediate to the people because they have a more direct say and are more involved with it? Given time, and the ability to make a seamless and graceful transition, that will happen. But we must have that ability and that freedom.

At present the prospect, which must be seen in its full starkness, is of a transition accompanied by heavy redundancies—not in tens or twenties but possibly in hundreds—and by substantial cuts in services. We shall have to lop off entire functions, which we shall not be able to afford—industrial development, for example, which is vital to encourage jobs to an area of high unemployment, but which is financially vulnerable if we must have massive cuts. There will also have to be cuts in areas that I regard as sacred, such as education and social services.

Do not force those cuts on us, Minister. I ask the Government not to sabotage their own creation, the local government reorganisation. Let it work. Help it in its hour of need. It would be awful to see it ruined by the alienation, rejection and hostility that would be caused by massive cuts and redundancies, followed by a long argument between the Government, local authorities and politicians in general about who is to blame—that most unseemly, undignified and unnecessary of political arguments.

Something must be done: only the Government can do it—and they must do it soon.

9.8 pm

**Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Last year, the Government got themselves into an awful political mess over the settlement, because ultimately everyone—not only politicians at national and local level but governors, parents and schools throughout the country—believed that the Government were not giving schools a fair deal. People saw the prospect of cuts affecting their children's education, and they reacted and voted accordingly at the local elections.

This year, the Government have from the outset tried to put a spin on the settlement, in an attempt to convince people that somehow, there is extra money for education. The Government tried to spell that out in a series of letters from Tory Members to schools in their constituencies. For local authorities that have education as a function, the education SSA has risen on average by 4.4 per cent., while the actual spending attached to that has risen by about 3 per cent. In total, the SSA for those authorities has risen by only 2.1 per cent., and the extra funding for the authorities has risen by 1.2 per cent.

When the Chief Secretary to the Treasury came to the Treasury Select Committee, he was unable to explain how education authorities would be able to pay for the increase in inflation, the teacher's pay settlement that will be coming soon—which the Government expect the schools to find—and the thousands of extra school children in the next financial year with a funding increase of 3 per cent. Those sums do not add up to 3 per cent.—they add up to an awful lot more.

Even if local authorities tried to spend all the extra money that the Government claim is available for education, they would then have to admit—as the Chief Secretary admitted in the Select Committee—that there will be no extra funding for other important services. During this debate, it has become apparent that no Conservative Member regards any other service as important. Social services, housing, planning, libraries and environmental health are important services that need money, but the Government are not offering that money.

**Mr. Pickles:** Would the hon. Gentleman, who has vast experience in local government, care to tell us by how much the settlement is inadequate? Is it £3 billion, or £4 billion? Will he set a figure on what local government needs?

**Mr. Betts:** If Labour had been in power for the past 16 years, we would not have wasted money as the Government have done on schemes such as the poll tax. That money could have been applied properly to local services that would have benefited local people.

The extra funding for my local authority, Sheffield, next year will be 0.8 per cent. That is a nonsensical figure, as can be seen when one looks at the needs of schools. The Tory argument is that funding should be given to the schools, and not to the central administration of education. Sheffield undertook an independent study of its schools, however, and they came back and said that they wanted no more delegation. Many of them realised—particularly the small primary schools—that having some services, such as psychological support services, funded centrally gave them better value for money.

The reality is that even if the local authority directed every extra penny given to it to education, every one of the schools in my constituency next year will face a cut in funding and a cut in the services that they can provide. Conservative Members do not understand that, in the past few years—when circumstances have been slightly better—schools have been putting away a bit of money for a rainy day. In the past two years, that rainy day has come, and schools are now spending their reserves to keep teachers employed and to buy books and equipment for the children.

Every one of the schools in my constituency is now saying that those reserves are coming to end and—in most cases—have done so already. They will not be replaced next year. Irrespective of what the local authority does, those schools will have a gap in their resources. There will be a cut in services because the reserves that they have will no longer be able to provide services to the children in the form of the employment of teachers, spending on books and equipment and repairs to schools. That is what headteachers and school governors are telling me and, frankly, I am prepared to believe what they say more than I believe the Government's assurances.

On top of that, parents will see their council tax bills drop through the door next month. They must not blame Labour or Liberal Democrat authorities for what will happen. Buckinghamshire—one of the few Tory councils around—estimates that it will have a 9 per cent. increase in council tax. The Chief Secretary admitted that his estimate from the Government's own figures of the increase in council tax is 8 per cent. for the next financial year.

As it is the Government's intention to switch the amounts of money funded locally to provide services from 21 per cent. of the total to 26 per cent. in the next three

*[Mr. Betts]*

years, there will be not only an 8 per cent. increase in council tax—on the Government's estimates—in the next financial year, but an 8 per cent. increase in each of the following two years. On the calculations and estimates used by the Chief Secretary, the total increase in council tax will be 25 per cent. cumulatively over a three-year period. Will the Minister answer whether that is the case? There will be a 25 per cent. increase in council tax in the three years, while people get poorer services. Thank goodness the Government will not be in power in the two subsequent years to carry that into effect.

Ministers say that, whatever arguments may be advanced about the amount of money involved, the methodology is all right: it has all been agreed. I challenge that on three grounds. First, there is the issue of capital financing, which I mentioned earlier in an intervention. In a study requested by the Audit Commission, Price Waterhouse concluded that it was wrong to fund capital financing through SSAs and to make use of notional debt. It suggested a different method, involving adjustments to the credit approval levels given to local authorities in the past. Why do the Government not take up that suggestion, which was approved by the Audit Commission—a neutral body, looking objectively at ways of funding local authority services? Is it because some of the biggest gainers would be authorities such as Birmingham and Sheffield?

Secondly, there is area cost adjustment. I welcome the study that is currently in progress. Ernst and Young has already carried out a study for the metropolitan authorities, which effectively demolished the area cost adjustment figures as they stand. An area cost adjustment should be precisely that: it should take into account the difference in the costs of different areas, and accordingly adjust the resources that councils receive from central Government. In fact, however, authorities that bear exactly the same costs receive different amounts of help.

The Minister has commissioned a study, and I welcome that, but, like my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson), I am a little cynical. I fear that nothing will be done as a result of the survey if action would be inconvenient in terms of a general election. I hope that the Minister will assure us that that is not the case.

Thirdly, there is the issue of the shared accommodation figures. They affect the social index, and, in turn, the allocation of money for adult services within the social services budget and for the "other services" block. They also affect funding for children's services. That is an anachronism. Shared accommodation is such a relatively small part of total accommodation that it no longer provides an accurate measure of deprivation in communities. It is not surprising that Westminster ranks so high in the Government's deprivation league tables, given that they are using a measure that has been discredited by every objective observer of their method of calculating SSAs.

My local authority contains two nonsensical features. First, there is the question of Supertram. I support the scheme: I think it important for us to encourage and develop light railway systems, which are environmentally friendly and give people an incentive to use public transport and leave their cars at home. I welcome the funds that the Government have provided. Nevertheless, it strikes me as stupid for the Government to fund Supertram partly through the local authority revenue support grant, in such a way that—although it costs the authority nothing—that spending displaces other spending within the capping limits.

I have to explain to constituents not that their council tax is rising because of the Supertram capital expenditure, but that it will fall for that reason because less money can be spent on education, social services and other important matters. That has always been a reason for grievance, not only in Sheffield but in Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley, whose services are being cut although they do not benefit from the tram.

Secondly, the Government calculate the highways SSA on the basis of the number of vehicles that travel down particular roads. Absurdly, they have worked out Sheffield's SSA, and its grant, on the basis of censuses relating to vehicle movements on roads that were dug up so that Supertram could be built. No vehicles could go down those roads. The Government have accepted that that is the case, but they will not accept that Sheffield has lost £900,000 a year—which affects all our services—as a result of that ridiculous way of calculating the highways SSA. Other roads should have been used in the calculation. Sheffield has been particularly badly affected because of the disruption caused by the Supertram works.

Finally, we must also consider the nonsensical way in which fire authorities are funded. It is ridiculous that such authorities can be given a lower capping figure than that required by the chief fire officer to deliver the standard of service required by Home Office regulations. That is a classic case of two Government Departments, each not knowing what the other is doing.

Last year, the Government had to raise the capping level for the fire authority in South Yorkshire because the Home Office accepted the chief fire officer's recommendation that he could not provide a legal fire service within that level. Yet, this year, a fire station in the village of Mosborough in my constituency—one of the largest housing developments in the Sheffield area—will be shut down. That is wrong, and the Minister ought to do something about it.

The settlement does not give any extra resources for education and will mean cuts across the board, not merely in education but in other important services. It will mean large council tax increases of around 8 per cent., according to the Government's own estimates. The grant is not distributed fairly and, in the case of my city, there are clear nonsenses, which I hope that the Minister will consider. Ultimately, if he has no sympathy for the people of Sheffield or for my constituents, he might at least have some for the four remaining Tory councillors on Sheffield city council, who will almost certainly lose their seats at the local elections in May.

9.20 pm

Ms **Hilary Armstrong** (North-West Durham): We have had an interesting debate. It has certainly shown the difference between the two sides of the House. It was interesting that almost all the Conservative Members who contributed supported the Government's general case, but went on to plead special cases for their authorities and pointed to some unfairness in the way in which they were being treated. That hints at a slight problem for the Government, who are pleading with all the charm, or otherwise, that they have, that everything is fair and a watertight methodology is being used.

The right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) made a particular plea and I hope that the Minister will be able to deliver the commitments that he gave to his authority because the problems caused by reorganisation there are problems that we want to be acknowledged. We want the Government to live up to those commitments.

We have been discussing a financial settlement that expresses the relationship between central and local government. An effective democracy depends on alternative and competing sources of power, yet the Government have centralised power and enfeebled local government in ways that many people believed would never happen in this country. It is small wonder that many councillors feel that they have become little more than an administrative outpost of central Government.

Time and again, hon. Members have said that the people have given their verdict. Much as Conservative Members complain about who is running councils, it is not the Opposition but the electorate who control that. They will be somewhat bemused that their wishes are so trounced by Tory Members.

Local government has the potential for being the engine of regeneration. It is local government, rather than central, that has a clear awareness of the needs, desires and aspirations of the local community. Local government is best placed to respond flexibly to changing circumstances in the locality. Local government, rather than central Government, works closely locally on a day-to-day basis with other public agencies, such as health authorities, but also with business and community groups.

The way in which some Conservative Members talk about relationships between business and local government shows that they do not know what has been happening. Extremely effective partnerships between Labour local government and business have been forged up and down the country. In Consett in my constituency, they are central to the town's recovery from the closure of the steelworks. The Government fail to understand the benefits to society from the development of a proper working relationship with local government.

One commentator, the former editor of *The Times*, Simon Jenkins, has said:

"the Conservatives have concentrated power on the central institution of Downing Street as never before in peacetime . . . The Tory state is now the most centralised in the western world."

He now works for the *Evening Standard*. Neither *The Times* nor the *Evening Standard* is famed for its support of the Labour party, but we welcome his judgment.

Local government is now exceptionally reliant on central Government for its funding. That is why we have these debates. What can be spent in the localities is, in almost all aspects, determined by central Government. Therefore, it is to central Government that we must bring our complaints and concerns. That is no accident. It is not the result of things happening without anyone knowing but of deliberate decisions to disempower local government.

According to the Prime Minister's former trusted adviser, Sarah Hogg, Ministers and Margaret Thatcher were exasperated with local government in the late 1980s. She said that that was continued in 1990 and that

"More and more Tory MPs thought that the logical solution was for central government to take over completely".

We have heard some of those Tory Members today.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford):** What about Anthony Crosland? He was sick of it too.

**Ms Armstrong:** Does the hon. Gentleman want to intervene?

**Sir Paul Beresford** *indicated dissent.*

**Ms Armstrong:** The revenue support grant settlement this year gives councillors little ability to makes decisions that respond effectively to the needs and desires of their local communities. Instead, councillors, Labour, Liberal and even the odd rare specimen of a Tory, are placed in a straitjacket by central Government.

This month's Treasury Select Committee report—I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on his contribution on this—states that to fund an increase in the areas that the Government have recommended, including education,

"Local authorities are either going to have to make efficiency savings of a level which may be unobtainable in the short, or even long term or substantial cuts in other sectors of their budgets or they will have to find additional revenue from other sources, predominantly the council tax."

Most local politicians do not have the choice of whether to cut services or hike up the council tax. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) said, too many councils are being forced both to cut services and raise the council tax as much as they can. Again, local communities will pay more tax and get less services.

Local government and local communities are having to pay the price of central Government economic incompetence and waste. Central Government still take no responsibility for that. They have not even bothered to apologise for the £4 billion poll tax fiasco. Indeed, they are now set on an another significant administrative waste in the shape of their dogmatic, ideological determination to introduce nursery vouchers.

The Government have not even followed the Environment Select Committee recommendation made in October 1995 that the Department of the Environment should attempt to quantify alleged efficiency savings possible in local government. It said that the Department

"is certainly mistaken to imply that all that is required is to offset inflation through efficiency savings".

The Committee recommended that the

"Department makes some realistic attempt to quantify the alleged efficiency savings as propounded by the Audit Commission."

We have been urging the Government to do that for some time, but they singularly refuse to take it on board.

Several hon. Members have questioned the logic of the SSAs, notably my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire, who gave a detailed critique of how the SSA affects his constituency and North East Derbyshire district council.

The Secretary of State claimed that he had always considered me a fair-minded woman. I try to be, but that is why I find the inequities in the current funding system objectionable. Neither I nor my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is alone in

*[Ms Armstrong]*

objecting to the methodology used in the current funding system. No reasonable person could believe that a system that is meant truly to reflect economic and social need could place Westminster city council fourth in the league table of deprivation.

The Minister and I have had some correspondence about that matter. He may have noticed a recent article by the former local government correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, John Grigsby—again someone not noted for his support for the Labour party.

**Mr. Curry:** He has said some nice things about me.

**Ms Armstrong:** He has said some good things about the Minister, but not about the system. His article states that

"it is the government which has created the unsatisfactory grant regime . . . Unfortunately for the government's argument, its indices are not the only criteria of deprivation Bristol university supplies. Turn the page"

he suggests to the Minister—

"and there is another list which takes into account economic factors like adult and youth unemployment and single parents. Here, Westminster comes in as the 96th most deprived council. And the second edition of the same publication quotes the environment department's own index of local conditions independently produced for application to local authorities, which rank Westminster as only 25th most deprived."

No Labour Member is naive about the difficulties of ensuring a fair system. As John Grigsby goes on the say, however:

"The Westminster does matter because it is so illogical."

He says that what is of

"fundamental importance is that justice should not only be done, but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done."

Clearly, justice is not being seen to be done.

**Mr. Gummer:** Will the hon. Lady simply explain to me why Westminster council did better under a Labour Government than under a Conservative Government if the system is unfair? If she says it is unfair, it was more unfair when Jack Straw drew up the rules.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order.

**Mr. Gummer:** I apologise. I should have said the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

**Ms Armstrong:** I am tempted by the right hon. Gentleman's intervention. He has sought to intervene a number of times to lambast Labour Members. At least he resisted this time and did not try to abuse people. That his normal method of intervention is to abuse people says more about him than it says about us. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) did not devise the system. My father was the Minister at the time and he certainly did not have my hon. Friend as an adviser. The Secretary of State forgets that I have a little knowledge of what was going on in the last Labour Government. He tries to use figures in his normal way: to confuse rather than elucidate. The figures that I have given are clear. They resulted, as he knows, in rates being levied in Westminster that were nothing compared with the council tax being levied today. There are anomalies. The Government know that, and they should do something about them.

Under the Government's "pay more, get less" policy, council tax payers will have to fork out more for the privilege of receiving fewer services. Council tax payers will have to pay the price of Tory economic incompetence. The gap is widening between what the Government acknowledge that councils should spend and the funding that local authorities receive from central Government. The Tories expect council tax payers to fill the gap.

The Secretary of State might try to con us by claiming that the Government are motivated by a desire to enable local government to raise a greater proportion of its funding, but the Minister said this afternoon—and it has been confirmed throughout the debate—that that is not their intention. Their intention is to hide another tax hike—this time, by trying to hide behind the coat-tails of Labour local government.

The Government have failed to take into account the fact that experience has taught the electorate to trust the word and explanation of local councils in preference to the statements of Tory Ministers.

The Government's original figures, produced at the time of the Budget statement, show that the Government expected council tax payers to fork out a 5.2 per cent. council tax increase next year and an extra £3.5 billion in the next three years—the equivalent of nearly 2p in the standard rate of income tax. The final tax hike is likely to be considerably greater, however, and hon. Members have mentioned the words of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury Select Committee.

The Government claim that they are generously giving new money for education. The figure that is floated by Ministers is the supposedly generous 4.4 per cent. increase in the education SSA. It is not only the British people who are more intelligent and sophisticated than to believe the Government—not even their colleagues believe them.

**Mr. Pickles:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Armstrong:** No; I will not give way.

Let us consider the facts clearly and objectively. Education authorities will receive an increase in central Government grant of exactly 1.2 per cent. in the year ahead. When Conservative Members speak about money, they need to speak about the actual money—1.2 per cent. The increase in SSAs is 4.4 per cent.

**Mr. Pickles:** How wide is the gap? How much extra would Labour give?

**Ms Armstrong:** I will not answer questions about how much we shall give until the Government deal with their waste. They should deal with the waste, and then ask us questions about what we shall spend. We know that the Conservatives would not tell us the truth before the most recent general election so, if we try to say anything now, we shall have to change it once we see their cooked books.

It is an illusion that there is more money for education throughout Britain. Parents know that there is not, teachers know that there is not and the Tories know that there is not. That is why the Tories have been blustering and bluffing during the debate.

**Mr. Tipping:** Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

**Ms Armstrong:** I am happy to give way to my hon. Friend.

**Mr. Tipping:** I was interested to hear my hon. Friend mention blustering. I wonder what she makes of the fact that, in Nottinghamshire, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been saying that there is extra money for education in Nottinghamshire. The local authority in Nottinghamshire has spent all the extra money in schools, yet next year, in the Chancellor's constituency of Rushcliffe, teachers' jobs will be lost, and £6.3 million of repairs remain to be done at schools. Is he being economical with the truth?

**Ms Armstrong:** My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) will know that if Nottinghamshire received what Westminster receives it would be able to provide an extra 4,000 teachers.

**Mr. Pickles:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Armstrong:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer might then be able to uphold some of his promises. As usual—

**Mr. Pickles:** Give way.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. From where I am sitting, it seems obvious that the hon. Lady is not giving way.

**Ms Armstrong:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer, like other Ministers, is saying one thing and doing another. The Government have made commitments on tax which they have not kept. They are not very good at telling the truth about it either, as we saw from Prime Minister's questions yesterday.

This is a pay more, get less settlement. Council tax payers and service users will pay the price of the Government's economic incompetence and waste. Councillors are being placed in an impossible position. They must either cut essential services such as school services, meals on wheels and home helps or they must set the council tax at a level which they know that local people can ill afford. Some councils have to do both. That is not what local democracy should be about.

The Government have made it impossible for local people to determine the level of services or what should be paid for them. Of course, local democracy is not the Government's overriding priority. Their obsession is to stay in power and run the economy into the ground. How can they otherwise afford the income tax cuts that they are looking for?

I believe that the electorate will not be fooled. When they see services cut, they will know that the Government are to blame. When they see their council tax rise, they will blame the Government. That blame will be clearly expressed in the local elections in May and in the general election. I know that people want that election because they are sick of paying the price of Tory obsessions, dogma and mistakes. Instead of the people of this country paying the price, we look forward to the Tory Government paying the price.

9.41 pm

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry):** It is not often that, in a debate on local government finance, one can begin with Procrustes, but as my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) introduced him, I have taken some affection for him and done my research. He apparently lay in wait on the Athens road and equipped people who came for lodgings with a bed that was not necessarily the right size. If the people were too long, he chopped them. I did not realise that capping had such a distinguished antecedent, but I am encouraged to know that I follow in such a long tradition. I understand that Theseus fastened Procrustes to his own bed and chopped his head off—he had clearly missed his vocation as a local government Minister.

When the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) forgot her speech, she said some sensible things. I agree with one thing that she said; that local government should be the engine of local regeneration. I am grateful for that endorsement of our policies. A Labour Government did not introduce city challenge, from which areas such as Sheffield have benefited. A Labour Government did not introduce the single regeneration budget, from which many Labour-held areas have benefited. A Conservative Government brought local authorities and the private sector into play to promote creative regeneration activities in their areas.

I spent this morning in Dudley seeing regeneration by a Conservative Government in practice. What is happening there demonstrates what can be done by local government if it breaks out of the mind-set in which the Labour party would leave it. We want to develop that concept, so I look forward to the endorsement and support of the hon. Member for North-West Durham for the principle of capital challenge. It works on exactly the same principle as asking local authorities to define their priorities and work in partnership to deliver them. I am delighted that the Labour party, belatedly, has woken up to the creative activities of the Government.

I fear that my text for the day has to be based on the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). I should like to quote him. He may not live to acquire the fame of Procrustes, but his fame will last at least until the election. The hon. Gentleman said, "I don't endorse anybody else's numbers except my own and you're not getting those out of me.". It is not quite the Book of Revelations, but at least we now have "Dobson's dictum" which appears to be: hear all, see all and let nowt out. Does the Labour party intend to go to the next election without revealing what it will spend? Will Labour Members simply say, "We condemn your settlement and our local authorities say that it is £3 billion short."?

Every Labour Member who spoke in the debate said that he or she wanted more money for education, community care, social services and so on, but the Opposition will not add up the cost—and that is what matters. If they claim that expenditure is inadequate, they must know by how much it is inadequate. The Labour party cannot be a lobby organisation: it is supposed to be an Opposition, yet Labour Members simply say what they do not like and refuse to put a figure on the cost of what they want.

The money must come from somewhere, and it can come from only one place—the taxpayer. It can come from more Government grants of taxpayers' money, or

*[Mr. David Curry]*

more money can be collected from the taxpayer locally. There is no other way of doing it. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras must tell us how much money the Labour party would spend and where it would come from, otherwise it is simply mystery money and phantom finance. Opposition Members are afraid to say a word to anyone in case we start to add up the sums for ourselves.

**Ms Armstrong:** Will the Minister tell us who paid for the £4 billion that was wasted on the poll tax?

**Mr. Curry:** Why will the hon. Lady not answer one simple question? Everyone who intends to vote at the next election wants to know how much it will cost. Labour Members exhibit an unusual degree of Trappism when it comes to finance: they will not say a word. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition housing spokesman, the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), is guilty also. He has said that he will release capital receipts, but he will not say how many or for how long. It is all shrouded in mystery. We have only gesture politics; none of the arithmetic has been done. At least we know what the Liberal Democrats stand for—sort of.

**Mr. Coe:** Oh no, we do not.

**Mr. Curry:** I did say "sort of". I shall give a few examples, but they may not add up to the total picture. The Liberal Democrats would lift the cap completely and remove all safeguards. At least the Opposition would retain some safeguards, with the Audit Commission assuming the curious role of the US cavalry that would gallop over the hill if it thought that people were transgressing. The Liberals offer no such safeguard.

**Mr. Dobson:** Is the Minister saying that he cannot see the sense in our proposition? We believe that the Audit Commission should set a timetable for improvement and, if councils do not meet that timetable, the Secretary of State could act. Does the Minister think that scandals such as that in Lambeth should be allowed to continue for decades, as occurred under the existing law?

**Mr. Gary Streeter** (Plymouth, Sutton): It is Labour-controlled.

**Mr. Dobson:** Yes, Labour-controlled Lambeth was a disgrace. Something should have been done, but the Government did nothing for a decade. That is why we want to change the law.

**Mr. Curry:** There is no point the hon. Gentleman saying that he will do this, that and the other if he will not answer the biggest question: how much money will the Labour party spend? What will it cost? The hon. Gentleman talks about sending in the Audit Commission when councils have overspent or underspent. Such a role would take the Audit Commission into completely new territory. I think that we all agree that it is currently playing a useful role setting out objective indicators to assist local government in managing its affairs.

We agree that some councils should be reformed. Where wrong has been done, we condemn it—irrespective of where it occurs—once it has been proved. However, I do not believe that we should send in the Audit Commission to do any old job; it should stick to its present role.

**Ms Armstrong:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Curry:** I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment. She should concentrate on answering the question: how much will a Labour Government cost us? How much would a Labour Government cost the taxpayer, centrally and locally? What is the right amount for the settlement? The hon. Lady can illustrate her point by referring to the current settlement.

**Ms Armstrong:** If the Government had taken action against councils that were defrauding their council tax payers, the country would be in a better state and there would be more money for the settlement. For a kick-off, the Minister could have recovered the £29 million from Westminster. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. These interventions are very long. The House must settle down. The Minister has a right to reply to the debate. The hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) was given a reasonable hearing and the Minister must be given the same courtesy.

**Mr. Curry:** Let me focus on the arguments.

**Mr. Betts:** That will make a change.

**Mr. Curry:** Well, the argument is about how much the Labour party thinks it is right to spend on the settlement. I have asked that question a dozen times, but I receive no answer. If the Labour party was to form a Government, all local authorities would parade to its office and ask for more money. They want to know whether they would receive it, but the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will not give them—or the taxpayer—a clue. It is the most important question in politics.

**Mr. Jessel:** Is my hon. Friend aware that the former Labour-controlled Greater London council set up a 30-year contract to transport waste and that that contract still has 21 years to go? The cost now falls on my constituents and others in six boroughs in west London. It amounts to several million pounds a year, which is completely inequitable. Will my hon. Friend look to see whether anything can be done to undo the damage done by the Labour-controlled Greater London council?

**Mr. Curry:** My hon. Friend is referring to the landfill tax. It is true that some local authorities are locked into long-term contracts that were signed some time ago. They have known the intentions behind the tax for more than a year and I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that, last year, local authorities received £26 million for waste regulation. The responsibility goes to the Environment Agency, but the resources stay with local government and there will be some offsetting national insurance contributions. I promise my hon. Friend that, during the deliberations which must follow the vote tonight, I will pay attention to that issue.

It would be helpful to mention the work on the SSAs that must be done over the next year, because that is important to local authorities. The SSAs must change and develop. Nobody thinks that this is a rigid system that is carved in granite. We make changes and review every year on a rolling programme. People know that that is the case. All the work is shared with the local authority associations and none is done privately.

It is true that interests are not the same. We hear that most obviously in the arguments about the area cost adjustment. Some local authorities have a strong commitment to it, but some think that it is pernicious. There are representatives of each view on both sides of the House. The idea that there is some absolute truth is nonsense. We have to find a system that works well and which people accept as being objective. They must also be able to accept that if they make sensible representations and make a good case, we will try to take it on board.

Our first priority this year is the area cost adjustment review. I do not know what the outcome will be. I have said before that it will have to be intellectually robust and demonstrate a need to spend. If that is the case, we will incorporate it. We are aiming to have the results by June so that they are available for next year's settlement. I hope that local authorities will agree on it, but that is perhaps somewhat optimistic. It is important to be satisfied that it is the best possible intellectual basis for allocating money.

The second area of investigation, which is also important, is the sparsity factor. Here again, many rural areas are concerned about the cost of supplying services in wide open spaces. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The House must settle down and give the Minister a reasonable hearing. That applies to both sides of the House. There has been chattering on both sides of the Chamber while the Minister has been trying to answer the debate.

**Mr. Curry:** There are equally pressing concerns among urban authorities where the population lives in crowded conditions and where there are problems of health, for example—the Webber-Craig authorities. They are concerned to see the SSA formula adjusted to take account of those problems. The sparsity work is scheduled to be completed in time for next year's settlement.

The children's element of personal social services has a completion date of July. It will have an important effect, especially for some urban authorities. The elderly element is also subject to review. Those are the principal elements of work this year. I do not know what will happen—some may neutralise each other or they may push in the same direction. We will incorporate data where they are demonstrably the most effective and up to date available. We do not want local authorities to fall over the edge of the cliff, so we must not give them too difficult a task on adjustment.

Hon. Members will be pleased to learn that authorities that have to deal with the problems of unaccompanied refugee children will receive a grant in the coming financial year. The Department of Health will consult on the means to distribute that.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and I have had many exchanges across the Chamber on different matters, but I share his desire that the new unitary authorities should get off to a good start.

**Mr. Morley:** Which ones?

**Mr. Curry:** All of them. Everybody understands that they cannot inherit all the spending patterns of their predecessors. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Humberside has a difficult legacy. I am anxious for the process to work and I shall listen to representations from the new unitary authorities that have a particularly difficult legacy. Of course, one or two of them may get a legacy that they had not expected. Apparently there is an Aladdin's cave in Avon, which had not been anticipated.

I understand the concerns expressed about the fire service. We have taken into account pensions, fire safety and fire prevention. It is a difficult area and it is not easy to find an effective formula. The associations are keen on a particular approach based on fire stations. I have said that I am willing to consider it. Some circularity is involved because it reflects existing spending patterns. Also, certain high costs could fall on metropolitan areas. However, if those problems can be resolved, I am willing to consider objectively whether the formula can be improved.

All these matters are of considerable importance. Many of my hon. Friends raised questions of detail, to which I cannot reply tonight in the short time available. I shall write to them and deal fully with the points that they raised. My hon. Friends the Members for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) and for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) referred to problems in their county areas and difficulties in their district areas.

I understand that the account given by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) was meticulous. I look forward to examining it in the detail it merits.

What happens now is that the preceptors must set their budgets by 1 March and the billing authorities must do so by 11 March. Capping decisions will be taken at the beginning of April and authorities have four weeks in which to decide whether to accept them. If they do, the process ends. If they do not, they have to challenge the cap by the beginning of May. Meetings with Ministers will take place and we will consider the arguments. As I have shown in recent years, where a good case is made, it receives thorough attention. We expect to issue the final caps in late May. That is a traditional timetable and I am sure that local authorities will, as always, avail themselves of the process.

I want to return to the problem that I highlighted at the beginning of my speech—that we do not know where the Opposition stand on these matters. We know that they want to end compulsory competitive tendering and to hand power back to some of the public sector trade unions. We know that they want to end capping, which would impose extra costs on the council tax payer. We know that they want to put business back in the clutches of local authorities by repatriating the business tax, but there would have to be a redistribution mechanism for that. The Opposition say that they will do something about capital receipts, but they do not say what.

The biggest question is: how much would the Opposition spend? That is true of Labour and of the Liberal Democrats. The elector is caught between a rock and a soft touch. I am afraid that the best recourse for them is to support us in voting for this measure.

*Question put:—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 300, Noes 264.

**Division No. 42]** **[10.00 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann

Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Timothy Wood and**
**Mr. Roger Knapman.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Davis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Eric Clarke and**
**Mr. Joe Benton.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 164), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

*Resolved,*

That the National Parks Supplementary Grant Report (England) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 167), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

*Resolved,*

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 166), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

*Resolved,*

That the Special Grant Report (No. 16) (House of Commons Paper No. 165), which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Local Government Reform (Southport)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

10.14 pm

**Mr. Matthew Banks** (Southport): It is a great honour to be a Member of Parliament, and a particular honour to represent the delightful seaside resort of Southport. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before 1974 my constituency was a unitary authority that looked to Lancashire, not to Liverpool. But since 1974, it has been swallowed up by Merseyside and lost its independence.

The Southport county borough was proudly independent and self-governing throughout most of this century, from the 1900s to 1974. During that time, Southport had some of the lowest rates in the United Kingdom, and, I am pleased to report, was controlled by an efficient Conservative council.

In 1974, when Southport was swallowed up, a new authority called Sefton metropolitan borough council was created, including the parliamentary constituencies of Crosby and Bootle. Because of the geography and the make-up of the area, I have never believed, and nor have my constituents, that the metropolitan borough council works in their interests, or in those of Southport as a whole.

From the time when I was selected as a prospective parliamentary candidate in early 1989, I pledged that, if I were elected—and, indeed, up to and including the election—I would work unceasingly to find a mechanism to ensure that the local government structure for Southport was reviewed. Not content with that pledge, I went further. I publicly promised that I would ensure that such a review would begin in the lifetime of this Parliament, not at some unspecified date in the future. It is now time for that process to commence.

I look to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to make such a commitment at the end of the debate. Recently, in answer to yet another of my parliamentary questions, the Secretary of State said that the Local Government Commission had completed its review of the structure of local government in the shire counties, and that he was now considering the recommendations in the commission's final report, which was published on 19 December. No doubt my right hon. Friend will spend some time considering the report, but I believe that it is now time for the structure of local government in my constituency to be reviewed.

Southport county borough under the Conservatives had the among the lowest rates in the country. It was well run and efficient, and took much pride in itself and in the town. But since Merseyside swallowed up my constituency, that pride has been a little tarnished, and I am determined to reverse that trend so that Southport can be proud and independent in Lancashire again.

I place on record my thanks to the independent cross-party Southport borough campaign. With my assistance, it organised a referendum within the town, which took place over a period of one month. Before that, in one of a series of meetings that I have had over several years with the Secretary of State, the Local Government Commission and other Ministers at the Department of the Environment, I was asked whether I could demonstrate that at least 5,000 of my constituents wanted a change. I told my right hon. Friend that I could do rather better than

that—and indeed, over the month of the referendum, about 23,000 of my constituents made it clear that they wanted that change. I was determined, on their behalf, that the change should come about.

Despite that large number, I do not believe that the Local Government Commission gave me the kind of response for which I would have wished. In fact, in my view the then chairman did not keep his verbal and written promise to me. Since then, I have felt very much alone in my battle with Whitehall and Westminster to ensure that the matter remains on the agenda, culminating in tonight's debate.

I would like to thank also my hon. Friends who have joined me in the House tonight. Blackpool has sought to move away from the control of Lancashire county council, and I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) is in his place, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). I am particularly pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), as he has fought so hard for his constituency and for the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter).

**Mr. David Hunt** (Wirral, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that there are similar strong feelings about the need for a review of the structure of local government in Wirral, and particularly in the constituencies of Wirral, West and Wirral, South? Thousands of representations have been received over a lengthy period from local people. He has our strong support, and I very much hope that we will have his.

**Mr. Banks:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He knows full well that he has my support. We have stood together in these discussions, and I very much hope that at some future date—not too far away—the Local Government Commission will, as a result of my right hon. Friend's efforts, review the structure of local government in the Wirral also.

I should like to place on record my thanks to my former parliamentary assistant and great friend Roderick Brown, my agent, Mr. John Critten, and my parliamentary secretary here at Westminster, Jane Banks, for all their help behind the scenes in bringing this matter to a satisfactory resolution. I am pleased to see that Jane, who doubles as my wife, is here tonight. I am only sorry that, as I did not have a great deal of notice of the debate, other constituents have not been able to be present to see the debate. No hon. Member has a more supportive or politically astute spouse, and Southport is extremely lucky to have her.

May I also place on record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), the former Chief Whip, who had to bear the brunt of my sometimes gritty determination. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) and to my former Whip my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who know how hard I have had to battle behind the scenes on this issue.

I read with great interest today my local newspapers in Southport—the *Advertiser*, the *Visiter* and the *Champion*. I noticed a front-page article in the *Southport Champion* with the headline: "Town to quit Sefton? MP Banks pushes for Southport to go it alone."

Further down the front page, there were some comments from the former Member of Parliament, Councillor Ronald Fearn. I quote what he said in the article:

"I have campaigned for this for 20 years. I hope Mr. Gummer gets his finger out and does something. We do not want any more vague promises, we want action."

That comes from a man who, in 1973, voted as a councillor to go into Merseyside in the first place and did nothing in the intervening years. In February 1992, he voted with the Labour party in each and every Division in this House against the creation of the very Local Government Commission that is our only chance of gaining independence from Merseyside.

**Mr. Harold Elletson** (Blackpool, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that Councillor Fearn was in this House for four years, but did nothing to get Southport back into Lancashire? My hon. Friend has fought his campaign valiantly to get Southport back where it belongs—in the red rose county of Lancashire.

**Mr. Banks:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I mentioned, Blackpool will be gaining its independence from Lancashire county council very shortly, as will Blackburn and, I hope, other places.

The importance of the size of a particular potential unitary authority has also been brought into question. Blackpool and Blackburn have gained independence that they did not have before 1974, and a town such as Hartlepool—of a similar size to Southport—has done so also. I have no truck with those who say that Southport will not be big enough to run its own affairs. It did so before 1974, and it can, and—if I have anything to do with it—will, again.

The only issue of contention has been put about by those with a vested interest, who say that senior citizens will not be able to benefit from the generous current concessionary travel schemes. I do not believe that any successor authority would want to do other than continue to opt into the concessionary travel scheme that currently exists in Southport and the metropolitan area. Any candidate from any political party who said otherwise would not be elected.

Breaking away from Sefton and ceasing to be run by Bootle will allow the tourist industry in my constituency to develop properly. At present, Bootle councillors do not give a damn about what happens in Southport. It is nonsense for them to suggest that we might come third, behind Blackpool and St Anne's as a resort. We have our own product: it is different from Blackpool's, and we are very proud of it.

I believe that, if the Minister is prepared to give the go-ahead tonight, a review can not merely get under way in the lifetime of the present Parliament but begin in a matter of weeks. I should like the Local Government Commission to institute a referendum, so that local people can give their views, to arrange public meetings and consultation, and to take sufficient time to listen carefully to local opinion.

Such reviews take a long time. The shire review has taken at least a year, and it may well take longer than that to complete the review of Southport and Sefton. My constituents must remember that this Government, and this Conservative party, will give them the opportunity of a review and the chance of independence. Mindful of the actions of my predecessor—a Liberal Democrat—and his party's and Labour's policy for regional government, I fear that, in the unlikely event of a Labour Government,

*[Mr. Banks]*

those two parties would not complete the review I seek. The interests of my constituents will best be served by the re-election of the present Government.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and to his ministerial team for the way in which, over a number of years, they have listened to the arguments that I have advanced, sometimes forcefully. Now, however, the time for debate is over, and the review should begin. We want our independence in Southport to be considered as soon as possible, and I look to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to announce the review for which I have asked, so that, once again, my constituency can run its own affairs and get out of Sefton and Merseyside once and for all.

10.26 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on stepping into the breach on an urgent basis. I note that he has the heavy brigade behind him in the form of my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans)—and, of course, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), who is pushing a similar case to which we must give consideration. I am delighted to respond to the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Southport has made so emphatically. Unusually but effectively, his wife has supported him, campaigning vigorously.

Since 1974, when the change came about, people in Southport have objected to being part of Merseyside. It is not just being in Merseyside rather than Lancashire that is unpopular; given Southport's former status as an independent county borough, people also dislike being part of the larger metropolitan borough of Sefton, along with Bootle and Crosby. My hon. Friend's wish for Southport to be returned to Lancashire is long-standing: he spoke of it on the first occasion he spoke in the House, and he has continued to speak of it ever since.

The Local Government Commission's remit covers structural, electoral and boundary changes. When it was set up in 1992, its first priority was the structural review of the English shire counties; however, in September 1993, we made it clear that the commission would be able to review the metropolitan areas when the shire reviews were completed, where there was pressure for change. There has certainly been strong pressure in Southport, perhaps to a unique degree—aided, abetted and pushed by my hon. Friend.

In September 1993, the Local Government Commission received the results of the ballot carried out in Southport. Of 35,000 ballot papers delivered, an extraordinary 23,000 were returned in favour of a review and less than 1,000 against. That was a positive response rate. From an area with an electorate of 72,000, it must be taken as a dramatic indication of local opinion.

The commission has concluded the shire structure reviews, including the further district reviews in counties such as Lancashire. Its main priority now is the periodic electoral reviews. It is bound by statute to undertake those and, as far as practicable, within no more than 15 years since the previous review. Those are becoming increasingly urgent in a number of places, and that work should take precedence. However, there will be room in its programme to carry out a few other reviews.

My hon. Friend met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State before Christmas, and he knows that we are aware of the strength of feeling in Southport. I can confirm to him that one of the commission's additional reviews will be that of Southport.

Any review, except for a periodic electoral review, needs a direction to the commission from the Secretary of State. We are considering whether the direction will tell the commission to consider Southport or the whole of Sefton. It is important, however, that it is clear that the commission is not being directed towards a particular outcome.

It will also be necessary, as with the individual district reviews, which have just been completed, for the commission to consider the viability of the remnant authority that might result. That is not to say that it will not know what pressures led to any particular review. I suspect that my hon. Friend will not allow it to forget.

The basic procedures that the commission has to follow in any review are set down in the Local Government Act 1992. There must be two intervals for consultation and representations—before and after it produces its draft recommendations. Although guidance can expand on that procedure, the detail of how it conducts a review should be left to the commission to decide. That would include how it might measure the attitude of the general public. My hon. Friend might like to approach the commission directly to find out what methods it would like to use for the boundary review.

The recommendations at the end of any review are, of course, a matter entirely for the commission. In the case of a review of a metropolitan area, however, some constraints arise from the Act. For example, it defines a structural change only as a change from a two-tier system of local government to a one-tier system; there cannot be a change in the opposite direction.

In addition, a unitary authority cannot be part of two-tier county area. In other words, a unitary Southport self-evidently could not be part of a two-tier Lancashire under Lancashire county council, although the two could be deemed to be joined for ceremonial purposes, such as the lord lieutenancy. It is therefore helpful that the shire structure reviews are now complete—subject to my right hon. Friend's decisions on the commission's final reports on the district reviews—so that the context is clear.

I said that there is room in the commission's programme for a few boundary or parishing reviews and that one of those will be of Sefton. We hope to be able to announce soon what the others will be. That will be when the commission announces its programme of periodic electoral reviews. We are working on the direction and guidance to the commission. We will also be discussing with it what would be an appropriate length of time for the review, given the issues that have to be addressed in metropolitan areas.

Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on the force and energy that he has put into this subject, in the face of the failure of his predecessor, and on his success in ensuring that local government in Southport will be considered by the commission.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 1 February 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be considered again on Thursday 8 February.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Chocolate

1. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on the European Union's proposals in respect of chocolate. [11264]

**The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg):** I have received strong representations from British businesses about the need to remove arbitrary restrictions and to encourage free trade. I have recently written to the two Commissioners most closely involved, to emphasise those concerns. The Government are determined to do all that they can to ensure the recognition of the traditional descriptions of British chocolate throughout Europe.

**Sir Michael Neubert:** Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the incredulity with which our nation of chocolate lovers greeted the proposal that its favourite confection should in future be called "vegelate"? Will he do his utmost to ensure that this latest lunacy from Brussels is stifled at birth, before the British people become confirmed in their belief that they are at the mercy of a load of Cadbury's fruit and nut cases?

**Mr. Hogg:** My hon. Friend is quite right. Two important issues are involved—first, the need to preserve to British manufacturers of chocolate the right to sell in Europe under the designation chocolate, chocolate products that contain vegetable fat in addition to cocoa butter; secondly, to ensure that the milk chocolate that we manufacture and consume in Britain—which is milkier than that manufactured abroad—can be sold in Europe, but not under pejorative labelling.

### Veal Imports (Holland)

2. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the tonnage of veal imported into Britain from Holland since 1994. [11266]

**The Minister for Food (Mrs. Angela Browning):** This information has not been collated centrally since 1992, but it is estimated that the United Kingdom imported approximately 1,700 tonnes of veal in 1994, with Holland as the main supplier.

**Mr. Callaghan:** I thank the Minister for that reply. Will she consider consulting those who work in the veal industry in Britain—the producers and the caterers—in the hope that we can stimulate home consumption of veal and therefore stop the import and export of veal calves in veal crates?

**Mrs. Browning:** Indeed, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that much work has been carried out in that respect, certainly in the past year. The average consumption of veal is approximately 2 oz per person per year. However, most of it is consumed in the catering industry. I am sure that that is what most concerns the hon. Gentleman. I have been working closely with the Meat and Livestock Commission, and I was pleased to write the foreword to a booklet for the catering industry showing new cuts and recipes for the use of veal in catering.

**Mr. Garnier:** Does my hon. Friend agree that one way to deal with the fears of the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan) is to persuade local education authorities—particularly those run by the Labour and Liberal parties—not to ban beef and beef products in schools?

**Mrs. Browning:** Indeed; I wrote to all LEAs and those involved in the school meals service just before Christmas. I am pleased that county councils such as Dorset, which took rapid and ill-informed decisions, have now changed their minds. If Members have concerns on the subject and would like me to provide any more information to LEAs and the school meals service, I should be happy to do so.

**Mr. Morley:** I am sure that the Minister agrees that the importation of such a large amount of veal into Britain is

not good for our balance of trade. It is also intolerable that imported veal is produced in veal crates, which are banned in Britain on the ground of cruelty. In that respect, does she agree that the redesignation of animals as sentient beings rather than as agricultural products would help to speed up the end of that system in Europe? I appreciate that she told me in a recent reply that the Government were considering that proposal, but is she aware that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food rubbished the principle at a recent meeting? Does she agree that it is worthy of support and will she support it—yes or no?

**Mrs. Browning:** The hon. Gentleman should take the answer that he received from me as it was written. My right hon. and learned Friend is examining the matter, and we shall give it serious consideration.

**Mr. Hawkins:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the deeply irresponsible policy that has been set out from the Opposition Front Bench may not be unconnected with the fact that the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) receives no less than £15,000 per annum from an animal rights group?

**Mrs. Browning:** The definition of sentient beings is somewhat different from the main thrust of the remarks of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). We are aware that, along with other Labour Members, he has attached his name to early-day motions which call for the banning of the export of live animals. That position is not shared by all members of the Opposition Front Bench. There is a division, I think.

### Veal Crate System

3. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received in the last 12 months on the abolition of the current veal crate system as used in the rest of the EU. [11267]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** There has been clear support for our initiative to bring about the end of the veal crate system throughout the European Union. As a result of sustained pressure from the United Kingdom Government, we now have proposals for revision of the EU legislation, well before the date specified in the directive.

In welcoming those proposals, we have made it clear that we shall continue to press in negotiations for the early adoption and implementation of measures which fully meet the welfare needs of the calf.

**Mr. Martlew:** Will the Minister accept that the representations made in Parliament and in demonstrations throughout the land in the past 12 months have had the effect of bringing forward the Commission's proposals? Will he accept also that phasing in over 12 years is far too long?

The Minister's predecessor used to tell the House that, if he could, he would ban the export of veal calves, but he did not think that such action would be legal. The Minister is reported to have told the Devon branch of the National Farmers Union that, even if he had the power to introduce such a ban, he would not use it. Has there been a policy change?

**Mr. Hogg:** I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's question. He has failed to give any credit to the Government's activities. Those activities within the European Union brought about the decision of the Council and the Commission to consider the matter earlier than would otherwise have been done. On many occasions, I have pressed the Commissioner, and the Council, to bring forward proposals. I did so most recently in December and January. We shall press for early implementation of regulations that will match the regulations that the Government introduced many years ago.

**Sir Jerry Wiggin:** Is it not a fact that the Labour Government reintroduced the export of live animals? Is it not sheer hypocrisy for the Opposition Front-Bench team—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) was a Labour Minister—to oppose what the Government are doing? Is it not another example of double standards?

**Mr. Hogg:** It is worse than that. I have read a *Hansard* report of a debate on 16 January 1975, when the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) was a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Minister. In a free vote, he supported the resumption of live animal exports.

**Dr. Strang:** That matter has been explained in the past. The vote took place on the basis of the strict conditions that were recommended.

Surely the Minister recognises that rearing calves in relative darkness, keeping them deliberately malnourished and in crates in which they cannot turn round, is cruel. Will he now answer the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)? Surely he recalls that the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), who is now Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said that he would not ban the export of calves in veal crates because he believed that by doing so he would put the United Kingdom in breach of European law. Is the Minister saying that, even if he could halt the trade without breaking European law, he would not do so?

**Mr. Hogg:** In explaining his vote of 16 January 1975, the hon. Gentleman has given no answer whatever, because many of his Government colleagues in that Division voted the other way, as the Division list shows. The difference between what the hon. Gentleman says today and what he said when he had a free vote merely demonstrates the truth of the proposition: Labour says one thing and does another.

### Potato Brown Rot

4. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he is making in controlling the problem of potato brown rot. [11268]

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell):** Following last year's outbreaks in the Netherlands, the European Community adopted a series of controls, which the Government have supplemented with further measures to provide safeguards for our industry against spread of this disease.

**Mr. Alexander:** Is it not the case that, although we must not overreact about the disease because it appeared

in the Netherlands recently, nevertheless a recent consignment of potato seed from Holland cleared the Dutch authorities and was found, when it entered this country, to contain brown rot? Is my hon. Friend satisfied with the controls in Holland? Do they comply fully with European Union requirements?

**Mr. Boswell:** I thank my hon. Friend for those questions and comments. One consignment of Dutch seed potatoes into the United Kingdom was found to have evidence of brown rot—although the diagnosis has not yet been confirmed—and that raises the question of the validity of the Dutch tests. I can tell my hon. Friend that although the Dutch tests vary slightly from ours, they are very much in line with the requirements of the European Union. The only difference is that we impose as a further safeguard an additional set of tests, which very much reduces the risk of the disease reaching this country.

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** As the Minister made it clear in his initial reply that he has powers to supplement the restrictions recommended by the European Community, why does not he place a temporary ban on the importation of seed potatoes from the Netherlands?

**Mr. Boswell:** What was clear from our earlier exchanges is that we do indeed have powers to supplement, but they must be properly proportionate to the risk. We have considered this carefully and notified the European Commission of the action that we are taking. We have received wide support in the industry for the proportionate action that we are taking and are satisfied that it is appropriate to the risk as we perceive it today. We shall continue to monitor the position, and if there is a need for further action, we would, of course, be prepared to take it.

### Apples (Intervention System)

5. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about progress in the phasing out of the intervention system for apples. [11269]

**Mr. Boswell:** Discussions are continuing on reform of the regime for fresh fruit and vegetables on the basis of the Commission's proposals. The Government welcome them as a useful first step towards our goal of an end to intervention for all fresh produce.

**Sir Roger Moate:** I thank my hon. Friend for not being rushed into a bad compromise that would divert us from the ultimate goal of getting rid of the intervention system altogether. Does he agree that, in most years, the system results in almost 1 million tonnes of apples being grown just to be destroyed, at immense cost, largely to the British taxpayer as a major contributor, and that it undermines our ability to sell the best apples in the world—British Coxes and other fine apples? It is an unacceptable system, and we must phase it out before too long.

**Mr. Boswell:** I have every sympathy with what my hon. Friend said. The intervention system is extremely wasteful. It is damaging to the interests of the United Kingdom: both to the taxpayer, who has to pay a large share of the burden for a small portion of the total intervention, amounting to only 1 per cent. of the total Community spend, and to the interests of our growers, because it replaces good fruit from this country with surpluses of unrealistic and uneconomic production on the back of large intervention, with the French taking more than one third of their apples into intervention in the last recorded year. It is an unsatisfactory system, and we oppose it. We are determined to make major changes, and not to make concessions by reaching an early and unsatisfactory conclusion.

**Mrs. Golding:** Is the Minister aware that the draft regulations on the European Union fruit and vegetable regime underline the high price that the country is paying for his Government's lack of influence in Europe? Why are we threatened with such a bad deal for British growers, involving the continuance of waste and, in all probability, fraud? Why have Ministers let us down yet again in Europe?

**Mr. Boswell:** I am sorry that the hon. Lady has decided to introduce a note of asperity to discussions that have generally featured a measure of consensus, both in the industry and between the parties in Committee here. We shall do our utmost, because, unlike the Labour party, we are not prepared to commit ourselves not to be isolated in Europe. If we think that we are right, we shall stick by our principles, and resist the proposals of the countries—many with socialist Administrations—that account for the greater part of the intervention, the greater part of the cost and nearly all the abuse.

**Sir Colin Shepherd:** Is my hon. Friend aware that we make more cider in Hereford than is made anywhere else in the world? Cider manufacturers who are crying out for raw material in the form of apple juice find it immensely frustrating to see enormous quantities of apples being destroyed when they could be juiced to make apple juice and cider. Will my hon. Friend put continuing pressure on the system, as it is essential that we end that frustration?

**Mr. Boswell:** I understand my hon. Friend's concern, and that of the cider industry. Although the industry has been generally buoyant in recent years, the problem with allowing it access to intervention stocks is that that might have a displacement effect on apples offered commercially for cider production. We think that, on the whole, ending or curtailing the intervention system is a better and more market-related approach.

### Foodstuffs (Chemicals)

6. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new proposals he has concerning the use of chemicals on foodstuffs. [11270]

**Mrs. Browning:** Our controls are constantly reviewed in the light of scientific developments.

**Ms Quin:** Have the Government any new proposals to inform consumers about the chemical and pesticide treatment that may have been applied to fresh fruit and vegetables—apples, potatoes and carrots, for example? Why is it that, although consumers are rightly entitled

to detailed information about what is in processed and packaged foods, they are given almost no information about fresh fruit and vegetables?

**Mrs. Browning:** I am pleased to say that today I announced the establishment of a pesticides forum—that was a commitment in the rural White Paper—which will bring together interested parties, and which will naturally include consumers. I hope that the forum will help to put more information into the public domain. I shall send the hon. Lady a copy of the press release that went out today.

**Mr. Lord:** The EC directive on nitrates in drinking water is causing great concern to my farming constituents in Suffolk. Does my hon. Friend realise just how little evidence there is of the way in which nitrate levels in drinking water affect human health? Is she aware of the great problems that nitrate-vulnerable zones will cause Suffolk farmers? May I urge her and her colleagues, as a matter of the greatest urgency, first to look at the way in which the system will be introduced—because it is flawed and will cause great problems—and secondly to consider whether we need this mad directive in the first place? That is even more important. In fact, nitrates are not doing a great deal of harm.

**Mrs. Browning:** The Ministry receives scientific advice from independent expert committees. I am sure that, if my hon. Friend has further scientific evidence that he wishes us to consider, we shall be pleased to receive it.

**Mr. Skinner:** Have the Government noted the campaign to stop the use of the pesticide Lindane? A number of reports suggest a direct link with breast cancer. In Lincolnshire, the incidence rate is one in eight, whereas I believe that it is about one in 12 in the rest of the country. There is evidence that where Lindane has been banned—in Israel, for example—the rate has fallen dramatically. If that is the case, will the Ministry re-examine the position with a view to banning the pesticide?

**Mrs. Browning:** I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that we always consider scientific advice and the sort of information that he has brought before the House. I reiterate that our decisions are based on scientific advice, and therefore I assure him that I shall look at the matter again to see whether there is anything new that we have yet to consider.

## British Food Exports

7. **Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to increase exports of British food. [11271]

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry):** The value of UK food and drink exports is currently almost £10 billion a year. We continue, through Food From Britain, to provide active support for British food and drink exporters.

**Mr. Elletson:** Is my hon. Friend aware of the help provided by Food From Britain to more than 1,000 British companies, including several from Blackpool and Fylde? Marketing grants and other forms of assistance have helped several local firms, including Premier Biscuits, Fair Game and the Packaged Ice Company, to increase exports and break into new export markets. Does he agree that Food From Britain is doing an excellent job and will he join me in congratulating it?

**Mr. Baldry:** Food From Britain is doing an excellent job, and all over the country large numbers of successful businesses are exporting foodstuffs from the UK. Indeed, food exports have increased by 10 per cent. since last year. We are exporting pizzas to Italy, mineral water to France, and I strongly suspect that, somewhere in the UK, someone is exporting ice cream to the Eskimos.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** One of the better foods that we export is fish; the delicious and nutritious brainfood that we should all eat more of, especially those sitting on the Government Front Bench. The British fishing industry would like to export more fish, but at the moment it is importing too much of our fish, caught in our waters by foreign vessels. Therefore, is it not disgraceful that the Minister has not made a statement on how well he fulfilled the mandate imposed on him by the House of Commons by the Government defeat in November to get a better deal for British fishermen at the Fisheries Council?

**Mr. Baldry:** I would have been delighted to have had the opportunity to proclaim my success at the Fisheries Council. We struck a very good deal, balancing the interests of the UK fishing industry with the needs of best science. We must ensure that our industry has the maximum catch this year, at the same time as ensuring that there are sustainable levels of fish in the sea for years to come.

**Mr. Tyler:** I acknowledge that the livestock sector is not doing anything like as well as other sectors, as the farm incomes survey showed last night. What plans does the Minister have to promote the export of meat and dairy products, especially to other countries of the European Union? Did he note, for example, that at the recent international green week festival in Berlin, the Irish were there in force, led by their Minister, yet there was no representative from the Government, the Meat and Livestock Commission or Food From Britain?

**Mr. Baldry:** UK Ministers and Food From Britain are at practically every significant food fair in Europe. Bearing in mind how few Liberal Democrats are present, it is very difficult to take anything they say seriously. Indeed, in their own document on agriculture, they freely acknowledge that

"Lib-Dems say everything to everybody to satisfy the pro-animal and pro-farming lobbies."

8. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next plans to meet his counterparts in the EU to discuss the export of British beef; and if he will make a statement. [11272]

**Mr. Baldry:** Beef exports have been discussed at three of the last four meetings of the Council of Agriculture Ministers. British beef exports are a real success story. Last year British beef exports were worth an impressive £526 million.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Following my hon. Friend's robust efforts to protect British fishermen in the Irish box,

Staffordshire farmers now want him to push still further the export of British beef and not allow bovine spongiform encephalopathy to be used as an excuse by our French and German cousins for not importing it. Will he convey to our French and German brethren that British beef is, of course, far nicer than knackered horse?

**Mr. Baldry:** I am glad to say that the Meat and Livestock Commission estimates that UK beef exports in December were significantly higher than they were at the same time in the previous year. Clearly, although unfair and alarmist reports about BSE do not help, our continuing impressive beef export performance is testimony to the quality and competitiveness of British beef. We have made it clear to the Commission that we expect it to ensure that Germany complies with European Community law.

**Mr. Madden:** Will the Minister confirm that animal welfare groups do excellent work in monitoring meat exports? Will he therefore repudiate the remarks made a few moments ago by the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), who has now fled the Chamber, accusing my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) of pocketing £15,000 a year from an animal welfare group? Will the Minister acknowledge that that money goes not to my hon. Friend but to support research carried out in his private office, and that the same organisation funds Conservative Members in precisely the same way?

**Mr. Baldry:** I am sure that the Register of Members' Interests speaks for itself.

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** Will the Minister assure me that, when he makes representations about beef exports to the European Union, he will keep in mind the valuable contribution made by Northern Ireland to those exports? Will he be fully briefed by Baroness Denton, the Northern Ireland Office Minister responsible for agriculture, about the difficulties that Northern Ireland exporters now face in exporting beef to the European Union?

**Mr. Baldry:** We all have good cause to be proud of the quality of agriculture in Northern Ireland; it makes a significant contribution to United Kingdom agriculture overall. I have no doubt that if Baroness Denton feels that there are concerns, she will raise them with us, and we shall act upon them.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** Will the Minister tell us why neither he nor any other Minister attended the Berlin green fair, where the promotion of food exports was discussed? If the Irish Minister was there, why was the British Minister not there?

**Mr. Baldry:** As I have already explained, United Kingdom Ministers attend many trade exhibitions to promote UK food. The fact that UK food exports have increased by 10 per cent. in one year is a testimony to that.

### Milk Quotas and the Potato Marketing Board

9. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the National Farmers Union to discuss milk [illegible] and the Potato Marketing Board. [11273]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** I regularly meet representatives of the National Farmers Union to discuss issues of importance to them.

**Mr. Winterton:** A brief response from my right hon. and learned Friend. Are not the United Kingdom's climate and agricultural land ideal for the production of milk and the growing of potatoes? Is it not vital that we do not rely upon set-aside as a long-term income for farmers, and that we fully and properly utilise our agricultural land? At the next meeting of Agriculture Ministers, will my right hon. and learned Friend therefore press for additional quota for milk producers? Will he ensure that the proposed development council for the potato industry is properly representative of the growers?

**Mr. Hogg:** Our long-term objective is certainly to do away with price support systems and restraints on production. In the shorter term, we are arguing within the European Union for much greater transferability of milk quota between member states, and we shall continue to do so.

**Dr. Strang:** On the subject of the European milk regime, I thank the Minister for placing in the Library the request that the British Government made two years ago for permission to continue to receive European funds for milk in our secondary schools and for school meals. Did he agree with that approach? Did he agree with what the then Minister of State, now the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said about those payments being important for the nutrition of our schoolchildren? If so, why is he stopping those funds now?

**Mr. Hogg:** That question shows that the Labour party is not serious about reducing public expenditure and, therefore, is not serious in its pretensions to reduce taxation. We must see whether public money is being spent properly. We came to the conclusion that it was not in that case. That was the correct conclusion. The hon. Gentleman's question shows, yet again, that Labour says one thing and does another.

### British Food Exports

10. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the recent export performance of the United Kingdom food industry. [11274]

**Mrs. Browning:** The export performance of our food and drink industry remains buoyant. The latest figures available, for the 12 months ending October 1995, show a rise of some 10 per cent. compared with 1994.

**Mr. Riddick:** Is my hon. Friend aware that a recent survey showed that British chocolate is more popular on the continent than is continental chocolate? Is she aware that Glenys Kinnock MEP said at a recent inter-group meeting that vegetable fat should not be incorporated in chocolate? Is not vegetable fat the very thing that makes British chocolate unique? Is it not the case that, whether it be chocolate manufacturers or airlines, the Kinnocks are not exactly doing British companies any favours?

**Mrs. Browning:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The British chocolate and confectionery industry is one

of which we can all be rightly proud in terms of home sales and exports. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has outlined to the House the representations that he is making in defence of British chocolate. I had a meeting with Commissioner Kinnock a few months ago at which he assured me that he would bat for Britain. From the report that my hon. Friend has mentioned, it sounds as though there is trouble with her indoors.

**Mr. Foulkes:** Recognising the importance of potatoes to our food export industry, will the Minister gather information about Girvan Early Growers, an effective and efficient co-operative for growing and marketing potatoes, which had a turnover of £1 million last year? The co-operative was set up by six farmers in and around Girvan in my constituency. Will she use that information to encourage similar co-operatives to boost potato production in the whole of the UK?

**Mrs. Browning:** The hon. Gentleman draws attention to his constituency just as British producers are working in co-operatives to ensure that they are growing what the customer wants. I commend them, and I shall encourage others to follow that example.

### Retail Prices Index (Food Goods)

11. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of food goods used to compile the retail prices index are sourced from the United Kingdom. [11276]

**Mr. Boswell:** The retail prices index is based on a range of food and other goods and services intended to be representative of current consumer purchases. It does not take account of their sourcing, but my colleagues and I are anxious to encourage British food.

**Mr. Evans:** Does my hon. Friend agree with Janice that all food goods produced in the United Kingdom should be marked with a United Kingdom flag, and that all imported goods should be marked F for foreign? Does he also agree that that lot over there should wear badges showing their sell-by date so that we can all know the difference between new Labour and old Labour? We would then really know what the word hypocrisy means.

**Mr. Boswell:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his interesting suggestion—his and Janice's. There are certain technical problems in relation to both parts of the suggestion. In relation to food products, some are processed and might lose their original identity, while some might be blended together. In relation to Opposition Members, the biggest technical problem is that we might not know from one day to another whether they were old Labour, new Labour or somewhere in between. I have come to the conclusion that the Leader of the Opposition's recent support for the right to roam has come about because Opposition Members want to distance themselves from each other as far as they possibly can.

**Mr. Tipping:** Does not the common agricultural policy add about £20 to a typical family's weekly bill? Is not a reform of the CAP essential, and needed urgently, if we are to help ordinary families with their cost of living?

**Mr. Boswell:** While the common agricultural policy is expensive—my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has taken the lead in Europe in advocating change—I would not necessarily accept the figure that the hon. Gentleman quoted. The cause of CAP reform can be taken forward only by a party that is prepared to speak out for it; it cannot be taken forward by a party that is prepared to cave in to other interests to ensure that it is never isolated in Europe, even when it is wrong—as it usually is.

**Mr. Nicholas Baker:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be desirable for British beef and meat products to form a high proportion of the items in the retail prices index? Would not it be more difficult to produce and export British beef if local education authorities emulated the incompetent Liberal Democrat administration at Dorset county hall? Is he aware that it introduced a ban on beef products in schools, based on no evidence but on rumour and media hype? Two weeks ago, it cancelled the ban—thank goodness—but the damage to the confidence of young people in British beef products is considerable and that to the farming community incalculable. Is that not another example of the Liberal Democrats being prepared to say anything to anybody?

**Mr. Boswell:** My hon. Friend is entirely right. It seems from the report that he has given to the House that Dorset county council, under its present administration, is not good at running its schools and would be rotten at running a British export drive.

### Canned Foods Industry

12. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on developments in the canned foods industry. [11277]

**Mrs. Browning:** None recently, although my Department keeps in regular touch with the industry on issues of concern.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** Is there not a public interest case for the fullest possible disclosure of information on industrial accidents and food hygiene in the food canning industry in the United Kingdom? Will the Minister call on Campbell Soups of Camden, New Jersey to publish that information in the form of reports and surveys on its United Kingdom operations and, in particular, on its factories in England?

**Mrs. Browning:** There are already in place mechanisms through the Health and Safety Executive and environmental health officers for monitoring food processing plants. If the hon. Gentleman has specific factories and incidents in mind, and has information that he can substantiate, we would be grateful to receive it.

**Mr. Bellingham:** Is my hon. Friend aware that there are many canning jobs in King's Lynn in my constituency, including those of nearly 500 people who work for Campbell's? They are sympathetic to what the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is trying to do to save the factory in his constituency, but are against the boycott of Campbell's products because it could jeopardise their jobs.

**Mrs. Browning:** The House recognises the concern of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours)

about the loss of jobs at Campbell's in Maryport. He knows that I have supported the action that he has taken through legitimate means to try to represent his constituents. The Government cannot support a boycott of one product against another because, as he will be aware, jobs all around the country are involved, including those in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) and in Stratford-on-Avon, which have benefited from the losses that the constituents of the hon. Member for Workington have sustained.

### Pigs (Welfare Regulations)

13. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the annual cost to British pig farmers of the welfare regulations on sow stalls and tethers; and what action he is taking to assist them in meeting these costs. [11278]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** It is impossible to estimate the cost of the many alternatives to sow stalls and tethers. Less than 25 per cent. of sows are housed in them and many would have needed replacing irrespective of the ban.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** Does the Minister agree—I am sure he does—that it is not acceptable [illegible] industry should be expected to convert itself to welfare-friendly systems without financial assistance, help with promotion or a level playing field with other European Community producers?

**Mr. Hogg:** It is extremely important that we try to create throughout Europe a common set of rules; the British Government are seeking to do just that. In the first part of his question, the hon. Gentleman is saying that, whenever operating procedures are changed, assistance has to be provided by the Government. That would be an extremely dangerous precedent. I will wager that the hon. Gentleman has not discussed that proposal with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

**Sir Donald Thompson:** None the less, have not pig farmers with stalls and tethers—as did the veal farmers—led the way in the welfare of British animals, with the result that our welfare system is paramount in Europe? Are not they entitled, therefore, to some compliance costs?

**Mr. Hogg:** The Government have put in place an exceptionally beneficial tax regime for agriculture—most notably, though not exclusively, the right to average incomes and profits over two years. That is a most important contribution to what my hon. Friend has in mind.

### Indian Cuisine

14. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the rate of growth and consumption of Indian cuisine since 1976. [11279]

**Mrs. Browning:** Indian cuisine is very popular. I know my hon. Friend has played no small part in promoting both Indian cuisine and Anglo-Indian relations. Although I have no separate comparison for Indian restaurants, statistics available from the 1995 Curry Club user survey suggest that, since 1991, the number of curry restaurants has increased by around 12 per cent., accounting for 6 per cent. of the entire United Kingdom restaurant and take-away trade.

**Mr. Jessel:** Is my hon. Friend aware that thousands of Indian restaurants give tremendous pleasure to millions of British people all over the United Kingdom with their highly spiced foods, which buttress the terrific relations between Britain and India? Those relations were further promoted by the Prime Minister's visit to India for Republic day two years ago as guest of honour of the Republic of India.

**Mrs. Browning:** I am sure that the House recognises how absolutely delicious Indian cuisine is. I know that many hon. Members spend their money in Indian restaurants, which accounts for the increase in trade in that sector. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the issue.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Eng. gements

Q1. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 February. [11294]

**The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major):** This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming another successful year for the Manor House private hospital, which is funded by the Transport and General Workers Union and other unions to provide private health care for their members? In view of the Labour party's long-term opposition to private health care, does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a classic case of the Labour movement saying one thing and doing another?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a fascinating point. I think that he mentioned the Transport and General Workers Union. It sponsors many prominent hon. Members, so they will certainly be familiar with its activities. I was not aware of the case my hon. Friend raises, but if it is true it certainly calls into question the deep and apparently sincere hostility of so many Opposition Members to the private sector of medicine that they have set out for so many years. It is surprising that they seem keen to use the private sector, but are keen to condemn it.

**Mr. Blair:** Perhaps I could ask the Prime Minister about the national health service. Can he confirm the figures of the Consultants Association and the Audit Commission that show that, under his Prime Ministership, within the past five years, the costs of administration have

doubled? Given today's news about the pay awards to top administrators, does not the Prime Minister think that the Secretary of State for Health should say clearly to the trust boards that, in future, the average pay rises for managers should be very similar to those for doctors and nurses?

**The Prime Minister:** I cannot confirm the detailed figures that have been released—I have no reason to believe that the right hon. Gentleman is wrong about them, but I cannot immediately confirm them. The right hon. Gentleman should take great care before he returns to his old line of attacking management in the national health service and its costs.

**Mr. Skinner:** Why?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman asks why. I shall give him several reasons. First, because that is precisely what the Socialist Health Association told him not to do. Secondly,

"I don't think it's really in question any more that the NHS has been under-managed in the past".

[HON. MEMBERS: "Undermanaged?] I am sorry that Opposition Members scoff—those are not my words but those of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) when she was Labour's health spokesman. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]

Of course one would wish to ensure a fair division of pay among all people in the health service. The right hon. Gentleman knows that the present Government, under my Prime Ministership, gave the nurses a pay review body, whose recommendations we have always honoured.

**Mr. Blair:** Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to tell the Secretary of State to do as I ask? *[Interruption.]* "No," say Conservative Members, but I was quoting the words of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Instead of the Prime Minister saying things that are in his folder and my putting things to him, will he answer the basic question? Why have administrative costs increased by more than £1 billion a year in the past five years—when the number of nurses is falling, when patients are on trolleys and when there is a shortage of acute beds? The question that the Prime Minister must answer is, why is the national health service safe in the hands of a Government who place administrators before nurses?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sorry to tell the right hon. Gentleman that he is mistaken on almost every point that he puts to me, but let me deal directly with his point about management costs. It is fair to raise the important issue of management costs. If the right hon. Gentleman is worried about management costs, and I am sure that he is sincere in what he says about them—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]—can he explain why he does not support the 8 per cent. cut of administrative costs next year that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health proposes? The right hon. Gentleman does not support that. Can he explain why he voted against the abolition of regional health authorities, which saved a whole tier of management?

We have provided the resources for more medical staff and for the treatment of 1.5 million extra patients. A few years ago, it was impossible to check properly how resources were used because there was no proper management in the national health service. As the right hon. Member for Derby, South said, that had to be put right. We have put it right. Now that we have put it right, the right hon. Gentleman criticises it.

**Mr. Blair:** Let us debate at least on the basis of facts. Does the right hon. Gentleman dispute that the extra costs are more than £1 billion a year? If they are, instead of spending that money on bureaucrats, administrators, company cars and pen-pushers, why does he not spend it on nurses, doctors, patients and beds?

**The Prime Minister:** The money is being spent on patients. The right hon. Gentleman does not appear to be able to grasp that point. To spend it on patients, it is necessary to do what we have been doing—put resources into medical care and manage them so that money is available for medical care. Until the right hon. Gentleman understands that, he will continue to ask me questions that are, literally, senseless. I suggest that he examines the matter again with the right hon. Member for Derby, South, who understood those matters when she was Labour's health spokesman, but who obviously disagreed with the right hon. Gentleman—which may well be why she has almost disappeared from public view in recent months.

Q2. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 February. [11295]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Jenkin:** Can my right hon. Friend confirm that boot camps are for the punishment of young offenders, humanely but firmly? May I urge my right hon. Friend to make use of the military corrective training centre at Colchester garrison and ignore the blandishments and objections of Liberal Democrat and Labour Colchester councillors, who once again demonstrate that the Opposition parties are the villain's friend?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, and I shall certainly examine his suggestion. We hear much from the Opposition parties about their approach to crime, and in some cases about how tough it is. We do not see it at a national level and, if my hon. Friend is correct—I have no reason to doubt that he is—those parties clearly take the same inadequate approach at local level as we have seen them take at national level.

Q3. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 February. [11296]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Hain:** Does the Prime Minister recall telling the House on Tuesday that the British economy is now the best in the western world, when in fact seven European countries are growing faster? Does he also recall telling the House that crime in Britain is falling for the first time

for 40 years, when in fact crime fell in 1977 and 1978, under Labour? Was he deliberately misleading the House or just reverting to his old, routine incompetence?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right on crime figures, but I understated what I might have said to the House. The fall is not the first for 40 years—the hon. Gentleman is right about that—but the largest fall in crime since records began 100 years ago. It was achieved against the opposition of the hon. Gentleman and many other Opposition Members to almost every measure that we have brought forward in recent years.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to the economy. I said that we have the best performing economy in western Europe, and I think that the hon. Gentleman should look at exactly what I said. The facts are that we have the lowest level of inflation for 50 years, the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years, the lowest unemployment of any major European country and the lowest basic rate of tax for 50 years. We are number one in Europe for foreign investment and we export more per person than Japan or the United States. Which European country can match that record?

Q4. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 February. [11297]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Sir Roger Moate:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that privatised companies are a very attractive proposition to investors? Is he aware of a pamphlet issued recently by a Labour Member of the European Parliament that shows that nearly £1 billion has been invested in privatised companies by Labour local authorities, including Southwark, Lewisham and Islington? Is not that yet another example of Labour hypocrisy? They opposed privatisation, but now they profit from it.

**The Prime Minister:** I have seen the brochure and I commend it to hon. Members. It was written by a Labour Member of the European Parliament and has a foreword by the leader of the Labour Members of the European Parliament. Its case is set out as my hon. Friend claims. I am delighted to welcome Islington, Lewisham and Southwark to the stockbroker belt, but it strikes me as odd that the Opposition opposed privatisation, they fight privatisation in the House, they go on television to attack privatisation, they attack the management of privatisation, and yet they buy shares in privatised companies and enjoy profits from them. As usual, they are saying one thing and doing another.

Q5. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 February. [11298]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Hardy:** How does the Prime Minister think the British people will recall his widely publicised promises in the 1992 general election campaign to cut taxes year after year, given that he then increased them by more than at any other time in British history? Is not that the most glaring example of saying one thing and doing another?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman will know that taxes are now going back on a downward trend. He might like to hear some examples of saying one thing and doing another. The Opposition are claiming that they will not put taxes up; but what did the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) say some time ago?

"Well, I would say is this: that if the Chancellor, to raise money to do things, did raise the tax level on the top rate from 40 to 50 per cent., we would not oppose it".

That is not what the Leader of the Opposition says. Of course, the deputy leader of the Labour party, who is temporarily absent—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I do not know where the right hon. Gentleman is—he has decided to heckle someone else this afternoon. He said, however, that Labour

"should not follow the Government down the road of reducing the basic rate of tax".

How does that square with the promises made by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) about taxation?

Q6. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 February. [11299]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Robinson:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the assisted places scheme provides an excellent opportunity for thousands of children? Is it not another example of hypocrisy and double standards that the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition health spokesman have benefited from the excellent facilities in private education, yet wish to do away with the scheme?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is quite right. The assisted places scheme is another policy that increases choice and opportunity, particularly for people on modest incomes. That is why we are committed to doubling the scheme.

The Labour party is opposed to the scheme—or at least that is what I thought until the Labour leader gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) an assisted place in the shadow Cabinet.

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** When does the Prime Minister expect to be able to respond to the motion on Members' and Ministers' pay that stands in my name and in those of 300 other right hon. and hon. Members? Meanwhile is there any comment he can offer the House on the subject today?

**The Prime Minister:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there needs to be a new mechanism for determining Members' pay for the future, as the existing link to civil service pay grades disappears following civil service restructuring. That has been the case for some time. We have been considering how to take the matter forward. Of course we shall take account of the views expressed by the House in the early-day motion standing in the right hon. Gentleman's name. We have not concluded our consideration and consultations. As soon as we have, we shall bring our conclusions to the House.

## Business of the House

3.32 pm

**Mrs. Ann Taylor** (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us details of future business?

**The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton):** The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Debate on policing of London, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 6 FEBRUARY—Until 7 o'clock, a debate on the future of GP fundholding, on a Government motion; followed by a motion relating to the Collective Redundancies and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations.

WEDNESDAY 7 FEBRUARY—A slight variation from the usual Wednesday morning debate, in that this is the first occasion on which the first two debates will take place on Select Committee reports recommended for debate by the Liaison Committee. Until 12.30 pm, therefore, there will be a debate on the Agriculture Select Committee report on horticulture, and the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee report on employment creation in Northern Ireland; followed by debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Opposition Day (4th allotted day): Until about 7 o'clock, a debate on rail privatisation, followed by a debate entitled "The renewed threat of Post Office privatisation". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

THURSDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Until 7 o'clock, motions on the Welsh revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Remaining stages of the Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

FRIDAY 9 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (5th allotted day)—the first of three allocated to the minority parties under Standing Orders. There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats, subject to be announced in due course.

During the rest of the week, I hope to provide a further day for the official Opposition, and it may be necessary to take Government business on the Thursday. On Friday 16 February, the business will be private Members' Bills.

[*Thursday 8 February: (Welsh Revenue Support Grant Reports); relevant reports: Local Government Finance Report (Wales) (1996-97); Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (Wales) 1996-97.*]

**Mrs. Taylor:** I shall begin with the issue that was raised at the end of Prime Minister's questions. I stress to the Leader of the House that there is obvious and widespread support across all parties for establishing a new mechanism for dealing with the pay of Members of Parliament and of Ministers. As only the Prime Minister can refer the matter to Lord Nolan by widening that committee's terms of reference, I stress to the Leader of the House the need for an early indication of the Prime Minister's intentions in that regard, so that hon. Members are not placed in the invidious position of having to make decisions about their own pay and that of Ministers.

This week, hon. Members on both sides of the House have made clear their opposition to the suggestion by some members of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals that it should levy a pre-entry top-up fee of £300 per student. CVCP members believe that that is necessary because Government funding of higher education has not matched the increase in student numbers. I understand that the CVCP will meet tomorrow to make a final decision about the matter.

Should the proposal receive formal support, does the Leader of the House agree that a Minister should make a statement to the House on Monday to explain how the Government will respond to that very difficult situation? Would it not be wise to have a full debate on the funding crisis facing both higher and further education, as more and more further education colleges are also in significant financial difficulty?

Will the Leader of the House give an assurance that the Government intend to make a statement to the House the moment that the report of the Scott inquiry is published? It is important that the House should be the first to hear the Government's response to that report. I hope that any statement will coincide with the report's publication, and that that will be followed as soon as practicable by a proper, full-scale debate in the House.

Finally, the Leader of the House will not be surprised if I ask yet again about his proposals for debating important European issues. Last week, he said that he could not say whether or when there might be a debate on important issues such as convergence, social protection and economic and monetary union—which the all-party Scrutiny Committee unanimously recommended should be debated on the Floor of the House. Last week, the Leader of the House said that he had not seen the Committee's report. It is now available, and I hope that he will acknowledge that we should have an early debate on the matter.

While we are on that subject, I again press the Leader of the House to tell us when he expects to see the publication of the White Paper on the intergovernmental conference, and when the House will have an opportunity to debate it. If the Leader of the House does not respond to that issue soon, we can conclude only that the Government are frightened of debating any European issue.

**Mr. Newton:** I will take the questions in the order in which they were asked. First, in relation to Members of Parliament's and Ministers' pay, the hon. Lady will not be surprised to know that I would have said exactly what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said had he not been asked. I will add only this. The hon. Lady's statements yesterday of Opposition support for a reference to an independent body were extremely helpful. As I have told her, and as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, we hope to be able to announce our conclusions on that matter shortly, following our own further consideration and consultation through the usual channels.

Secondly, in relation to top-up fees and the meeting tomorrow, there is no sense in my speculating about what might or might not be appropriate in the wake of a meeting that has not taken place. However, I shall of course draw her remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. I emphasise that while, of course, the universities face a challenging public spending settlement

this year, they have been given new flexibility to finance capital investment through the private finance initiative, and we certainly see no need for universities to introduce top-up fees.

As for Scott, we will announce our plans for handling the report in due course. However, the House may like to know that my right hon. Friend the President the Board of Trade is answering a question this afternoon announcing the expected publication date.

In relation to the hon. Lady's question about European legislation, she is right to say that the report has been published—I have it with me. However, it was embargoed for any use before 2 pm today, so she will understand that we have not had an extensive opportunity to consider it. We will, of course, consider it, and respond in the appropriate way at the appropriate time.

Finally, the White Paper on the IGC is in preparation, and will be published in good time, before the start of the IGC at the end of March.

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): Can I push the Leader of the House a little further on the important question of the IGC? Will there be opportunities for hon. Members to give their input before the drafting of the White Paper, as I am sure that there are still some issues to be resolved, and an opportunity for a good debate on or shortly after its publication? I am sure that many hon. Members would like to join in on those weighty issues.

**Mr. Newton:** I will of course bear—*[Interruption.]*—in mind my right hon. Friend's points. I should also tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) that neither of them has shown any inability to provide their input to discussions on those matters in a variety of ways.

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): As a result of the Leader of the House's announcement that the annual debate on the policing of London will take place on Monday, which I welcome, will he go further and tell us whether it is possible to establish—given the controversy that occurs when it is not done—annual dates for debates on such matters as "The Health of the Nation", which is the Government's document setting annual targets, and the environmental state of the nation, which is a departmental and Government programme?

Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us why next week's business does not include a debate on the Leicestershire (City of Leicester and District of Rutland) (Structural Change) Order 1996, which is the first local government order to be debated not in the House but in Standing Committee, quite against the interests of many hon. Members on both sides of the House?

**Mr. Newton:** On the hon. Gentleman's last point, as he will well know, the understanding about the changes made by the House after Jopling was that statutory instruments would normally be taken in Standing Committee unless requests were made through the usual channels for them to be taken on the Floor of the House. We would always consider such requests. In this case, it seemed sensible to take the order, which Opposition Members have been pressing for, in Standing Committee.

In relation to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, there is a Jopling link. There is of course an understanding that there will be an annual debate on the policing of London. However, the House cannot continue to press me to move perhaps even further in a Jopling direction, certainly to sustain the moves that we have made, and also to demand an increasing number of annual set-piece debates on this, that and the other.

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Southend, East): After the very worrying and alarming decision taken by Commissioner Kinnock to allow massive funding from public funds for public airlines in Spain—which seems to show that the idea of a level playing field within Europe is simply a sick Brussels joke—will the Government be willing to have a debate on the changes that we can make in the wholly unrestricted power of Commissioners to make decisions which can cause real damage to British industry and destroy British jobs or jobs in other nations?

**Mr. Newton:** Perhaps I might take my hon. Friend's remarks as some sort of input along the lines touched on earlier. The decision seems to us, at best, a weak decision which threatens to undermine all our efforts to establish fair competition in the Community aviation market. We shall be studying the decision closely, and we have not ruled out a legal challenge.

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): The Leader of the House will remember that I raised with him the question of the replacement of MOD police with private security men. He will also be aware that the matter is now becoming urgent, because the question has arisen of arming private security men and training them, and there are real worries about replacing MOD policemen in highly sensitive and important factories around the United Kingdom. It is vital that the House of Commons debates these matters before decisions are implemented, and not afterwards.

**Mr. Newton:** I always bear the hon. Lady's requests in mind, but she will acknowledge that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces wrote to her in December, sending a copy of the consultation document, and again on 17 January. She will be aware that copies of the consultation documents and other studies on defence policing have been placed in the Library of the House.

**Sir David Mitchell** (North-West Hampshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that more than 35 Ministers are paid less than senior Officers of the House? In view of that, will he lend some urgency to decisions on the matter?

**Mr. Newton:** I thought that I had said, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did, that we hoped to give to the House an indication of the Government's proposals for carrying these matters forward within the relatively near future.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Has the Leader of the House any alternative to offer to the rejection by the Liaison Committee of the unanimous request by the Transport Select Committee for a debate on the important issue of ferry safety? Since we reported, there have been

*[Mr. Paul Flynn]*

two incidents. One involved a ferry that went down off Indonesia in two minutes; yet the Government refused to investigate it, because the vessel was not in British waters.

Then there was the rigged evacuation conducted at Dover, which proved that, although it was supposed to be possible to evacuate 2,000 people from a vessel in storm conditions at sea, it was not possible to evacuate more than 315 from a vessel tied up in harbour in broad daylight. As the risk of a disaster is as real now as when the Committee reported in July, can we have an urgent debate?

**Mr. Newton:** I am sure that the Chairman of the Liaison Committee will consider the hon. Gentleman's further representations. Although the Committee has suggested two subjects for debate next Wednesday, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that that is not the end of the opportunities for such debates. No doubt his request can be borne in mind.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it was with some surprise and not a little disappointment that we learned that the Government had renewed for a further five years the right of individual reference to the European Court of Human Rights, without giving the House or even the Home Affairs Select Committee the opportunity to consider whether that was what we wanted?

Is my right hon. Friend further aware that there is immense dissatisfaction with the fact that, time and again, the decisions of this House and this people are referred to a court of foreigners who do not have our traditions and do not have an understanding of our culture, and that those decisions are often reversed? Will he give an undertaking that, if such matters come up for consideration again at any time in the future, they will be referred to the House, so that it can be given an opportunity to consider them fully?

**Mr. Newton:** I will certainly bring those remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friends who are principally concerned with those matters.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Can the Leader of the House give a firm assurance today that the Government machine will stop rubbishing the Scott report before publication? Is he aware that the comments of the former Foreign Secretary, Lord Howe, were inappropriate? Why do we not wait for the Scott report to appear before the smear campaigns begin?

**Mr. Newton:** That question from that quarter almost beggars belief, given the amount of smearing by the Opposition.

**Mr. Hugh Dykes** (Harrow, East): Will the Leader of the House consider, not immediately but in due course, at least a half-day debate on the People's Republic of China, covering Hong Kong, what is to happen next year and bilateral relations throughout?

**Mr. Newton:** Consider it added, without commitment, to my little list.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House ask the Prime Minister, when he makes his statement about the proposed pay review for Members of Parliament, to consider giving British pensioners the same percentage increase as Members of Parliament?

**Mr. Newton:** The pressure, as the hon. Gentleman will know, is for an independent body to look at those matters. The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) made that request, and many Members have signed up to it. Were such a reference to be made, it would be for that body to consider what to take into account.

**Mr. Bob Dunn** (Dartford): May I join my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) in asking for an urgent early debate on the decision by Commissioner Neil Kinnock to permit the payment of a subsidy of £400 million to Iberia, the Spanish airline? Does not that show that, in 1992, the people were right to say that Mr. Kinnock was unfit to govern? It would also give us the chance to show that we are not prepared to sell British airlines short.

**Mr. Newton:** I cannot add to what I said, but I am sure that there will be a good deal of disappointment—perhaps on both sides of the House, but certainly among my hon. Friends—about what Commissioner Kinnock appears to have agreed to.

**Mr. Greville Janner** (Leicester, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman be good enough to arrange for an early debate on the miseries inflicted on schools by vandalism and arson? The English Martyrs Roman Catholic school in my constituency has been struck by arsonists three times in the past seven months. It is desperately in need of replacement mobile classrooms, closed circuit television and fencing. The head teacher of Barleycroft primary school in my constituency was attacked in the school car park.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment was good enough to come to Leicester and look into the matter, but nothing has happened. The schools have to pay for those necessities with money that should be spent on educating the children. Please may we have a debate very soon?

**Mr. Newton:** I cannot promise a debate, but I can certainly promise to bring the hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The underlying need is to carry still further forward the Government's vigorous campaign to detect and, whenever possible, prevent such crimes as he describes.

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): Following the questions by my hon. Friends the Members for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and my right hon. Friend's admirable reply, may I repeat my plea for a debate specifically on civil air transport? The decision by Transport Commissioner Kinnock could open a flood of applications for state aid by such carriers as TAP, Aer Lingus, Sabena and Olympic Airways, and consequently risk the livelihood of many of my constituents who work for British Airways.

**Mr. Newton:** I well understand my hon. Friend's concern, and I hope that that was clear from my earlier reply. I shall bear in mind his request for a debate.

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): Last year, in the teeth of opposition from just about everyone, the Government

allowed the merger of Scottish and Newcastle and Courage to go ahead, with the loss of 1,600 jobs—200 in my constituency. Will the Leader of the House provide time for a debate on such mergers? The people of Halifax think that there is a big connection between the £50,000 a year that the Tory party receives from Scottish and Newcastle and the Government's decision not to oppose the merger.

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Lady knows perfectly well that such decisions are taken only after independent examination by the Director General of Fair Trading, and often the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Her suggestion is not only unfounded, but rather confirms what I was said earlier about the Opposition's tendency to smear.

**Mr. Piers Merchant** (Beckenham): Will my right hon. Friend consider the possibility of a debate on the Government White Paper "Making Waste Work", so that we can examine the excellent policies proposed by the Government and the steps taken by good Conservative boroughs such as the London borough of Bromley, the "green and clean" borough? I hope that my right hon. Friend will not misunderstand me when I say that it would be beneficial for the House to debate rubbish.

**Mr. Newton:** I think that I am right in recalling that there was a somewhat similar Wednesday morning debate not so long ago. Were my hon. Friend to encourage yet another one, I would not wish to dissuade him.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): I welcome the opportunity on Wednesday to debate the report on unemployment by the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. Will legislation need to be changed to allow the Northern Ireland Grand Committee to move from place to place? How do we go about having it meet? Will it be the will of the House, or will it be the decree of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland?

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Gentleman has asked me fairly persistently about these matters over some weeks. He will have received, subsequent to our exchanges last week, what I hope he found an encouraging reply from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. I do not think that I am personally in a position to add to that.

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): May I join the growing number of Members who want a debate on air transport in Europe? Is it not a national scandal that a British Labour Commissioner should agree to a subsidy that can only put at risk jobs in the United Kingdom? Such a debate would give us the opportunity to point out that privatisation has led to British Airways being extremely popular and successful, and by far the best airline in Europe.

**Mr. Newton:** I would not necessarily choose exactly the words used by my hon. Friend, but I have already said that I share the sort of concern that he has expressed. I shall add his name to the list of those who want such a debate.

**Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North-East): May I press the Leader of the House to give serious consideration to the arrangements for cold weather payments, especially those made in my constituency? Wolverhampton is covered by two weather stations, one in Birmingham and one in Shropshire. It is ludicrous when cold pensioners, virtually on opposite sides of the same street, are denied the same benefit, when the ambient external temperature is exactly the same. Urgent action should be taken by the Government to ensure that there is fair play and equity between pensioners in exactly the same conditions.

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Gentleman will know of the substantial improvements that have been made to the scheme over recent years. I shall, of course, bring his specific point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North): May I support calls for a debate on the decision of Commissioner Kinnock that there should be subsidy of foreign airways, bearing it in mind that he is a resident of the borough of Ealing? His decision will threaten the jobs of many of my constituents and those of many others in England. He cannot be allowed to get away with it. Should not the House face the matter, debate it and put Commissioner Kinnock down, if it can?

**Mr. Newton:** My hon. Friend will have heard what I have already said, probably about four times. I shall ensure that his representations are also taken into account.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Mr. Harry Barnes: come up with something else.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): I certainly will, Madam Speaker.

Eighteen items are awaiting consideration by European Standing Committees A and B. Some of them have been in the queue for a long time. The Leader of the House said that he would look into the matter. Has he done so? If so, what is the result?

**Mr. Newton:** I have obtained some information, and I hope to come back to the hon. Gentleman before too long.

**Mr. Charles Hendry** (High Peak): May we have an early debate on the rural White Paper, so that we might discuss the important role of business in village communities, especially in the light of the assurance given by the National Westminster bank that it remains dedicated to serving the needs of customers in rural areas, despite its plan to close its Whaley Bridge branch, the fifth closure of a village branch affecting my constituency in the past two years?

**Mr. Newton:** My hon. Friend is asking about the possibility of a debate on the rural affairs White Paper. I see some attractions in that, and, without commitment, will bear the matter in mind.

**Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): Last December, the Government were defeated at the end of a debate on fishing policy. The hon. Member for Holland with Boston

*[Mr. Austin Mitchell]*

(Sir R. Body) said that he would not take back the Government Whip until the Government had a better deal for fishing.

Is the Leader of the House able to give us an opportunity to debate fishing, so that the Minister with responsibilities for fisheries can report to the House and not only to his hon. and retreaded Friend, and so that I can raise an issue that has been brought to my attention by "Channel 4 News", on a video of illegal fishing methods practised by flags of convenience vessels registered as British, which comprise about a fifth of our fleet? They are catching fish illegally under the eyes of fishery protection vessels and landing them pretty well unpoliced in European ports. We need to debate that, and fishing generally.

**Mr. Newton:** I shall concentrate on the second half of the hon. Gentleman's question rather than the first. I am sure that the appropriate action for me to take would be to bring his comments to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): May I also ask for a debate on the extraordinary decision of Commissioner Kinnock, because there is an aspect that has not been highlighted? This was the first appointment made by new Labour to Government office, and a serious decision has been taken. Those on the Labour Front Bench would have to tell us in such a debate whether the decision was taken because the right hon. Gentleman has buckled under pressure, or because real Labour still believes in subsidising nationalised industries.

**Mr. Newton:** The attractions of such a debate seem to grow by the minute.

**Mr. Alan Simpson** (Nottingham, South): The Leader of the House will be relieved to know that I will not ask him for a debate, but I should like a statement to be made in the House about local government reorganisation in Nottingham. I ask him to make representations to the Secretary of State for the Environment and to point out three things to him: first, Nottingham and, I think, Plymouth, would remain the only two major cities that have not been able to get a commitment to unitary status if their orders are not laid; secondly, they have remained longest in the queue for reorganisation and unitary status; and, thirdly, in Nottingham's case, delay of a year would cost the city an unavoidable additional £500,000, which everyone in the locality would like to avoid. I hope that we can press on with unitary status and reorganisation.

**Mr. Newton:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will bear those points in mind.

**Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): Will the Leader of the House assist me and other hon. Members by having a word with the Home Secretary before we debate policing in London next Monday, and draw his attention to a reply that he recently gave me, which showed that, in 1994, 959 people who were apprehended while committing burglary were cautioned but not prosecuted? Will he ask the Home Secretary to be prepared to reply in advance to questions that I have tabled for reply on 6 February, on page 1326 of the blues, which probe the extent of the scandal whereby people who have committed the serious offence of burglary are only cautioned? Will he tell us whether those people are included in the so-called "clear-up" figures of the crime statistics? Will the Home Secretary come clean next Monday on that scandal?

**Mr. Newton:** I shall warn my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary of the hon. Gentleman's interest in these matters.

# Royal Navy

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

4.2 pm

**The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot):** It is a great privilege and pleasure for me to open the debate on the Royal Navy. As we speak today, the Royal Navy is at work around the world, discharging its many and varied commitments with the dedication and professionalism that is its hallmark.

I should like to open this annual debate by highlighting some of the Royal Navy's achievements since we debated it last year. First is its work in the Adriatic. Two weeks ago, the House paid tribute to the vital contribution made by the British Army in the former Yugoslavia. Today, the House will wish to congratulate the Royal Navy on the immense part that it, too, has played and continues to play.

Our carrier task group, currently led by HMS Illustrious, has made a major contribution to enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia. In September, aircraft from HMS Invincible, which I visited in Portsmouth this week, played a significant role in the highly successful air campaign to deter the Bosnian Serbs from further attacks following their brutal attack on the Sarajevo marketplace. Sea Harrier aircraft from our carriers have flown over 2,600 sorties on, or in preparation for, missions in the area.

Other ships, currently HMS Brazen and HMS Beaver, have been involved in Operation Sharp Guard, the combined NATO/WEU operation to enforce the arms embargo and other sanctions against the former Yugoslavia, in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions. Sharp Guard units have now challenged over 51,000 ships, boarding more than 4,000 of them and diverting more than 1,000 for inspection.

On land, 845 Squadron of the Fleet Air Arm has been in Split for over three years, providing vital casualty evacuation and helicopter support for British forces and now for IFOR. Let me take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the three young British service men killed in the tragic land mine incident in Bosnia on Sunday. It has served as a sad reminder of the inherent dangers of the IFOR mission, and of the strength asked of the families who stay behind. I am sure that the House will wish to join me in paying tribute to the courage, skill and professionalism of the three young men—and, indeed, all our service men and women who are involved in an operation that offers the best hope for bringing lasting peace to a troubled land.

Elsewhere in the world, the Navy has maintained a UK presence in the Gulf, in the south Atlantic and in the Caribbean. Again this year, the achievements of the West Indies guard ship deserve special mention, not least following the eruption of a volcano on Montserrat on 18 July. HMS Southampton, supported by RFA Oakleaf, provided the Montserrat authorities with much-needed assistance for two months. That included beach surveys, erecting temporary accommodation and flying twice-daily helicopter surveys into the crater to allow scientists to maintain a very close watch on the vents, from as close as 10 ft.

The Navy was also able to help when the southern part of the island had to be evacuated in August, and troops from 42 Commando Royal Marines were deployed to assist with the additional policing burden. Finally, 148 personnel from the Commando Logistics regiment were sent to Antigua for three weeks in September to establish evacuation centres in the event that they might be required—which, happily, they were not.

Hurricane Luis, one of the most severe storms to hit the Caribbean in recent years, also brought work for HMS Southampton and RFA Oakleaf. Southampton was involved in the rescue of 13 Venezuelan coastguards from an isolated island that was in danger of being swamped by huge seas. Luis wreaked particular havoc on Anguilla. Southampton and the trusty RFA were on the scene within hours; work parties immediately set about restoring power and communications, and helped to repair key facilities such as the airport.

The Navy's ability to respond so quickly and decisively to crises around the world—as those examples have shown—underlines the high standard of its training, and the superlative quality of its people.

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Royal Navy's ability to intervene around the world, and to project power in the current fluid international situation, is more important than ever? For that purpose, effective amphibious forces are required, including dedicated assault ships. Can my hon. Friend say when the replacements for HMS Intrepid and HMS Fearless, the landing platform docks, will be ordered? HMS Fearless, which is now trying to put to sea, is a rust bucket.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I agree about the importance of amphibious operations. I visited HMS Fearless on Tuesday, and I shall say more about it later.

Last year also saw a Royal Navy task group deployment to the far east and the Pacific. As with previous such deployments, Australasia '95 was an outstanding success on many different levels. The Navy was able to renew its links with distant friends and allies. It undertook joint exercises with the Australian and Indian navies and made the first ship visit to New Zealand since 1983. That deployment also provided a tangible demonstration of our continuing commitment to the five-power defence arrangements, and helped to promote British exports in the region.

Closer to home, the Navy has been closely involved in building stronger relations with the countries of central and eastern Europe. Ship visits and joint exercises have helped to break down old barriers and to form new and lasting friendships. In the autumn, 130 Royal Marines were deployed to Romania for mountain training and joint exercises with the Romanian army, and the Royal Marines also led a multinational operation in the Baltic states to train and equip an infantry battalion drawn from the forces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. That is regarded as the most successful example of co-operation between NATO, neutral states and former Soviet Union states.

The Royal Navy continues of course to be very busy in our own waters. The fishery protection squadron goes about its vital task of enforcing legislation and ensuring that all fishermen can carry out their lawful business. It provides a vital presence in the Irish box following full Spanish accession to the common fisheries policy.

*[Mr. Arbuthnot]*

The Royal Navy also made a huge contribution to the tuna fishery last year. The season passed off peacefully, in marked contrast to the problems encountered in the Bay of Biscay in 1994. By establishing good co-operation with its foreign counterparts on the tuna grounds, and with our fishermen and the industry generally, the Navy helped to ensure that there were no significant incidents involving our vessels during the tuna season, and earned the thanks and respect of our fishermen in the process.

I have described a few of the many tasks undertaken by the Royal Navy, but I have not so far mentioned its most important responsibility: the maintenance of our strategic deterrent—the ultimate guarantee of our independence and security. The Trident system is one of the most sophisticated and challenging programmes this country has ever undertaken. It has been brought in—after 11 and a half years—on time and under the original cost estimate, which is a truly remarkable achievement.

The first two submarines, Vanguard and Victorious, are now in operational service. The third, Vigilant, was launched in October and will shortly embark on contractor's sea trials. Construction of the fourth, Vengeance, is proceeding to plan.

**Mr. Llew Smith** (Blaenau Gwent): If it came to the crunch, would the Minister be willing to press the button to fire those nuclear weapons? If those nuclear weapons were fired, what repercussions would it have for our environment?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I am conscious of the fact that, in asking that question, the hon. Gentleman is one of 42 Opposition Members who asked us to scrap our entire nuclear deterrent programme. I had the privilege of being on board HMS Victorious to witness her first test firing of an unarmed Trident missile off the east coast of the United States, as part of the submarine's demonstration and shake-down operation.

The exercise was incredibly professionally carried out, and the excellent co-operation between the United States navy and the Royal Navy was very heartening. It was an experience that I shall never forget. The firing went successfully, as did the firing by the submarine's second crew a few weeks later.

If the Labour party had been in power for the past 17 years, no British Minister would have had that experience because, in the 1980s, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) added his name to an advertisement that said:

"Parliamentary Labour Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament supports the removal of all nuclear weapons from British territory."

Indeed, as recently as October last year, the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) put his name to an amendment calling for the scrapping of Trident.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield now says that he was wrong when he signed that advertisement, but the 42 Opposition Members say that he was right then and he is wrong now. However, we know, and the country knows, where the instincts of the Labour party lie—in the direction of disarmament. It may say one thing now, but in power it would do another.

As regards conventional warfare, I would like to say a few words—

**Mr. Llew Smith** *rose—*

**Mr. Alan Simpson** (Nottingham, South) *rose—*

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I have a lot to get through.

**Mr. Smith** *rose—*

**Mr. Simpson** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** As regards conventional warfare, I would like to say a few words about each of the Royal Navy's three core capabilities—nuclear-powered attack submarines, aircraft carrier groups and amphibious forces.

First, our fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines—

**Mr. Simpson** *rose—*

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I shall give way in a few minutes.

Those highly effective vessels can deliver fearsome firepower from forward positions with the benefit of surprise, and conduct vital covert intelligence gathering. Our current Swiftsure and Trafalgar boats are undergoing an extensive upgrade, and we are bringing into service the capable Spearfish heavyweight torpedo, the most advanced of its kind in the world.

For the longer term, we plan to replace the Swiftsure class with batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines. We have decided to proceed on the basis of a design proposed by GEC Marconi, following the evaluation of complex bids from industry. We intend to begin detailed discussions with the firm soon.

Last October, we also announced an order for conventionally armed Tomahawk land attack missiles.

**Mr. Simpson:** Before the Minister began to talk about conventional missiles, I intended to tell him that I was pleased that he was able to experience the launch of a trial Trident missile. However, has he visited Hiroshima or Nagasaki to see what it is like to be on the receiving end of such a missile? Would he be willing to take responsibility for the scale of human destruction that follows the decision to press that button?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, because it confirms the point that I made earlier, which I have also made in several other speeches and at Question Time. The Labour party is dedicated to nuclear disarmament—and that is not all. Let us not forget that the amount of deterrence that we gain from having a nuclear deterrent, at a very low cost compared with the rest of our defence budget, is massive. But the Labour party is essentially a party of disarmers. I am happy to say that I have been to Japan to see some of those areas, and I believe that the importance of a nuclear deterrent has been shown in Europe over the past 50 years—the longest period of peace for many years.

**Mr. John Hutton** (Barrow and Furness): The Minister mentioned the Government's plan to replace the Swiftsure

class submarines. Why did he not make a proper statement about his intentions to the House before Christmas? Why did he sneak the decision out in a faxed letter to me? Why did he not have the courage to come here and make a full statement?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The hon. Gentleman made that point on the day the decision was announced. A huge number of procurement decisions have to be announced. The news was good, and there was no question of my sneaking it out. If I had thought that I could get away with making a statement to the House about it, I assure the hon. Gentleman that I would have done so. However, I suspect that if I had, he might also have complained. The fact remains that some companies are successful in winning competitions and others are not. There always have to be losers. It is a pity when companies lose, but it has to happen.

Aircraft carriers and their embarked aircraft provide the second core capability, not only for air defence at sea but for projecting power ashore. Operations in the Adriatic have vividly demonstrated the contribution that sea-based air can make.

Our carriers are equipped with the recently updated FA2 Sea Harrier, which has proved its worth over the skies of Bosnia. Following its update and with its advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles and Blue Vixen look-down radar, the Sea Harrier is now one of the best fighters in the theatre. Trials are under way to allow RAF Harrier GR7 aircraft to operate from carriers from the beginning of 1997. That will make use of the GR7's specialist ground attack capability and increase the flexibility and effectiveness of our carrier forces.

The Sea Harrier will be an extremely capable aircraft for many years to come. But given long development and production lead times, we are already considering its replacement in the next century. In December, we signed a memorandum of understanding with the United States to participate in the development of a possible successor.

Amphibious forces form the third of the Royal Navy's core capabilities, and I entirely agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). The courage, skill and endurance of the Royal Marines are admired the world over. They are a formidable fighting force; and 3 Commando Brigade, with the Army's 5 Airborne Brigade, will form the heart of the new joint rapid deployment force. The units will train together on a regular basis and will be equipped to form the spearhead of our reaction to any crisis.

In amphibious operations, the Royal Marines rely on specialist amphibious shipping, about which a great deal of nonsense has appeared in press. I can confirm to the House that our amphibious capability is highly effective. This week, I visited HMS Fearless, one of our two landing platform docks, which is currently undergoing maintenance. That was slightly delayed following a minor fire before Christmas, but we are confident that the ship will be able to meet its operational schedule, including joint exercises with the United States in April. She will return to service in a better material state than for several years.

More generally, some have tried to suggest that the UK's wider amphibious capability is in decline. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are enhancing the effectiveness of our existing vessels and planning for new, even more powerful ships in the future. Last year saw the launch of the helicopter carrier, HMS Ocean. She is currently fitting out and is due to enter service in 1998. HMS Ocean is the size of one of our aircraft carriers and will carry 800 troops, their equipment and supporting helicopters. As the House knows, we are also in contract negotiations with Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. for an order to replace our landing platform docks.

**Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): Conservative Members are proud to hear my hon. Friend the Minister's exemplary armed forces procurement record. There is, however, just one exception—the replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. It is 20 years since replacements were first considered, while it is five years since a Minister told me that the replacements would be ordered shortly. The vessels are steam-driven and their equipment is out of date. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that they should be replaced before too long?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I take my hon. Friend's point. That was one of the reasons why I visited HMS Fearless on Tuesday. Despite the fact that there is some old-fashioned equipment on board HMS Fearless, it is ready to do the tasks that we set it. While I hesitate to be repetitive, I must say that I hope that we shall be able to make a decision shortly.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** Can my hon. Friend ensure that we retain competition, whereby rival yards with comparable capabilities can bid? We do not have Swan Hunter any more—sadly—and in a no acceptable price no contract competition, it may now be hard to drive the price down to keep the costs within the Royal Navy's budget.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My hon. Friend has clearly read my speech, because again that is something that I shall come to in a few minutes.

**Mr. Paul Murphy** (Torfaen): I am troubled and concerned—as are many thousands of people in Glasgow and Southampton—about the future of the replacement for type 22 frigates. Does the Minister intend to give any information on the matter?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I shall come to that matter in a moment.

The strategic deterrent and the three core capabilities that I have outlined make the Royal Navy one of the most effective and respected navies in the world. That pre-eminence is underpinned by our escort fleet of 35 destroyers and frigates, which provides vital anti-air and anti-submarine protection for our carriers and amphibious forces and carries out a multitude of other roles. Nine of the modern Duke class type 23 frigates are already in service and one, HMS Richmond, has been accepted from the shipbuilders and is undergoing sea trials. Three more are being constructed and we hope to be in a position to make an announcement on a further order soon.

**Mr. David Chidgey** (Eastleigh): I am pleased to hear that, but I should like some more information. The Minister must be aware that in Eastleigh, Vosper Thornycroft is an important employer and that the delays in the announcement of the result of the tender for the type 23s, which should have been made before Christmas,

*[Mr. David Chidgey]*

are causing much concern to my constituents. Some 1,500 jobs are at stake and the shipyard's forward planning is being adversely affected. Will the Minister give an idea of when the decision will be announced?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The hon. Gentleman has been to see me to make his points. I have also spoken to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) about that important matter. We hope to be able to make a decision in the next few weeks. It is important to get it right, for the reasons given by the hon. Gentleman.

It is important to remember that our defence capability, including the number of frigates and other naval ships that we are able to order, depends on having a sufficiently robust defence budget—as, under this Government, it has always been and will always continue to be. That would be undermined by some of the proposals of the Opposition parties. Having said that, we hope to make an announcement on the type 23 frigates very soon.

**Mr. Murphy:** This will be a matter for the following debate, but does the Minister accept that even a delay of some weeks could affect Southampton and Glasgow? There are 1,100 jobs in Glasgow and 1,500 in Southampton dependent on the decision. Weeks cost jobs, and those areas cannot afford to lose any more jobs.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I understand that. It is very important to make the right decision.

**Mr. Winston Churchill** (Davyhulme): Given that the Government and the Ministry of Defence are in some discomfort over the negotiations with Lord Weinstock on the procurement of submarines and landing platform docks and that there is no other facility available to offer competition, does my hon. Friend realise the enormous U-turn that would arise if, in consequence of decisions taken on the procurement of frigates for the Royal Navy, the Government were effectively to end all competition in the United Kingdom by driving Vosper Thornycroft out of business? That would not be the action that one would expect of a Conservative Government committed to competition.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My hon. Friend refers to a discomfort that, I hope he will forgive me for saying, I do not feel. The NAPNOC—no acceptable price no contract—method of producing acceptable prices for the MOD has been very successful. I shall come to that shortly.

Helicopters are a key element for today's escort vessels. The Royal Navy's Lynx mark 3 helicopters are being upgraded to mark 8 standard by introducing a fully computerised tactical system and improved sensors. From 1998 onwards, we shall be adding to the Royal Navy's helicopters with the introduction of the highly effective EH101 Merlin. The first Royal Navy production aircraft was delivered in December 1995 and is undergoing trials and evaluations. To modernise the Royal Navy's air defence systems, we are also participating in the common new generation frigate programme. In the next century, that will replace the anti-air cover currently provided by our type 42 destroyers. We are making good progress in discussions with our French and Italian collaborative partners on both the ship as a whole and its principal anti-air missile system. We hope to announce the outcome of those discussions to the House in the near future.

The Navy depends critically for its support on the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The Adriatic is a fine example. RFA vessels, currently Olwen and Fort Grange, operate as an integral part of our carrier task group. RFA Resource is now in her second two-year tour in Split, providing unfailing support to British forces deployed in theatre.

As part of our continuing commitment to the RFA, I am pleased to announce that tomorrow we are issuing an invitation to tender for the design and build of up to two auxiliary oilers. The ships are planned to replace the aging O class fleet tankers. They will be double-hulled, to conform with the latest international regulations in respect of oil pollution, and capable of replenishing front-line ships at sea. They will be built largely to commercial standards, with some military features, which will include a flight deck and hangar for one helicopter.

I should also like to mention the role of merchant shipping, which is used to augment the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Our policy is to charter merchant ships on the international market to provide the greatest range of ships at a competitive price, thus ensuring value for money for the British taxpayer. British shipowners have the opportunity to offer their vessels for Ministry of Defence business. We believe that a substantial part of any shipping requirement can be met in that way. The deployment to Bosnia in recent weeks has been an excellent example of how we can put tens of thousands of tonnes of equipment and stores into theatre for thousands of personnel, by using the international market.

Modern and effective front-line forces require an efficient and responsive support. Last year, following "Front Line First", we announced the redeployment of minor war vessels from Rosyth naval base, which will become a Royal Navy support establishment by April this year. I want to pay tribute to the loyalty of the work force at Rosyth, who have maintained their traditionally high standards of performance throughout this difficult period.

I want today to restate the MOD's commitment to assisting with the regeneration of the Rosyth area. Last year, we selected Rosyth 2000 Ltd., a consortium of leading Scottish businesses, as the preferred bidder for the Rosyth naval base site. We are now in negotiation with Rosyth 2000 and are seeking to ensure that the decommissioning of the naval base, and the regeneration of the area through private sector initiatives, are managed in such a way as to achieve a smooth transition from defence to productive civil use.

I should also like to mention our plans for the sale of the royal dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth. We received tenders from Devonport Management Ltd. for Devonport and from Babcock International Group for Rosyth, and I have since been negotiating with them. I regret the continuing uncertainty for the work forces. I hope to receive recommendations within the next few weeks and to announce final proposals as soon as possible thereafter, allowing for full consultation with the remaining MOD employees in both dockyards.

At Devonport, we are also in negotiation with the consortium forming Devonport Management Ltd. for the design and construction of the facilities for refitting nuclear-powered submarines. We hope to make an announcement in a similar time scale. Our plans remain

for Devonport to be the only nuclear refitting dockyard in the future. Recent progress in the negotiations has been encouraging. The facilities are planned to be ready in time to meet the refit plan for the Vanguard class, which is programmed to start at around the turn of the century.

**Mr. David Jamieson** (Plymouth, [illegible]port): I welcome the Minister's statement that an announcement will be made in the next few weeks about privatisation of the dockyards in both Rosyth and Devonport. But does he not realise that there is some cynicism among Opposition Members and a belief that this is a sort of Whitehall farce, because we have sat here so many times over the past two and a half years and heard other Ministers make exactly the same assertion?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I have said before, and I say again, that it is an extremely complicated and important development. It is essential to get it right. The negotiations are protracted and difficult, and that reflects the complexity of the issue.

I shall say something about our defence procurement policy in general and then speak more specifically about warship building.

The Government have today replied to the report of the joint Defence and Trade and Industry Committees on "Aspects of Defence Procurement and Industrial Policy". Our response will be published by the Committees in the usual way. I do not want to pre-empt it, but I should like to set out briefly the main conclusions of our separate review of defence procurement policy, which was under way before the Committees launched their inquiry.

The background is the need to deliver to our service men and women the battle-winning equipment that they need in a cost-effective way, to the benefit of the taxpayer. The rigorous pursuit of value for money has been a great success for our forces, for the taxpayer and for British industry. We must also ensure that our supplier base remains efficient and competitive and can meet our immediate and longer-term needs. We consulted industry through the National Defence Industries Council as part of our review. That continuing consultation will help us develop the best procurement policy for Britain.

We have drawn three key conclusions from our review. First, value for money, through competition, must remain the cornerstone of our policy, and it must take full account of through-life costs.

Secondly, the MOD will, with the Department of Trade and Industry, take more systematic account of defence industrial factors in our procurement decisions. We shall carefully consider the balance between off-the-shelf procurement and collaborative or national development of equipment, to ensure that we can maintain our competition policy in the short and longer term, meet our operational needs without unacceptable compromise, support the equipment that we have, and use our industrial resources to take full advantage of opportunities for collaboration.

Thirdly, we shall continue to pursue cost-effective collaboration. Much has been achieved, but we believe that collaboration, especially in Europe, will be increasingly important in future. That is why we are pursuing the concept of a European armaments agency and why we wish to participate in the Franco-German armaments structure that came into being at the start of 1996. In addition, the United Kingdom defence industry has important relationships in the United States, and there are good opportunities to build on those.

I am confident that that development of our procurement policy will be welcomed by the House and by the UK defence industry.

I shall now speak about the warship building industry. The Government recognise the benefits of preserving competition within industry wherever that is practicable, but there has been overcapacity in the warship yards, and consolidation has continued in the past 12 months. Swan Hunter's Wallsend facility has been sold by the receivers, bringing to an end Tyneside's strong tradition of supplying quality ships to the Royal Navy. This year, GEC Marine has taken over VSEL, bringing two warship builders under one management. Against that background, we have sought new ways to introduce competition.

One option has been to supplement the traditional competition between yards by encouraging established defence contractors to compete as prime contractors. That is already working in practice. VSEL teamed with Kvaerner Govan for the construction of HMS Ocean. The hull has been built under subcontract at Kvaerner's commercial yard at Govan and the fitting out of military systems will be undertaken at VSEL's Barrow-in-Furness yard. Similar arrangements may apply to the auxiliary oiler competition, in which at least one of the invitations will be issued to a team of prime contractor and commercial shipbuilder.

Competition policy has proved successful; the price that we pay for ships for the Royal Navy has reduced considerably in real terms. It has also brought the benefit of innovative designs—for example, in the batch 2 Trafalgar class competition. Where competition is not possible, it has become our practice to price non-competitive contracts at the outset. That no acceptable price no contract strategy has been adopted in the negotiations with VSEL for the replacement of HMS Fearless and Intrepid. Within that framework, we encourage our contractors to adopt modern procurement strategies, such as a competitive "make or buy" approach to subcontracting, and to use the latest techniques, such as computer-aided design.

I have ranged widely in my speech and touched on the Royal Navy's achievements, its equipment and its supporting infrastructure, but in summary I wish to say only that the United Kingdom has a first-class Navy. It is a service with an unrivalled tradition and honourable history, but it is also a modern, capable and formidable fighting force that is rightly eyed with envy and respected by others. The Navy is at work around the clock and around the globe and it remains as crucial to the nation today as it has always been. In short, it is a Navy of which the House and the country can be truly proud.

4.40 pm

**Mr. Paul Murphy** (Torfaen): It is extremely fortunate for the House that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement is leading the debate, because it seems that he will be extremely busy for the next few weeks making decisions about the type 23 replacements and, of course, the royal dockyards.

What troubles the Opposition—it might be a matter for those responsible for the business of the House rather than for the Ministry of Defence—is that there is only one

*[Mr. Paul Murphy]*

occasion during the parliamentary year when we debate the Navy. I should have thought that it would have been better to delay the annual debate for a few weeks so that hon. Members from all parties who have deep concerns about procurement could speak in the debate.

I have read some earlier naval debates. The Minister was right when he said that the Navy has been extremely flexible over the past five to 10 years—it has had to cope with different situations around the world. Twenty years ago, of course, the Navy had to deal with problems east of Suez, and 10 years ago there was the problem of the east and of communism. All of that has gone, and I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members will want to pay tribute to the skill and determination of the men and women of the Royal Navy over those years.

Threats still exist, of course. The Minister touched on them. There is still uncertainty in parts of eastern Europe and there are problems in the middle east. Those of us who were fortunate enough to listen to the Prime Minister of Israel yesterday realise how important the peace process is in that part of the world. There is also the staggering growth in the far east. The possible threats remain, not just to this country, but to peace and security on the planet.

The Minister was right to draw the House's attention to the activities of the Royal Navy in the West Indies, the Falklands, the Persian Gulf and, until 1997, Hong Kong. I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members will agree with the tribute that the Minister paid to the Royal Navy for its activities in the former Yugoslavia. It has played its part in Operation Sharp Guard to enforce the United Nations embargo on arms and the trade sanctions.

I want to pay a personal tribute to the Royal Marines for their work in Northern Ireland. For six months, I was an Opposition spokesman on Northern Ireland, and I realise the great courage that our forces needed to play their role there. The same is true in respect of the Royal Navy's coastal activities. Some weeks ago, we had our debate on the Army. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) was, I believe, unjustly criticised for his opposition to certain Government policies for the Army. It is important to put on record what we feel our role in opposition should be. It is not to attack those who serve in our armed forces, but to criticise and bring to account the Ministers responsible for the defence policies of the United Kingdom.

It will not be too long before Conservative Members have the same role as we have now, and they must realise that they will have to criticise whatever policies a Labour Government will present. I have to say, however, that, in the past few weeks, the Government have seemed more like an Opposition than a Government.

There have been dramatic changes in world politics during the past few years. Any party that forms the Government has to respond to those changes, but we have always charged that the Government's response has been badly thought out. We believe that, although the cuts that have been made might have been necessary in certain instances, they have not been defence led. Rather, they have been led by the needs of the Treasury. I fear that, occasionally, the Government's policy has been dominated by adherence to a too rigid doctrine of free market forces, which does not always go with the Navy's needs.

There has been an unstructured rundown of the Royal Navy, involving ships, submarines, people, dockyards, the staff college at Greenwich and supply depots. No one would say that defence in 1996 requires the same resources as it required in 1986, but we are saying that there is a need for a proper strategic review of how defence is handled. We need consider only the redundancies—in July 1995, an admiral, 460 officers, 2,000 ratings and 130 Royal Marines were made redundant. By the turn of the century, the Royal Navy's strength will be only 44,000.

In 1993, the Select Committee on Defence report stated:

"There has been no period of financial calm: just the opposite. No plans seem to survive the next public expenditure round. Every activity is reviewed, and revised again and again."

The Select Committee later stated:

"For many service personnel and civilian employees, the prospect of redundancy hardly denotes stability . . . Market testing, which has barely affected most of the major centres of MoD civilian employment, is gathering pace, importing a further element of turbulence."

I understand that the Royal Navy has started its own internal study to see whether it can still carry out its traditional duties, following the defence cuts. Sir Jock Slater was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*—not normally a friend of the Labour party—on 3 October 1995 as saying:

"We have to make absolutely certain that if the crunch were to come then we can regenerate . . . Overall our people are pretty stretched now."

He went on to say that he was concerned about the effect that the reforms were having on morale and that the changes had increased work loads and eroded job security. He continued:

"There are no two ways about that at all . . . I am concerned about the effect it has on our people."

I have no doubt that both sides of the House agree with the Labour party's main principles. First, we believe that NATO is the cornerstone of our defence policy—it was a Labour Foreign Secretary who helped to set NATO up in the late 1940s. Secondly, we believe that the United Nations should be supported—I am sure that the Government agree—especially in its humanitarian activities. Thirdly, we believe that we should have the resources necessary for the effective defence of our country. Those are the three planks of the Labour party's defence policy and I am sure that the Government do not disagree with any of them. However, we differ fundamentally on how to achieve those aims.

Time and again, the Government have derided our ideas for a strategic defence review. The French and the Americans have had one. We had them in the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s and even in the early 1980s. Why cannot we have one now that the world has changed so dramatically? I am not alone in calling for a strategic review. Anthony Preston, the editor-in-chief of a magazine called "Naval Forces", has said:

"The time has come, not for blindly continuing to cut the budget, but for the logical review of the Navy . . . What I am worried about is just hacking away at the foliage, without working out what the job of the Navy is."

*The Sunday Times*, another paper usually friendly to the Conservative party, said in 1993:

"instead of conducting a new defence review, which common sense now demands and the armed forces want, the government has hidden its defence policy behind a cloak of secrecy so impenetrable that

nobody knows what it is or what the taxpayer actually gets for £24 billion a year . . . A defence review would be an opportunity to stop this death by a thousand cuts that is destroying what is still one of the finest armed forces in the world."

We would all agree with that.

The surface fleet is half the size it was a quarter of a century ago but, as the Minister admitted in his speech, our commitments have not changed particularly. We still have commitments in the Caribbean, the south Atlantic, and the middle east, and we are now committed in the Adriatic, although we are losing Hong Kong—it represents the only change in this area. We are told that the operation is very tight—

**The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames):** Is the burden of the hon. Gentleman's remarks the idea that the Royal Navy has too many tasks to conduct? Is he saying that his defence review would lead to a reduction in the tasks that the Royal Navy undertakes?

**Mr. Murphy:** Not at all. I have said that resources must match commitments. I remind the Minister that when his party was in opposition, one of his predecessors, Sir Ian Gilmour, was asked the same question by the Labour party. He replied that it was only when the Conservatives were in government that they would be in a proper position to look at the details of a strategic defence review. We cannot conduct such a review until we have all the necessary intelligence given us by the various civil servants and by the armed services themselves. What we can say is that, over the past five years, the Government have had every possible opportunity to conduct a defence review and have failed miserably to do so.

Perhaps the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will tell us, when he winds up, what is to happen to Britannia. I understand from another Conservative newspaper this week, the *Daily Mail*, that the national lottery might pay for a new vessel. I am sure that the Minister will scotch that rumour later on.

We are pleased that the Government have retained the fishery protection and hydrographic services, but we are troubled about the Royal Fleet Auxiliary—there is some doubt among the experts as to whether we have the answer right.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) will raise the question of the Royal Marines school of music. If he does not, I certainly will. Many of us were disturbed that it should have been moved from Deal. We find it particularly worrying that it is to be housed in temporary accommodation, bearing in mind all the trials with which that group of men and women have had to put up over the years. Temporary accommodation is not a good solution.

Will the Minister to make it absolutely clear—my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) will speak about the detail—what is to happen to the Royal Naval college at Greenwich? I am delighted to say that the Defence Committee, comprising Members from both sides of the House, is to take evidence at Greenwich in the weeks ahead. I hope that we will be given an assurance this week that there will be no repeat of the Admiralty arch fiasco. It did nothing for the reputation of the Ministry of Defence or its Ministers.

The Minister touched on the royal dockyards. My party has a two-dockyard solution to the problem. I should like now to elaborate on what I said earlier in an intervention, and what I shall say applies also to the type 23 frigate replacements. The perpetual delays emanating from the MOD are bad from a number of points of view: the first is that the House of Commons is not given a proper opportunity to debate the decisions. Decisions given in answers to written parliamentary questions are not the same as debates in the House.

As I said before, this debate should have been an ideal opportunity for the Minister to appear before us and for us to ask him questions about the replacements for the frigates and the future of the two royal dockyards. Someone told me today that MOD no longer stands for Ministry of Defence—it stands for Ministry of Delay. I am sure that the thousands of people who need decisions to be made for the sake of maintaining their jobs in Glasgow and Southampton are deeply troubled by the fact that the Minister can give us no information about the replacements for the frigates.

An answer given to a Conservative Member this week by the Minister states that he is considering a batch of frigates "of up to three". What does that mean—one, two or three? The differences are clearly enormous. If only one ship is to be built, thousands of jobs will be put at risk if the others are not built too. Moreover, we need to know when the ships will be built by—the turn of the century, next century? The answers are vital, and I hope that we shall have a proper opportunity to debate them in the weeks ahead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) will touch on procurement matters later if he catches the occupant of the Chair's eye. The Defence Manufacturers Association recently gave evidence to the joint Trade and Industry and Defence Committees as follows:

"Sadly, the MOD's procurement policies have, until now, done little of a positive nature to support industry's chances of retaining a competitive edge".

That was said in 1995. We are pleased, however, that the Minister said today that there will be more co-operation with our European partners—that is indeed good news. I only hope that the Secretary of State agrees.

My hon. Friends the Members for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and for Motherwell, North recently referred in this place to the considerable number of cases of financial mismanagement in the MOD. They ought to be put on record, not least because the Secretary of State told his party conference last year:

"Every day, every week, every month we will convert waste into weapons."

Well, he has gone about things the other way round: weapons have been made into waste, and the waste of money in particular has been staggering.

Eight hundred million pounds has been overspent on Trident construction facilities at Faslane; £6 million has been spent needlessly on consultants' fees for MOD housing plans; £8 million has gone on schemes to privatise the royal dockyards. But all these pale into insignificance compared with the £261 million squandered on refitting warships which are then sold off at rock bottom prices or even used for target practice. HMS Andromeda was refitted at a cost of £27 million and then sold for £65,000. HMS Battleaxe was refitted in July 1994 at a cost of £13 million—only two years ago—and sold by the MOD for an unknown sum—

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures from, but I can assure

*[Mr. Arbuthnot]*

him that the prices of the ships that the MOD sells are commercially confidential. The £65,000 figure he quotes is completely wrong.

It is also important to remember the significant change in the defence climate of the entire world when the cold war ended. A number of ships were going through their refit at the time, and it became plain that they were no longer necessary for our defence requirements. It was right to dispose of them, and we shall continue to dispose of such ships. Disposal generates significant sums which are then available for spending on new ships. Often, refitting for overseas owners provides a great deal of work for British shipyards.

**Mr. Murphy:** The figures are not made up; they come from parliamentary answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields. We knew about the changes in world politics well before 1994. We are asking: why refit all these ships when we know that we are not going to use them? Had there been a proper defence review, none of this might have happened.

**Mr. Harry Cohen** (Leyton): I know that my hon. Friend does not have time to watch much television, but did he see the "Spitting Image" programme last Sunday? It referred to the Polaris submarine HMS Renown, which was refitted in 1993 at a cost of £155 million. Since then, it has been left in dock awaiting decommissioning at a cost of £29 million per annum. Does that not add weight to his point?

**Mr. Murphy:** I fear that I did not see "Spitting Image" last Sunday, but I saw it the week before and I was much taken with the uniform worn by the Secretary of State for Defence. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North has also raised the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) makes so well.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The refit of HMS Renown—which took five years—was finished in 1992 and the ship then went out on three operational patrols. It was later decided that it was no longer needed because of the end of the cold war and because of the significant success of the Trident programme, which is under budget and on time.

**Mr. Murphy:** Perhaps the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will be able to enlighten us later about the troublesome question of the four unwanted Upholder class submarines. We understand that some sort of deal has been reached with the Canadian Government about training facilities for both the Army and the RAF at Goose bay. Can the Minister tell us what prices we are likely to get for our submarines and to what use we are putting the Goose bay facilities, which many people believe are under-utilised?

The Reserve Forces Bill is currently in the other place and I assume that it will be introduced in this House in the next few weeks—if the Government can decide what to put in it. The *Evening Standard*—another newspaper that is friendly to the Government—recently described the Reserve Forces Bill as

"one of the sloppiest and worst-drafted pieces of work in living memory".

The Government tabled 200 amendments after the Bill was printed and before its Committee stage in the House of Lords. We shall not contest the legislation, but we hope that it will be better drafted when it comes to the House of Commons.

I believe that the Royal Naval Reserve has probably suffered more than any other reserve force during the past few years. It has only 3,000 men and women and 13 units. Eleven units have been closed, there is only one unit in Scotland and there is none in Yorkshire and Humberside. RNR ships have been lost also. We must offer worthwhile training at sea and proper command experience opportunities to our Royal Naval Reserve officers.

The complete loss of the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service in 1993 was particularly disturbing. We lost 2,700 volunteers and there are now fewer opportunities—nothing like those that exist in the Territorial Army—for men and women to serve as ratings in the Royal Navy. The Government must address that problem.

I pay tribute to the Maritime Voluntary Service, which has been formally constituted as a national training organisation and is a registered charity. It continues to grow, and shore premises and afloat billets have been obtained with assistance from a wide variety of organisations which recognise the importance of maritime skills. There are 50 units around our coast and its volunteers train to a very high standard. I am sure that the House will join me in supporting the MVS and in wishing it every possible success.

The sea cadets and the reserves link communities throughout the country to the armed forces and we are grateful to them for providing that essential connection. I shall make a constituency point and pay special tribute to the TS Kittiwake in Cwmbran. It took part in the recent VE and VJ day ceremonies and, like many such units all over the country, it provides marvellous opportunities for young men and women—including employment opportunities in the Royal Navy later.

I read today in *Hansard* that the Pay Services Directorate has been established. The Armed Forces Bill, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North has responsibility on behalf of the Opposition, deals with personnel matters, but I shall touch briefly on the subject of pay in the Royal Navy. The 1992 Tory manifesto said:

"Our Forces deserve the excellent pay and conditions we have secured for them".

There has been much to-ing and fro-ing in the Chamber this afternoon about saying one thing and doing another. The Tory manifesto said that, but this is what the Government have done: levels of pay for higher ranks have increased, but pay for lower ranks has fallen substantially in relation to average wages. The figures for average earnings reveal that, from the period 1979 to 1995, admirals' pay has risen by 12.3 per cent., leading seamen's pay has risen by 5 per cent. and able seamen's pay has decreased by 15.4 per cent. The Government say one thing and do another.

The biggest problem that we face—the Minister referred to it in some detail, as did the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers)—is the Royal Navy's inability to maintain its existing operations. That is extremely worrying. It is highly unlikely that we could mount another Falklands campaign, as we no longer have the necessary sealift capability. We are told—we were not

informed of it officially—that, last year, the Ministry of Defence directorate of operational capability conducted a "paper exercise" to ascertain whether this country could mount an amphibious operation similar to the Falklands campaign. It allegedly found weaknesses in our sealift capability.

The Merchant Navy has declined drastically—a fact which concerned the Defence Committee. It found that the number of militarily useful ships has decreased by 16 per cent. since 1992. The number of British general cargo vessels has halved since 1986 and the number of ro-ro ferries has decreased by a third. In 1982, 51,000 people served in our Merchant Navy: today the figure is 17,000 and it is estimated to fall to 4,000 by 2010. Fifty-four ships were sent to the Falklands, but Britain sent only 11 to the Gulf, while France sent 27. Many of the British ships that were sent are manned by foreign crews, which causes some problems. For example, Japanese crews refused to enter the Gulf in 1992 and India withdrew its nationals from merchant vessels which were used in the Falklands campaign. The Chamber of Shipping recently said:

"It is now a fact that our armed forces rely on the willingness of the commercial market, the willingness of foreign owners, the willingness of foreign crews to provide the much vaunted flexibility and mobility of our armed forces rather than British owners and British seamen."

**Mr. Soames:** I know that the hon. Gentleman, like a rather large pheasant, will not be diverted from his flight path. We all share some concerns about the flagging of British ships and regret that there are not as many of them as before. However, British forces have just completed the largest deployment of troops to Europe since the last war. That was performed in a spectacularly successful and orderly fashion without any difficulties whatsoever. It was highly effective and extremely efficient. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is the most important criterion for the deployment of our troops abroad?

**Mr. Murphy:** I am glad that the Minister referred to pheasants. One of the reasons why I did not see the Secretary of State for Defence on the "Spitting Image" programme last Sunday is that I was eating pheasant. They tell me that it is good for the figure.

As to the Minister's reference to sealift, we accept that efficiency and effectiveness are important. However, we must not forget that we have a duty to try to ensure that our Merchant Navy is up to scratch and can be used in those circumstances. We must remember that foreign ships and crews cannot be as reliable as our British Merchant Navy in many respects. It is not good to have to rely on other countries because the Merchant Navy has declined so drastically.

The Minister said that the Ministry of Defence borrowed two United States military transport vehicles for operations in Bosnia. Not one British ship was used to ferry equipment; we even used a ship that was registered in Luxembourg —a country which, as hon. Members will know, has no coast.

Last year, the MOD chartered 70 vessels for Bosnia. Only 15 were British and the rest came from Panama, Malta, Ukraine, Latvia and heaven knows where else. It is important to give credence to the idea that there is a future for the Merchant Navy. Part of that future lies in its relationship with the Royal Navy and its ability to help the Navy out.

Ministers will know, because their admirals will tell them, that the future of the Royal Navy is in what the technicians call littoral warfare, in which the three services operate together in task groups of helicopters, carriers and other assault ships near enemy coasts. That expeditionary role requires proper amphibious forces and equipment. The Minister is right to say that no one can question the excellent ability of, for example, the Royal Marines.

The Minister did not answer the questions that were put to him by his hon. Friends. What is happening to our aging and rusting landing ships is important. The House was told this week by the Minister that replacements for HMS Fearless and Intrepid would have to wait, not a few weeks this time, but until around the turn of the century.

We were told in another answer this week that HMS Intrepid was last at sea in 1990. That is almost six years ago. *The Daily Telegraph* recently reported that a major exercise for NATO in May could well be cancelled due to problems getting HMS Fearless to sea because the entire bulkhead had rusted away. A few weeks ago, *Defence News* quoted a defence source as saying of Intrepid:

"If it is ever possible to get her moving, she could only now be used for transport; certainly not amphibious operations . . . We continue to pour new wine into old bottles and it is a terrible waste of money".

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** If the hon. Gentleman had been listening to my speech, he would have heard me say that all of that is not true.

**Mr. Murphy:** I understand that, but I must tell the Minister that there is considerable disagreement and unease—not only on my part, but among Conservative Members who represent coastal constituencies that are involved in these matters—about the replacement of those ships and their seaworthiness. These are important matters because littoral warfare will be the Royal Navy's new role in the coming century.

The United States is exploring what it calls co-operative engagement. It was stated clearly in the debate on the Army that the United Kingdom leads Europe in relation to the allied rapid reaction force. Why cannot we, with our naval history and experience, lead Europe in naval co-operation as well? Why cannot we be the link between the United States and Europe in naval matters? One of the reasons is that the Secretary of State—he has gone now—is no friend to Europe. Surely even he realises that co-operation in Europe and in NATO is the way ahead, but it has been seriously jeopardised by cuts and the lack of a proper long-term plan.

Our Navy must be prepared and resourced for its new role. There must be a proper strategic defence review for the Navy and all the armed forces. As politicians, we must not let the Navy down in this new chapter of its history. Like all hon. Members, I agree with the Minister that the Royal Navy is still viewed with envy across the globe, and that the safety and stability of the British people, if I might paraphrase Kipling, still depends on uniforms that guard us while we sleep.

5.13 pm

**Mr. Peter Griffiths** (Portsmouth, North): I should like to echo the comments that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement made in opening the debate,

*[Mr. Peter Griffiths]*

when he expressed the nation's admiration and gratitude to the Royal Navy for its work not only in situations of military danger but in dealing with natural disasters such as those that have occurred in the Caribbean. As I represent a constituency with a considerable number of naval families resident within it, I should add to his congratulations and mention the admiration that one must also have for the families of those who serve in the Royal Navy. The sailor can serve at sea with reasonable confidence and good morale only if he knows that his family understands the responsibilities of his work and recognises the pressures that it places on him.

The Minister mentioned the work of HMS Southampton in the Caribbean. The crew of that ship were involved in extremely important humanitarian operations, but they were not the only ones who were inconvenienced. It had been expected that there would be rest and recreation in Florida during the ship's deployment and the wives, at their own cost, had arranged to visit their loved ones. That all had to be cancelled, however, due to the situation which arose in the Caribbean. It is important to remember the role of the families when we praise the armed forces.

Whenever one speaks about the Royal Navy or the armed forces generally, it is a truism to say that we live in uncertain times. One point on which I agreed with the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) was his comment that he felt that we ought to seek stability and certainty, in so far as that is possible in view of the problems with which the armed forces are designed to deal. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in his reply, will manage to settle some of the uncertainties that have beset hon. Members on both sides of the House in relation to some of the issues that the Ministry of Defence faces.

My hon. Friends made it clear in earlier interventions just how strongly they feel about the replacements for the aging assault ships. I accept the assurances of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement that we shall be able to meet our obligations in the coming exercises. However, no hon. Member can have any doubt that we must develop our amphibious capacity in such a way that we can supplement HMS Ocean with dedicated assault ships. That must be done as soon as possible.

I do not expect the Minister to change his statement about timing, but I ask him—as I asked his predecessor a year ago—to give us an assurance that we are talking about two replacement assault ships for the two existing ships, rather than one ship in addition to the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean. That assurance would be a great comfort to us and a part of the stability that we seek.

I should also like an assurance in relation to the replacement order for the new type 23 frigates. We all know that the companies tendering for the order have been asked to tender on the basis of building one, two or three ships. It does not require any great knowledge of shipbuilding to recognise that if the Navy requires three type 23 frigates it will be cheaper to order three at one time rather than one or two now and one or two more at a later stage after a separate negotiation.

The tender prices that have been placed before the MOD run only to March this year. It is therefore important that we can be assured that the decision will be taken within, literally, the next few weeks—in February—and that the decision will be to order three frigates. That would give the MOD flexibility to place the orders in a way that deals with the problem of maintaining jobs in the warship-building industry, which the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman raised. That would also help in relation to the important point that my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) raised about the need to maintain competition in price setting for vessels in this country.

It may be that the sheer size of HMS Ocean, which was a one-off ship, limited the opportunity for competition, but in regard to frigates I remind my hon. Friend that there is capacity on the south coast of England to build ships in steel that would be competitive in price, quality and delivery date. That potential would retain for the Ministry the opportunity to obtain competitive prices for vessels as they are required.

The case for Vosper Thornycroft is unanswerable. That company has seized opportunities in overseas markets year in and year out and is an example to other yards. It should be recognised as a highly successful shipbuilding operation that requires serious consideration when orders are placed for the three frigates.

I said earlier that families are an essential part of the structure of the Royal Navy and help to maintain morale. I should like to comment on a particular group of those serving within the fleet, both at sea and on shore, for whom we should express our admiration and whose career structure should be improved. I am talking about the women who serve within the Royal Navy. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will no doubt recall my questions on that matter last year, although I shall not deal with them in detail. He reminded us that 36 Royal Navy ships and five auxiliaries have been converted to include facilities for women, and there are now more than 1,300 berths for female sailors. That provides an opportunity for the Royal Navy to make better use of the skills and qualities of women sailors at sea.

One problem is that the ranks at which women serve at sea are not commensurate with their potential to operate in command positions. My hon. Friend replied to my Questions 108 and 109 at columns *354-55* on 13 March 1995, that no fewer than 97 per cent. of commissioned officers, petty officers and ratings have served at sea. That is not surprising as men join the Navy to go to sea. That is what sailors do. However, only 45 per cent. of women sailors ever been to sea, so 55 per cent. have no service at sea. That is a loss of quality serving sailors at sea because there is still a tendency to see women's duties as administrative and supportive and not at the sharp end of the fleet.

**Mr. Soames:** I applaud entirely the point that my hon. Friend is making and can reassure him that last week I had the great pleasure of visiting flag officer sea training operations. I spent the day on HMS Montrose, where I had the privilege of watching the first woman qualified senior navigator in the Royal Navy navigate the ship under the most difficult and testing circumstances—and she did a wholly admirable job.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. My purpose in raising the matter was to seek exactly such an assurance. However, we should be clear that only

25 per cent. of female sailors at commander rank have ever served at sea, as have 45 per cent. of those at lieutenant commander rank and 50 per cent. of those at sub-lieutenant or midshipman rank. My hon. Friend has made it clear that there is no reason to believe that women are not capable of carrying out command roles at sea.

The way in which women are seen on board ship depends on the rank at which they serve. When young women ratings face what is perhaps not serious harassment, but which may cause problems that they would like to discuss with someone else, they feel less able to complain if the senior female officer aboard the ship is ranked no higher than a sub-lieutenant. If there were senior women officers on board to whom such matters could be referred, any problems could be dealt with quickly without becoming the subject of formal complaints. Indeed, they probably would not occur at all if the circumstances that my hon. Friend described on HMS Montrose were more widespread. We should make every use of the skills and qualities of the women who serve in the Navy.

At present, morale in the fleet is high. When one talks to those serving in the Royal Navy on shore and at sea, there is a feeling that the Navy is performing an important task in carrying out our commitments in Bosnia. It is doing well and is proud of what it is doing. The fleet does not welcome the fact that it is operating in an area where there was warfare, but it welcomes the fact that it is operational, active and doing the job for which it was designed. Those of us who represent naval ports have every reason to echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement when he expressed admiration and support for the fleet and its sailors.

5.27 pm

**Ms Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), who made many excellent and pertinent points. I am also pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), who made an excellent speech. I join the Minister and others in paying tribute to the Royal Navy and the commitment and loyalty of its service and civilian personnel, who strive to maintain its position as a world leader. However, I wish that the Government would do more to demonstrate their loyalty and commitment to those people.

As has been mentioned, there has been further delay and indecision in the past 12 months. The Government are constantly saying one thing and doing another. Ministers have promised announcements in August, September and November and then before Christmas, but the saga continues. I quote Admiral Sir Benjamin Bathurst's comments about the defence costs study:

"I am conscious, of course, that these changes were not without their downside for some of our people . . . Many were, and perhaps still are, exposed to turbulence and uncertainty."

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North also made that point.

**Mr. Soames:** Like the hon. Lady, I have great admiration for Admiral Sir Benjamin Bathurst. In the context of the admiral's wise words, which she quoted, he also said that the storm may be over, but inevitably turbulence—the swell—will continue.

**Ms Squire:** I thank the Minister for his intervention. I shall quote the admiral again during my speech. In Rosyth, Devonport, Glasgow, Southampton and many other places, there seems still to be one hell of a swell that is affecting so many people's lives.

I am sure that it will come as no surprise when I say that I plan to devote most of my speech to Rosyth, the dockyards generally and the issues of concern to them. I appreciate, of course, what the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said about Rosyth and Devonport. Unfortunately, however, his remarks did not bring much comfort or certainty for the yards' prospects.

As for the Rosyth naval base, I appreciate that much work still needs to be done to try to ensure a seamless transfer of the personnel, as well as the site and its facilities, to Rosyth 2000. I welcomed the decision when it was made. I appreciate the Minister's efforts and willingness to address the issues, and to meet yet again myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) next week to have a further discussion.

It is my experience, however, and that of the people at the naval base, that others have not been quite so helpful or willing. It seems that the pace of the land agency with responsibilities for defence establishments varies between go slow or stop when it comes to trying to facilitate economic regeneration and progression. I shall be delighted if the agency proves me wrong in the next few weeks.

I pay tribute, however, to many of those who have been involved as the base transfers to become a supportive establishment. I pay tribute, of course, to all the personnel at the base, to the councils involved, to private enterprise and to the Scottish Office. I congratulate them on their efforts. I thank the Minister for once again commending the service and loyalty to their country of all those who have served and are serving at Rosyth naval base.

It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the men and women who have served at RAF Pitreavie, both in the naval service and in the RAF. The station finally closed its doors this week as its operations were transferred.

Is it still planned to transfer the naval base and its facilities to commercial operations on 1 April? There should be a definite timetable to allow other decisions to be made to facilitate the planning process. I appreciate that there may be continuing difficulties, but surely it should be possible to make enabling arrangements to achieve the seamless transfer that we all know is in the interests of the base.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen, the Opposition spokesman, in opposing the dismantling of the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service. I join him also in paying tribute to the reserve forces. I am delighted and honoured that, during the past week, I have been asked to become a vice-president of the Maritime Voluntary Service. I was delighted to accept the honour, and I shall do everything I can to support it.

**Mr. Peter Griffiths:** Will the hon. Lady's new office involve service at sea?

**Ms Squire:** I hope so. I participated in the armed forces parliamentary scheme with the Royal Navy, and found it invaluable. My only qualm is at the number of jackstay transfers that I would be required to undertake. I accept, of course, that it is all good training and experience. Perhaps it is not for me to join the Royal Navy full time but instead to deal with some of the turbulence and uncertainty that this place sometimes introduces.

*[Ms Squire]*

I repeat my view that the Government are guilty of mismanaging and mishandling the dockyards. Even the National Audit Office has agreed to consider the need for a further report on dockyard matters whenever the Department finally announces its decisions.

The Minister has once again failed to bring any certainty to the two royal dockyards. He has given no guarantees on pensions, redundancies or pay and conditions. He has not said that there will be no changes without agreement. Is he willing to give such guarantees today? If not, will he say when he intends to give them?

There is a growing rumour that the term contract for both dockyards, which is due to end on 1 April, is likely to be extended. Is that the position? If so, how long will the extension be? When does the Minister expect to make a decision on the contract award? When will announcements be made on additional submarine work and an aircraft carrier coming into Rosyth? Are there any impending programme changes for either Rosyth or Devonport? Is the Minister able to be any more specific, rather than saying that an announcement will be made in a few weeks? I have been hearing that phrase throughout my time in this place.

I have concentrated so far on shoreside infrastructure at Rosyth and Devonport. It is not glamorous, but it is vital. That is not my view and mine alone. I shall quote from an article that Admiral Sir Benjamin Bathurst wrote in August 1995 for the Royal United Services Institute. The quotation leads me to make some comments about the wider agenda, including the size of the fleet and forces, the support infrastructure and procurement. The admiral said:

"Successful operations, collaboration and training, particularly when resources are stretched, depend on an adequate shore-side infrastructure to guarantee that we make the most of what we have at sea. Stores and engineering may not be to the public eye the stuff of glamour, but whilst an army may still march on its stomach, a fleet relies on readily available support to remain effective and efficient."

The admiral then referred to service personnel. I have not found morale in the Royal Navy as high as the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North has described. Perhaps my outlook has been affected by my proximity to Rosyth naval base, which is about to close, and by not being where most naval personnel are located, but even during my time with the armed forces parliamentary scheme, morale often seemed low on board the ships.

The admiral also said:

"uniformed people may appear to be more expensive during the relative calm and tranquillity of peacetime programmes which are planned and structured. But when we have to despatch a force, or repair ships, or replace crews, or sustain an operation, we need that base from which to generate the required support . . the armed forces provide an insurance policy and we must be capable of honouring the obligations for which the public pay the premium."

There is great concern that the continuing reduction of the fleet and service personnel is affecting morale. We are still waiting for the fleet to reach its planned strength of 25 minesweepers, with 35 destroyers and frigates, three carriers and 12 nuclear submarines. The only prospect of a minor reduction in the Navy's commitments will come next year in the final withdrawal from Hong Kong. Hon. Members and Ministers have already mentioned the Royal Navy's extensive commitments, and evidence shows that, since 1993, the Royal Navy's resources have been stretched in meeting its commitments.

The permanent deployment of a carrier and a number of escorts to the Adriatic contributed to the Royal Navy's withdrawal from a number of NATO exercises, which inevitably impacts on the training and experience available for naval personnel. It also puts increased pressures on service families—a point that the Minister mentioned in his opening speech—who are separated for ever longer periods.

I would welcome the Minister's comments on the Ministry of Defence's directorate of operational capability last year, which said that there were weaknesses in sealift during a paper exercise to see whether Britain could mount an amphibious operation similar to that of the Falklands. All that can affect morale in the Royal Navy and the adequacy of our defence and security cover.

That leads me to the merchant fleet—an issue that has already been raised. I quote from another admiral—Rear-Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, who made a vital point in 1890, in a document entitled, "The Influence of Sea Power on History", in which he said:

"Sea power in the broad sense includes not only the military strength afloat that rules the sea or any part of it by force of arms, but also the peaceful commerce and shipping from which alone a military fleet naturally and healthily springs and on which it securely rests."

I see heads nodding in agreement with that. Yet it is widely believed that there are insufficient merchant ships on the British register to meet all defence contingencies today.

As hon. Members are aware, 92 per cent. of this country's exports, almost all its oil, gas, timber and key imports, and almost half its food, are seaborne. Of the 71 merchant vessels chartered by the MOD since the beginning of 1992 to participate in exercises, only one has been British-registered, and for operations in Bosnia, 23 vessels have been chartered—none of them British.

**Mr. Soames:** I do not mean to labour the point, but the hon. Lady raises issues that are for the Department of Transport and the Treasury to deal with. So far as the military side is concerned, which is all that we are able to discuss this evening, as I told her hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), what matters is that the services are able to conduct operations efficiently, effectively and promptly, and to that end we go to the Baltic Exchange when it is necessary to charter ships.

The hon. Gentleman said that it was wrong that we should borrow ships from the Americans, but we are grateful to the Americans for their help in providing sealift. It saved us chartering two extra ships. When we go to the Baltic Exchange to charter a ship, if a British ship is available, that is good news. If it is not, we charter what we need for the job, so that we can get the best value for money for the taxpayer. Plainly, it would be pleasant if all the ships that we charter were British, but they are not, and there are good reasons for that.

**Ms Squire:** I listened to what the Minister said, but we should debate what ships would be available for a planned exercise and our ability to obtain the ships that we would need in a sudden emergency. That is of concern not just to me and other hon. Members, but to the Select Committee on Defence.

I quote now from the Committee's sixth report, produced last year, entitled, "Defence Use of Civilian Transport Assets and Personnel":

"In a continually changing strategic environment where increasing emphasis is placed on the rapid deployment of our Armed Forces overseas the role of civilian transport assets and personnel becomes ever more significant. In our view, the ability of civilian markets to respond in a crisis has for too long been taken for granted; a process of regular and detailed review of all aspects of transport provision is essential before a satisfactory degree of confidence on this front can be established and maintained."

I now deal with procurement. I, too, wish to criticise the Government for the continuing delay in their decision on which of the two yards will get the order for the three frigates. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen said, 1,100 jobs are at stake at Yarrow on the Clyde. That shipbuilder is saying that it cannot continue to keep its work force unless it knows for definite, not in the next few weeks but now, what the Ministry of Defence decision will be.

I appreciate the points that were made about the hundreds of jobs at risk to Vosper Thornycroft. The Government do not seem to learn from history what happens when we allow our manufacturing base, particularly our shipbuilding and refitting capabilities, to decline. I accept that increasingly we operate on the basis of coalitions with our American and European allies, but we could experience problems if we envisage the threat as purely national.

The *Evening Standard* spoke eloquently last week about defence procurement in its editorial on the contract for battlefield ambulances being awarded to, I am pleased to say, Land Rover instead of an Austrian firm. What the article said also applies to naval procurement, however.

According to the *Evening Standard*,

"The British defence industry accounts for 425,000 jobs, or 7 per cent. of the nation's manufacturing workforce. No Government can afford to ignore this. It is absurd in this context to talk of the Government skewing the market: the Government *is* the market. It is the responsibility of Government to act as steward for the national interest."

I hope that the Minister will heed those comments, and accept that Britain must not abdicate its ability to build its own warships, aircraft and land weaponry. It must not lose out in that regard.

I gather that the Secretary of State cannot be present for most of the debate. I must say, however, that—like, perhaps, some naval personnel and others—I sometimes wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman occasionally needs to be reminded that he is no longer at the Treasury. It strikes me as appropriate to quote a famous verse from "HMS Pinafore". Before hon. Members exit rapidly at the thought of hearing me sing—I admit that I was chucked out of the school choir—let me assure them that I intend simply to recite the verse. Hon. Members may wish to join in.

**Mr. Dennis Turner** (Wolverhampton, South-East): Go on, sing it.

**Ms Squire:** No, no; I will not do that, even for my hon. Friend.

The words of the song will be very familiar:

"Now landsmen all, whoever you may be,
If you want to rise to the top of the tree,
If your soul isn't fettered to an office stool,
Be careful to be guided by this golden rule—
Stick close to your desks and never go to sea,
And you all may be Rulers of the Queen's Navee!"

The Royal Navy may sometimes consider that that verse is still an appropriate comment on certain aspects of the present Government.

I began by mentioning the defence costs study, and ended by quoting from "HMS Pinafore". In between, I have tried to make some pertinent points about the difficulties currently facing the Royal Navy, its personnel and its infrastructure. If I had been able to read as much as I would have wished, I could have said much more about global maritime strategy; but I shall conclude by drawing the Government's attention to some points made in a book that landed on my desk recently, entitled "The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine".

Let me quote from the afterword:

"The Royal Navy and Royal Marines are accustomed to the mayhem of world events, but the Naval Service of today puts to sea in a particularly confused world, in which security problems are not amenable to clear-cut solutions . . . In this environment positive forces must be united if there is to be progress . . . British forces must not only be able to operate closely with Allies and friends, but must be seminal in enhancing the capability of multinational forces. Clarity of thought and expression is essential in this environment. Without it, planning will be diffuse and execution muddled."

I hope that, in the next 12 months, the Government's approach and their support for the Royal Navy will feature clarity, careful planning and clear decision making.

5.53 pm

**Mr. Toby Jessel** (Twickenham): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), as it was a pleasure to hear her, in such expansive form, deliver such an interesting speech. She quoted from "HMS Pinafore"; I should like to quote from "The Mikado"—the song of the Lord High Executioner, who had a "little list" of people whom he wished to execute. He sang:

"I've got a little list—I've got a little list".

One of the people on the list was

"The idiot who praises, with enthusiastic tone,
All centuries but this, and every country but his own."

Sometimes, in this honourable House, people are not enthusiastic enough about praising their own country. However, they certainly do not include my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who, in a forthright intervention on the speech of the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) an hour or so ago, robustly praised the British armed services—the Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force—for their splendid achievements in Bosnia, as did my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. That is what I like to hear.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), who has just left the Chamber, said that the morale of the British armed services—including the Royal Navy—was high, and I believe that to be so. Bosnia, however, illustrates the fact that war has certainly not ended in the world for good. We can think of at least four examples in the past 15 years that have involved the British services, including the Royal Navy: Bosnia, the Falkland Islands, Kuwait and, of course, Northern Ireland. In that context, I include the Royal Marines in the Royal Navy.

That Britain should have had to be involved in armed conflicts of international significance four times in the past 15 years shows that human nature has not changed. Throughout human history, nations have attacked one

*[Mr. Toby Jessel]*

another, and it would be absurdly arrogant and ridiculously optimistic for anyone to assume that human nature has somehow changed for the better—that we shall be immune from that risk either in the next few years or in the next century. I hope and trust that our Government, and the present Parliament and its successors, will always be vigilant in upholding British defences, and that we shall never relax our guard. It would be extremely dangerous to give way to that temptation, thus increasing the risk to our country.

I was brought up with the Royal Navy. I hope that the House will not mind my saying something personal in that way. My father was in the Navy for 40 years as a regular naval officer; in the second world war he was a destroyer captain—much decorated, I am proud to say: he won a DSO and two DSCs. After the war, he was on the staff of the Royal Naval college in Greenwich, where he was an instructor in naval tactics and naval strategy before going to do the same for the Indians in India. That marked the beginning of my interest in India.

I was sent into the Royal Navy as a cadet at the Royal Naval college in Dartmouth when I was 13. I had been in and out of the Navy twice by the time I was 20. At 17, I asked to leave; they heaved a sigh of relief, but I went back in to do national service within eight months, and served as a midshipman on HMS Glasgow, the flagship of the Mediterranean fleet and sister ship of the Belfast town class cruiser, now moored on the Thames. The commander-in-chief was Lord Mountbatten, a remarkable man who ought to be honoured every year in this country and never forgotten for his splendid gifts and achievements.

I remember the words that were carved in enormous stone letters at Dartmouth:

"It is on the Navy, under good providence of God, that our wealth, prosperity and peace depend."

That was true then, and it is true today. As the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West pointed out, a large proportion of our food supplies and materials, and of our exports, still travel by sea. The Royal Navy remains absolutely essential.

As the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West told stories about two admirals, I hope that hon. Members will not mind if I tell a story about a third, Admiral Sir James Somerville, who was commander-in-chief of the British naval force in Gibraltar during the second world war.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North referred to the women in the Royal Navy who are the successors of the Wrens—the Women's Royal Naval Service. During the second world war, the chief officer of the Wrens in Gibraltar had the title of Chief Officer Wrens, the abbreviation for which was COW, which she did not like. She applied to Admiral Sir James Somerville for her title to be changed, and he sent a signal around the fleet saying, "Chief Officer Wrens will in future be known as Senior Office Wrens." He then invited her to dinner and they were great friends thereafter.

The hon. Member for Torfaen was kind enough to predict that I would refer to service bands and the Royal Marine bands. I am happy to reassure him that I intend to do exactly that. The performances of the Royal Marine bands are extremely fine. They have recently had to leave Deal, and although I can understand how people at Deal feel, the cost of a whopping great Victorian barracks became impossible to sustain. They have moved, for the time being at least, to Portsmouth.

When the Minister of State for the Armed Forces was speaking in the debate on the Army last month, I intervened and referred to the training of Army bands at the Royal Military school of music at Kneller Hall in my constituency. Those Army bands are without exception the envy of the entire world and I am very proud of the fact that they are trained in Twickenham.

The number of Army bands has fallen with reduced defence expenditure, as have the number of Royal Marine bands, and once again there is talk of a joint services school of music. There is some surplus capacity at Kneller Hall, where a new bandstand is under construction, which—I hope—is a mark of confidence in the future.

Whatever happens to the Royal Marine bands—I would not trespass on the territory of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North, although I do not know how permanent the arrangements are—and if ever the Government decide on a joint services school of music, the Royal Marine bands would be most warmly welcomed in Twickenham, where they could train alongside the Army bands at Kneller Hall. I am certain that the technical and traditional differences in the interpretation of music and in the instruction on the different forms of phrasing required by the Royal Marines would be fully respected.

I shall now refer to the preservation of historic warships. I declare an interest as an unpaid director of the Warship Preservation Trust, which was set up by our former colleague, Sir Philip Goodhart. He perceived that future generations—perhaps well into the 21st century—would be able easily to see 18th to 19th-century warships such as HMS Victory, and 19th-century warships such as HMS Warrior, but that in 100 years, unless somebody did something about it, nobody would be able to see 20th-century warships such as those that fought in the second world war.

Sir Philip knew that the Ministry of Defence was unable to find the substantial sums needed to pay for preservation and that the National Art Collections Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and such bodies were crammed full of people who cared passionately about paintings, sculptures and old buildings, but were not very naval-minded and not particularly interested in finding large sums to preserve warships. He therefore decided to set up the trust, and already it has two ships—a submarine from the second world war and an old frigate that fought in the Falkland Islands 15 years ago, which is now out of date.

Although, as we are all aware, the Belfast is moored in the Thames where people can see it, one wants a complete range of warships. Nobody questions the preservation of military aircraft for educational purposes, whether at Duxford, Hendon, the Imperial War museum or the Science museum. Aircraft tend to be rather smaller than ships, however, so it is rather a larger undertaking to preserve an old ship and stop it rusting and falling to pieces.

The national lottery bodies should take an interest in the matter. The National Heritage Select Committee, on which I serve, is shortly to embark on a review of the structure of the national lottery and the way in which its funds are allocated, and I very much hope that it considers proposing a structure to make it possible for national lottery funds to be used for the preservation of warships.

The same is true of that splendid, beautiful and magnificent ship the royal yacht Britannia, which was the subject of an Adjournment debate at the end of 1994, to which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces replied. He paid tribute to that magnificent ship, not only for its royal and ceremonial duties, but for its excellent record of promoting British trade abroad.

If, however, for the reasons that my hon. Friend the Minister set out, Britannia eventually has to be withdrawn from service—which many of us for sentimental and other reasons would greatly regret—it would be unthinkable to sell it to the Americans or any other worthy people in different parts of the world and not retain it in the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Soames:** There is absolutely no question of Britannia being sold abroad. There is no question at all of such a thing ever happening. As my hon. Friend rightly says, that would be entirely unthinkable.

**Mr. Jessel:** I am very glad to receive my hon. Friend's firm, clear and definite assurance, which I hope will be widely reported. I am certain that the great majority of people will fully back that decision.

The right place for Britannia is either on the River Thames or in Portsmouth; she would fit in well in either place. Portsmouth dockyard has received a big award from the millennium fund and is being built up as the prime naval heritage centre in the United Kingdom. I do not know, however, whether there would be room to moor Britannia there and put her on permanent public exhibition, so that people could either board her or see her from the quay.

Other right hon. and hon. Members have referred to the Royal Naval college in Greenwich. I see that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) is in his place and I would not be surprised if he were to catch the Speaker's eye. Greenwich college is probably one of the 20 or 30 most important heritage buildings in the United Kingdom. It is a marvellous building, which is why I was so very glad to be told by the Secretary of State for Defence that a committee of experts—I do not know whether the name of the chairman has been published, so I better not mention it—and distinguished people with great interest in heritage has been established to study what is to be done, and to ensure that the building is used in a way that will preserve permanently its quality and make its future worthy of its distinguished naval past.

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): The hon. Gentleman rightly expressed anxiety about the future of the royal yacht Britannia, and received a categorical assurance from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces that there was no question of it being sold to an overseas buyer. I hope, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees, that we may hear a similar categorical assurance that there is no question of the Royal Naval college being disposed of on lease to an overseas organisation.

**Mr. Jessel:** I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's point of view on that matter. Of course, there is one slight difference between Britannia and the Royal Naval college. If Britannia were sold, she could be towed away, or could travel under her own steam to a destination abroad. But it would not be physically possible to move the Royal Naval college building without it falling apart. But I, too, hope that the building will be run by British people.

The word "lease" has been mentioned, but it would be a 150-year lease. I know that a lease is not the same as the freehold, which we are told will remain permanently in the hands of the Government of the United Kingdom. But if someone buys a house on a 150-year lease, he thinks that it belongs to him. Although there are some limits on what he can do to it structurally, he does feel as if it were his. I hope that that will be borne in mind by the distinguished panel of experts who will consider that important matter.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for listening to me. Now I shall sit down.

6.11 pm

**Sir Russell Johnston** (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I hope that the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) will pardon me if I do not follow directly his lively, entertaining, personalised but very positive speech.

However, old ship preservation is historically important. For example, I often think of the old battleship Warspite, which had such a remarkable record, from Jutland through Matapan to D day, but ended up on the rocks of Prussia cove en route to the breakers. It would be something for future generations if such a ship had been preserved—but I am afraid that people were not quite as forward looking in those times as they have, I hope, become more recently.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), our defence spokesman, apologises for not being present. I am but a humble substitute.

**Mr. Soames:** No, no.

**Sir Russell Johnston:** Very humble, I assure the hon. Gentleman. Sadly, I must even leave before the conclusion of the debate, for which I apologise. I shall not delay the House for long, but there are a few issues that I want to raise briefly, either on our own account or in support of what has already been said.

The overriding factor is strength in relation to commitment or projected commitment. There is clear concern about that. But it is not something on which we should spend all our time criticising the Government; I should have thought that the concern was shared throughout the House. Hon. Members on both sides of the House want our Navy to be effective, and to continue to be so.

In this debate it has become the fashion, set by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), to quote admirals. Not wishing to be unfashionable, I shall quote Admiral Sir Jock Slater, the First Sea Lord, on strength in relation to commitment:

> "The reality is that if you reduce the number of frigates, destroyers and submarines, and the number of small ships as we are doing, and you maintain as we are doing, the number of tasks, then inevitably the stresses and strains on the fleet are greater ... Therefore the opportunities for maintenance are less, for leave and recreation are less, the opportunities for training at a higher level are not so great".

The First Sea Lord does not say such things for fun. The Minister should recognise that there is considerable concern on that subject.

As the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) said—I agreed with a great deal of his speech—we still have commitments in the Caribbean, the middle east, the Gulf

*[Sir Russell Johnston]*

and Hong Kong, although the latter will go next year. There is also the Adriatic. I associate myself with what has already been said in praise of the work of the Navy there, but that, too, will probably go if the Dayton accord works. It is a bit early to say whether it will; the situation is certainly difficult.

Such exercises and demands on our naval resources will almost certainly be repeated elsewhere. The Mediterranean alone is clearly an area of great potential instability, from the Aegean right along the north African coast. Egypt is in potential turmoil, we know about Colonel Gaddafi in Libya, and, moving up through Tunisia, Algeria is still under tremendous stress. The instability continues right up to the point where the Mediterranean joins the Atlantic at Gibraltar.

The likelihood of incidents of tension arising is great, not only in the Mediterranean but in the Black sea, another area containing all sorts of risks of tension and conflict. In certain circumstances, NATO or the United Nations could be involved. We need to be prepared for such events, and for our participation in them. For example, I am sure that the Minister has registered the fact that the newly completed Russian aircraft carrier made its first voyage through the Mediterranean, thus symbolically reasserting Russia's importance in that area.

In the background, as the hon. Members for Torfaen and for Dunfermline, West have said, is the great fall, from 690 to 556 in the past decade, in the number of merchant ships on the British register available for defence purposes. That is a matter for concern.

When one says that something is a matter for concern, people usually ask, "What would you do about it?" It is a fair question—and I do not know whether there is anything much that we can do about it, because of the heavy decline in our shipbuilding capacity. However, I often wonder whether there is more that not only we but other like-minded countries could do to ensure that registrations take place with responsible people, rather than with countries such as Panama. I do not know whether the Government exert any pressure in that direction.

Linked to that is the question of amphibious capacity, which has already been more than adequately debated. What will HMS Fearless's life be after it completes its upgrade? How long will it last? The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) asked that question, and also asked whether there would be another as well as HMS Ocean. I cannot say that we heard an answer.

I should like to say a word about the nuclear deterrent. The Minister knows that the Liberal Democrats accept a minimum deterrent, which means—let us be clear about it—no more missiles, and no more warheads than Polaris now has.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement attacked the Labour party as being in favour of disarmament. I am sure that the Labour party can most effectively speak for itself, but, speaking for myself, I see nothing dishonourable in seeking disarmament—quite the contrary. One can say that we require an effective, efficient defence system too; those two things do not necessarily contradict each other.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** May I ask the hon. Gentleman the question that I posed the Minister, which he failed to answer? If nuclear weapons were a part of our defence and if the hon. Gentleman were in a position of power, would he, if the crunch came, be willing to press the button to start off those nuclear weapons? If he did, could he anticipate some of the devastation that they would inflict on the environment and on the people of this planet?

**Sir Russell Johnston:** I should prefer not to embark on a long speculation on the theology of deterrence.

**Mr. Smith:** It is not a matter of theology.

**Sir Russell Johnston:** It is very much the theology of deterrence, because the whole theory is that it would not be used. As the Minister said, it worked vis-à-vis the Soviet Union when it was in existence. Nowadays, there is another form of deterrent—the French idea of force de frappe. In other words, if China or another country were to develop weapons, the French could say, "We cannot defeat you, but we will injure you. So great a threat of injury exists from us that you will not attack us."

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman said that nuclear weapons are a deterrent. But if we do not use the nuclear weapons, there is surely something of a contradiction. If the weapons are a deterrent, by definition one must be willing to use them. Otherwise, they are no longer a deterrent.

**Sir Russell Johnston:** I repeat what I said—the matter does get theological. I know perfectly well that there is a contradiction, but one prays that one will never have to use those weapons. I shall not go beyond that.

The Minister may recall that, at the beginning of the 1980s, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Teviotdale—

**Mr. Soames:** Lauderdale.

**Sir Russell Johnston:** I stand corrected. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) went to France with the late and beloved Dr. David Owen to talk about nuclear co-operation with the French. There have been proponents of such an approach on both sides of the channel. I remember listening at length to the then French Minister of Defence, Mr. Chevènement, making a long and extremely enthusiastic speech to the Defence Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union. His great enthusiasm, however, was not matched by his clarity. He talked about the need not only for the British and French to co-operate, but for a European deterrent to evolve. He did not say how that could be done. Will the Minister say something about the extent to which co-operation with the French—which, after all, has worked extremely well in Bosnia—is advancing in regard to the relationship between the independent nuclear deterrent and the force de frappe?

At business questions, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) raised the issue of fisheries protection—a matter that comes up time and again. I often wonder whether we should have greater collaboration within the EU in respect of fisheries protection. I feel strongly that it makes sense for EU member states—which, after all, frame the regulations of the common fisheries policy—to work together in terms of protection.

The Minister might be horrified at this suggestion, but I think that ships crewed from more than one country—English and Spaniards, for example, or Scots and Danes—would improve relations, and might avoid or reduce the likelihood of exaggerated confrontations.

**Mr. Soames:** That might be taking it a little far. I know, however, that the hon. Gentleman and most hon. Members would approve of the fact that the Royal Navy trains and operates day after day with navies from all over the world. The Navy enjoys a most intimate relationship with a number of European navies, with which we co-operate closely. German ships, for example, are training at the moment under the flag officer sea training. The French come to train with us, and we have been working closely with the Spanish navy on fishery protection. There is a most intimate relationship between all seafarers, but particularly between navies which, by and large, are friends.

**Sir Russell Johnston:** I thank the Minister.

Finally, I wish to refer to three "single issues". First, we welcome the establishment of the naval support command, which brings together various support activities. However, the decision to base the NSC partly in Bath and partly at the new Ministry of Defence base at Abbey Wood in north Bristol has to be questioned. My hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has vigorously pursued the matter, and he remains convinced that millions of pounds of taxpayers' money could be wasted if the MOD continues to reject the private finance initiative that has been proposed by my hon. Friend, the local councils and the chamber of commerce in Bath.

**Mr. Soames:** It is a load of balls.

**Sir Russell Johnston:** That may not be a parliamentary expression. Chambers of commerce, as we know, have a good attitude to the Government. I wonder what their response to that remark will be when it goes on the record.

Secondly, I agree entirely with what the hon. Members for Twickenham and for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) said about the Royal Naval college. We want there to be, to use the phrase of the hon. Member for Twickenham, a worthy use of the college.

Thirdly, I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West said so clearly on Rosyth and Devonport.

Life is different now, as has been said, but standards in the Navy remain admirably high. That has been shown in the quality of the Navy's contribution in the Falklands, the Gulf and—more recently—in the Adriatic. It has shown itself to be a formidable fighting force. We must face up to the fact, however, that we do not have the same resources that we once had. The future will inevitably see more and more co-operation, much of which—as the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said—is being done within the EU and NATO. I should perhaps have liked to hear a little more about that from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement than I did.

6.26 pm

**Mr. David Martin** (Portsmouth, South): While agreeing with much of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), including his remarks about new frigates being built by Vosper Thornycroft and the importance of keeping competition in that market, I wish to concentrate today on the importance of the Government making a decision sooner rather than later on the future of the royal yacht Britannia, a subject that has been mentioned several times in the debate. Britannia is due to be decommissioned in the summer of next year, and I want the Government to propose a sensible plan for her successor.

Any schemes must be considered with particular sensitivity to the use of taxpayers' money. I realise all too well, as do Ministers, that it may seem untimely to consider royal yachts at a time when some members of the royal family are attracting unwelcome publicity—I put it no higher than that—for the monarchy. In that respect, as one incident succeeds another, I still believe that to the three constitutional rights which Bagehot assigned to the sovereign—the right to be consulted, the right to encourage and the right to warn—should be added the right to despair. Putting all that aside, however, the Government cannot and must not put off a balanced debate and a decision as to the fate of Britannia and what to do about her successor.

First, natural and understandable emotions, which I share, are raised when the fate of Britannia is considered, not least in her home base of Portsmouth, where she is the second oldest ship in commission—HMS Victory being the oldest, of course, although it is no longer seagoing. Since her arrival on the scene in the early 1950s, Britannia has been supremely served by many dedicated crews. She remains a standard bearer of excellence in the Royal Navy and a potent symbol of British nationality and sovereignty. The same was true, of course, of her predecessor—the Victoria and Albert which, after being stripped out, was scuttled. I do not advocate that fate for Britannia.

Two other options are open. First, appropriate fittings could be removed and the ship sold so that the MOD and the taxpayer get a proper return on the disposal. I do not advocate that she should be sold abroad, however, and I was relieved at what my hon. Friend the Minister said about that.

The second option is to give Britannia to one of the cities or organisations which are keen to offer her a home—including Portsmouth—with a one-off endowment of taxpayers' money, or one extracted from national lottery funds. According to those who advocate that course, she could be permanently moored and preserved as a tourist attraction or even converted into a hotel or conference centre. With the greatest respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and others who support variations of that scheme, that option is fanciful and not sufficiently thought through, irrespective of how many consultants and reports are considered, and neither taxpayers' nor ratepayers' money should be used for that purpose.

Portsmouth has already been assigned £40 million of lottery funds through the Millennium Commission to help in the regeneration of a substantial part of the harbour. To found any scheme to preserve Britannia on the hope or expectation of more lottery funds is to emulate Oliver Twist—with, I suspect, the same result. However fascinating Britannia may be, especially at first, she will never be a viable tourist or commercial attraction. She

*[Mr. David Martin]*

would not have the unique attractions of HMS Victory, which is expensive enough to maintain already, or those of the Mary Rose museum or HMS Warrior.

Conversion to a hotel would be prohibitively expensive, not least because of the asbestos and other materials used in Britannia's construction in the 1950s. Whoever took her on as a touris attraction, quite apart from the enormous initial capital costs, would never be free of expense and subsidy. Should it be Portsmouth, I foresee that, sooner or later, large and continuing sums of taxpayers' and ratepayers' money, in cash and in kind, would be required to berth, maintain and run her. However emotionally attractive, such a plan is not likely to be given a fair wind by the MOD or by Ministers; nor would I recommend or press it. I favour removing appropriate fittings and selling her, though not abroad, so that the taxpayer gets a proper return on the disposal.

The most exciting and important consideration is that of a modern replacement for Britannia—just as, at the beginning of the present reign, she replaced her predecessor the Victoria and Albert. I have no doubt that there ought to be a successor ship and that it should be based in Portsmouth. Would anyone expect me to say anything else? She could inherit being the symbol of British nationality and sovereignty, and the international prestige, and continue helping to win significant export orders and being the unique endorsement of Britain's role and position in the international community.

An imaginative plan which shows great vision is being seriously prepared by the Cadland consortium. It would result in a ship 370 ft long, with a beam of 48 ft—I am no expert, but I will give some of the details—a multi-engined propulsion system capable of 20 knots and a classic three-masted rig. She would have a service life of 75 years and require a permanent crew of 40 rather than the 240 required on Britannia.

The plan does not envisage either taxpayers' money or lottery money to construct the ship. Income to maintain and run her would be generated from sail training and from commercial, Government and royal duties. She would successfully combine four main roles. First, she would fulfil royal state duties as at present. Secondly, she would have the capacity for 180 Queen's cadets from Britain and Commonwealth countries, which would add a social and cultural dimension, combined with sail training. Thirdly, the design and equipment would demonstrate the highest levels of British technology, engineering standards and design quality. Fourthly, public participation and access would be encouraged. Her exhibition facilities would offer an unrivalled platform for overseas trade promotion and continue Britannia's role in generating wealth for Britain.

Without going into further and unnecessary details, I believe that the plan combines vision and realism in equal measure. However, without a decision soon about the fate of Britannia and the Government's intentions as to a successor, such plans cannot be properly and publicly promoted with a fair chance of success, especially as the lead-in time is at least two years and probably more. I want a ministerial decision as soon as possible so that we can release the enterprise and imagination of the many people who are willing and keen to contribute to British achievement and naval excellence for the 21st century, with which Portsmouth will continue to be proud to be associated.

6.35 pm

**Mr. John Denham** (Southampton, Itchen): I should like to follow the remarks of several hon. Members about the award of the order for type 23 frigates, and especially the interest of Vosper Thornycroft in that delayed—and now urgent—decision. The Minister of State for Defence Procurement knows of my strong constituency interest. The shipyard is on the edge of my constituency and many of my constituents are employed there. I am grateful to him for the time that he gave me and some of my colleagues a few weeks ago to discuss the case for Vosper Thornycroft.

Hon. Members who have visited Vosper Thornycroft in recent years include members of Labour's defence team and those with an interest in training policy, who are interested in its innovative approach to work force training. They will have been enormously impressed by the quality of the company, its management and work force. It is well managed, has a committed work force and is committed to investment, both in capital equipment and in the work force. Although, by the nature of the business, it is not always possible to avoid job losses, the company has had an excellent record of retaining and retraining the work force wherever possible.

It is a matter of deep regret that a cloud of uncertainty hung over the company, my constituency and the rest of Southampton over Christmas and the new year. People had been led to believe that the decision on the order would be made before Christmas. Unfortunately, even today, we have had no date for the decision to be made. The practical consequences of the delay are already serious. The work force was reduced by more than 100 before Christmas. Those were not compulsory redundancies, but the release of contract workers. Nevertheless, contract jobs are still jobs to the people who were doing them and who no longer have the chance to do them. Further delay would make forward planning for the company even more difficult. If no decision was made and no work on the contract allocated to Vosper Thornycroft, employment would fall by a further 500 in the next year alone.

In parliamentary answers recently, the Minister has said that the order will be for up to three frigates. He said earlier that he hopes to take a decision within a few weeks. If he has not yet decided how many he wants, it will be a rushed job for those who have to do the work. I would have hoped that, by this stage, he could have told us how many frigates the Royal Navy requires, as a precursor to deciding who is to build them. I hope that he will give an absolute commitment that there is no question of the decision being delayed beyond the date of the current tendering period in March. It must not be delayed into a period of re-tendering and further indecision. That would be unacceptable to all those who are waiting on that decision. I hope that that commitment and perhaps a clear sign of the decision date and the number of vessels will be forthcoming. Like the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), I hope that the number will be three.

Any hon. Member would expect me to have a constituency interest in my local shipyard, but I genuinely believe that in this case my constituency interest and the

interest of the Southampton area coincide precisely with the national interest. The continued success of Vosper Thornycroft is vital for two reasons. First, it is vital to the future procurement policies of the Royal Navy, particularly the Royal Navy's ability to seek competitive tendering for new vessels in the future. Secondly, the awarding of the contract to Vosper Thornycroft is vital to sustain the company's remarkable export success in recent years.

Those two key issues—being able to supply the Royal Navy and being successful in export markets—come together in the awarding of the contract for the type 23 frigate. Vosper Thornycroft's ability to provide competition for Royal Navy orders depends, in practice, on the shipyard continuing to win the export orders which have sustained the company through much of the recent past. In turn—and this is crucial—export success depends on being able to show that the Royal Navy has confidence in the company by placing orders in it. The awarding of the type 23 frigate contract can secure both the future of competition in the awarding of contracts and Vosper Thornycroft's continued success in the export markets. The two issues cannot sensibly be separated. Over the next two years, Vosper Thornycroft will deliver six steel vessels—orders which were won on the back of previous steel shipbuilding for the Royal Navy.

What is the current position? One example that I have been given is that Vosper Thornycroft recently lost a valuable export contract for Brunei to GEC. In the company's view, a critical factor was the absence of a recent Royal Navy endorsement of Vosper Thornycroft as a supplier of steel ships. In that case, the competition was within the United Kingdom and the contract was perhaps not so significant in terms of the national interest, but there are many export markets in which Vosper Thornycroft is the sole UK competitor. If Vosper Thornycroft does not win those orders, they will not go to another British shipyard: they will go to naval shipbuilders in other parts of the world. That should be a serious consideration for the Minister.

The Minister placed weight on the NAPNOC—no acceptable price no contract—procedure, but there is scepticism on both sides of the House about the ability of that procedure to provide competitive prices. If Vosper Thornycroft suffers in the future, not only will the Royal Navy be dependent on that approach to contracting, but the country will lose Vosper Thornycroft's export ability.

In the future, there are longer-term plans for 12 common new generation frigates. It is therefore reasonable to ask the following question. Does the Minister believe that a future Navy Minister would be able to achieve the sort of savings—about one third over the life of the type 23 class of frigate—if at that time there were only one company capable of supplying all those vessels and thus one sole supplier with which the Government of the day had to negotiate? I do not believe that it would be credible to follow the NAPNOC procedure to its ultimate extent and suggest that the Royal Navy would forgo vessels that it needed because it was unable to get the price that it wanted.

I hope that I have summarised the case for placing the orders with Vosper Thornycroft. Of course, that is one of my key constituency interests, and other right hon. and hon. Members have other constituency interests. However, I believe that placing the orders with Vosper Thornycroft is in the national interest, the Royal Navy's interest and the company's interest in contributing to the United Kingdom's export record. My constituents would be disappointed if the orders were not placed with Vosper Thornycroft, but they would be doubly bitter if they felt that the long-term interests of the Royal Navy and the United Kingdom's economy were also to be sacrificed.

6.44 pm

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid-Staffordshire): I apologise to the House for not having been here earlier—I warned that I would not be able to be here. Hon. Members have already spoken about their constituency interests. Mid-Staffordshire is nowhere near the sea, but I speak in the national interest.

Before I became a Member of Parliament I was occupied in exporting around the world. I have been able to watch the debate on television and I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House have spoken about the importance of the Royal Navy, not only in terms of the defence of the realm but as a means to promote British exports. Having travelled throughout the world, particularly in the United States, I find it interesting to note the modernity of the Royal Navy. Many of the vessels in the US navy, although larger than ours, date back to the Korean war. It is a credit to the Ministry of Defence and to my hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench that the Royal Navy is not only lean but modern and sleek.

We have also been correct, if not always politically correct, to maintain our nuclear deterrent. It is an unfortunate fact that the genie of how to develop nuclear weapons, once let out of the bottle, cannot easily be put back inside it. Although the Soviet Union no longer exists, we should never forget that the Russian Federation, although an ally, still has nuclear weapons. Sadly, nuclear proliferation has meant that there are a growing number of nations around the world which, even though they do not possess nuclear weapons, certainly have the ability to make them and, perhaps more important, to deliver them.

Deterrence does work: we have seen that in Israel over the Gulf war. The fact that it was known that Israel had nuclear weapons and the ability to deliver them was the sole reason why Scuds, which could have been armed with the means of mass annihilation, were not aimed at the state of Israel. That is a good example of how nuclear deterrence works. [HON. MEMBERS: "Scuds were."] It is typical of the Labour party to argue that it does not believe that nuclear deterrence works; it does work. I would argue that the reason we have not had a nuclear war is—

**Mr. Jamie Cann** (Ipswich): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not mean to mislead the House, but Scuds were launched at Israel by Iraq in the Gulf war.

**Mr. Fabricant:** The hon. Gentleman was not listening to what I was saying. *[Interruption.]* I apologise to Opposition Members, who are now making fun of my voice—I am on Tyrozets because I have a sore throat. I said that Scuds were aimed at Israel; I said that they were not armed. The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) may like to check the record tomorrow. Scuds were aimed at Israel, but they were not armed because Israel had a nuclear deterrent. It is all very well for Opposition Members to scoff and wave their Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament credentials, but I believe that our Government are right to maintain their nuclear deterrent.

*[Mr. Fabricant]*

It is not only the nuclear deterrent that is important; it is also important that we have an up-to-date, modern Navy. We already have 13 new type 23 frigates. The UK is committed to the procurement of a common new generation frigate known as Project Horizon. It would have been so easy, with the Russian Federation now our ally, to say that we would make massive cuts in the Royal Navy. France has already decided on a 20 per cent. slash in its defence forces. In common with other countries, we are deriving benefit—a peace dividend—but we are doing so in a responsible way that still secures our global role in the world. On that I commend my hon. Friends the Ministers, who have not taken the easy option but have ensured that the Royal Navy continues to be a means to defend the state and promote our global interests worldwide.

6.49 pm

**Mr. David Jamieson** (Plymouth, Devonport): It was interesting to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). May I correct him on one matter? He said that the Scud missiles were not armed. I should think that quite a few people in Israel were wondering what went bang and killed a large number of people in that country.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Jamieson:** I think that the hon. Gentleman has had long enough.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this Navy debate. You will not be surprised, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I want to mention the dockyard, the contracts and Trident, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire). As usual, I intend to discuss matters that concern naval personnel, because there are many naval personnel, families and wives in my constituency and because the happiness and contentment of the families are essential to the effectiveness of those on the front line.

Plymouth has a long, proud association with the Navy, in a military setting and in a civilian one. We have the royal naval dockyard, the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy. Until recently, we had the Royal Air Force.

We have the 29th Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, which this year celebrates its centenary in the Citadel in Plymouth. With the leave of the House, I wish to read a resolution that came before Plymouth city council this week:

"in appreciation of the splendid traditions of the 29th Commando Regiment Royal Artillery and as an expression of the admiration of the Citizens of Plymouth for its great and glorious achievements in the Service of this Country and of its long and historic association with the City, the Council do confer upon the Regiment the honorary freedom of the City of Plymouth".

I am pleased to say that the resolution received cross-party—indeed, unanimous—support at the meeting of Plymouth city council on 29 January 1996. I hope that the Royal Artillery commandos will serve in Plymouth for another 100 years.

I congratulate the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in connection with Manadon college. He knows that I have made many representations to him, as have other hon. Members from the Plymouth area from other parties, and I am pleased that we managed to set up the working party that considered the future use of Manadon college.

We nearly succeeded in persuading the university of Plymouth to take the college over. Sadly, that plan has fallen through, but I hope that some other single user will take over the 100 acre site, with all its wonderful facilities. We should be careful not to strip out the remaining assets. Much of the valuable equipment is probably worth millions of pounds as it stands on site, but if it is sold for scrap or auctioned, it will fetch an amount much less than its real value to a future user.

Nearly two and a half years ago, I sat in the Chamber—in almost the position in which I sit today—with my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West, and we heard the announcement about the Trident refit contract. I was proud to listen to my hon. Friend, who made an excellent speech tonight. Many of us would suppose that my hon. Friend and I would have competed over those matters, but I am sure that she will confirm that we have never done so, and nor have the trade unions, the wider work force or the people of the two areas. We have been united in the wish to do the best for people who work in our dockyards and for the Royal Navy. We are united in something else: we believe that there is a purpose in having two dockyards in the country to carry out work for the Royal Navy. I praise my hon. Friend, who has been a consistent and dogged advocate of her area.

Two and a half years have elapsed since we sat in the Chamber in June 1993, when the previous Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), made the announcement, but the contract has not been signed. In his opening remarks, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said, yet again, that it would happen in a few weeks. It is rather like Billy Bunter's postal order—it is just about to arrive but it never seems to do so. For more than two years, hon. Members have been told that the announcement would be made in a few weeks. I hope that, when the Minister of State for the Armed Forces replies to the debate, he will confirm that it will be a few weeks and tell us the date—the end of February or the end of March, perhaps—by which the contract will be signed.

In Devonport, the period of uncertainty has been further muddied by the spectre of privatisation. The costs incurred leading up to privatisation were £7.2 million. They included consultants' fees, estate agents' fees and lawyers' fees for telling Babcock International Group and Devonport Management Ltd. what they already knew about the site that they were occupying, because they were the only bidders for the two dockyard contracts. As millions of pounds have gone to City accountants, they have undermined the security of the people who have given long, loyal service in the dockyards. That uncertainty and delay have almost certainly delayed the first Trident refit contract, which was intended to start in 1999 but is unlikely to do so before the year 2000.

We had hoped that in 1999 at least the future of people currently working in the dockyard would be secure. Instead, because of the uncertainty, partly because of the lateness in the arrival and signing of the contract and partly because of privatisation, we have short-termism, further lay-offs and further redundancies in the work force. That undermines the dockyard's effectiveness to carry out future work.

In the short term, there has not been the allocation of ships that is necessary to ensure that the work force are maintained at a strategic level to do that work in future.

The Gulf war and the Falklands war were mentioned. At the time of both those wars, I saw my constituents working 24 hours a day to refit ships. I saw the Canberra come in. Men and women worked hour after hour to get ships ready to travel to the Falklands. We could not achieve that now. Those skills have gone—the people have gone and the capacity in the yard has gone. If we make further cuts, our capacity to do other types of work will go. It is vital that we maintain the basis of the work force to meet the strategic requirements of the Royal Navy and the country.

Once those vital skills are lost or those who have them do not practise them for a time, they are lost for ever; in the past few years, we have ceased taking young people into the dockyard to train them to carry out the work in future years. It is the first time this century that we have stopped training young people.

Privatisation has caused further problems. Has privatisation caused the price of the Trident contract to increase? Under privatisation, the contractor will be responsible for the whole contract, and costs of unforeseen changes will be met not by the Ministry of Defence but by the contractor. I wonder how much extra that will cost the taxpayer.

When, or if, the dockyards are privatised, it is intended that Brown and Root, which is essentially an American company, whose merits I shall not discuss, will have the majority shareholding in Devonport. Perhaps the most important question that we must ask tonight is, what guarantees will the Government give that Brown and Root could not be taken over by a hostile company, perhaps from a hostile country? The Minister must give that answer tonight before he makes any announcement about further plans for privatisation. South Western Electricity plc has been taken over by an American company, and the local people who own shares have had them compulsorily purchased by the Americans; so we have experience of those matters in the locality.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The Ministry of Defence will retain a special share that will give us the power to stop anything that would damage our security.

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am grateful to the Minister. I have asked that question many times before and that reassurance has never been given. Can he also tell us whether that golden share will guarantee the redundancy arrangements, pay and terms and conditions that the long-serving and loyal work force have enjoyed for many years? That is a question to which the people in my constituency, many of whom have given 20, 30 or more years of service, want a reply.

I received a letter today from one of my constituents, a man in his 50s, who has worked in the dockyard since he was an apprentice. He said that he did not choose to leave the Ministry of Defence, and he wants to know what will happen to the contract of employment that he signed many years ago.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** My hon. Friend mentioned the record of Brown and Root. Would he care to comment on its management of the nuclear plant in Texas and the repercussions of that management?

**Mr. Jamieson:** I think that it would be more appropriate if the Minister commented on that matter. I hope that he will make a note so that later we might hear what investigations have taken place. There are some important questions to ask, because that company will be the employer of my constituents and, more important, it will provide vital services to our Royal Navy in one of its most sensitive contracts—the refitting of the Trident submarines.

I make no apology for returning to some of the themes about which I have spoken in previous years, partly because I have never had satisfactory answers to some of my questions, especially on issues of concern to service personnel and their families. I have pursued the matter of the service quarters, or more properly the empty married quarters, for nearly four years. All that has happened in that time is that the number of empty properties has gone up, despite the many promises that we have had from Ministers.

I tabled some questions for written answer in September 1992. The answers showed that there were 10,322 empty properties. The Ministry of Defence promised that urgent action was being taken to put that right. In September 1993, the number of empty properties had grown to 10,928, and that was followed by further reassurances that troops were coming home and the houses would be disposed of. In September 1994, there were 11,995 empty properties. The latest figure in December 1995, after all the efforts and energies of the Ministry of Defence had gone into disposing of those properties, showed that 14,098 properties were empty. That is nothing short of a national scandal.

The Joseph Rowntree report published in 1992, "Filling empty homes", put the cost of keeping a Government-owned dwelling empty at approximately £10,000 per home a year. That includes the rent loss, empty property rates, security costs, the cost of the dilapidation and the bed-and-breakfast costs of those who could live in that property but instead live in temporary accommodation. I make that £141 million a year of lost money. That is £16,093 an hour: so those 14,098 empty homes have cost nearly £50,000 during this debate.

I wish to remind the Minister of a comment that has been made about the situation. It was made not by me, or by any other Labour Member, or even by a troublesome Conservative Back Bencher, but by the Department of the Environment's task force report in July 1994 about the Ministry of Defence policy of leasing empty properties to local authorities. The report stated:

> "The record seems to the Task Force rather unimpressive."

It continued:

> "the principle of making vacant housing stock available to non-MoD clients should be considered urgently by the Service Departments; but little seems to have happened."

The task force was slightly wrong about that because something has happened—there are now more empty properties than when it made that comment. The most damning comment made by the task force—by one Government Department about another—was:

> "MoD have declared many times that they are not a social housing agency. This is obviously true but it should not serve as an excuse for short-sighted anti-social activity."

*[Mr. Jamieson]*

In its conclusions, the task force said:

"Regrettably, our assessment is that the MoD appears to have been unwilling to accept many of these suggestions . . . MoD has consistently avoided making any commitments to the Task Force either to improve its housing practices or to reduce its voids."

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** In view of the point that the hon. Gentleman is making, I presume that he fully supports the Ministry of Defence's decision to sell the married quarters estate in a way that will release some money to improve the standard of the portion of the married quarters estate that the Ministry of Defence continues to need.

**Mr. Jamieson:** I am grateful to the Minister for anticipating the next part of my speech. He will recall that privatisation was attempted two years ago, when the Crown Housing Trust was set up. To refresh the Minister's memory, I shall tell him that £5.4 million was spent on consultants, estate agents and all the people who usually benefit from Tory privatisations. A chief executive was appointed to a job that turned out to be nearly impossible. His salary was £80,000 a year, with performance pay of £20,000 a year, of which he received £18,000 for increasing the number of empty homes by 3,000.

The whole initiative collapsed, but the Ministry of Defence paid the chief executive £180,000 because his contract was not fulfilled. The Minister may correct me if I am wrong, but after the Ministry had paid the chief executive's salary, performance pay and compensation for his contract, it re-employed him to work on the next failed enterprise. If the Minister is claiming that privatisation is the answer to the empty properties, he should consider the recent history of the Ministry of Defence and its total failure to put people into those empty homes and to maintain its stock.

The Minister asked if I would welcome the privatisation and the sale of the properties by a private operator. The Minister should consider the situation in Peterborough, the Tory party chairman's constituency, where about 150 properties were put on the market. We do not know what price was received for those properties by the taxpayer via the Ministry of Defence because that is commercially confidential information. We cannot be told how much was received, but we know that the properties must have been sold at bargain basement prices, because those properties were put on to market immediately at rock-bottom prices. Of course, people in the area then found that their properties moved further into negative equity, and all sorts of problems were caused. So privatisation is not the way forward.

I suggest that the Minister read the Tory party's 1992 manifesto. It stated that empty Government properties should be released for social housing. Success is possible. Some such properties are being released in the coming week in Plymouth; about 160 Furse Park estate homes, some of them having lain empty for some 18 months or more and having fallen into decay, are being thus released. That is happening only because the Empty Homes Agency and I served an order on the MOD through the Department of the Environment. We have had to prise the fingers of the MOD off those homes one by one.

I believe that a housing association will take over the homes, and the city council will put into them 160 families currently living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation or in shelters for the homeless. That represents the way forward. I recommend that the Minister avoid the privatisation route and look at what we have successfully achieved working together in partnership—the MOD, the housing associations and the city council—in the best interests of the homeless and of the taxpayer.

What is to happen to service men and women who currently enjoy the discount scheme for former service quarters? Will they continue to receive any sort of discount; can such a scheme survive privatisation? I believe that the take-up of the scheme is running at about 400 a year. The reason why it is so low is that often service personnel occupy homes that they do not want to buy because they are in areas in which they do not want to live. There is a rumour that the discount scheme is to be abandoned—perhaps the Minister will comment—and that some sort of cash discount scheme that will apply to all service people is to be put in place. If so, many more people will want to take up the scheme because it will apply to any house on the market.

Where is the money to come from? Will it be capped? How will it be decided who is to benefit from the fund? In essence, Ministers are taking away the discount scheme, and that will seriously disadvantage former service personnel—just to make the privatisation look attractive. It is the taxpayer who will lose out.

Another matter that I have raised in the past and about which I feel deeply concerns the fact that many of the families in my constituency use the service children's boarding scheme. I support the idea of boarding education being available for families who need to move around the world and around the country because they are in the service of the country. But the Minister really ought to take a look at many of the families who are benefiting from the scheme but who are not moving around. The Government should perhaps consider education closer to home in the public sector, which does not cost so much.

In 1994-95 this service boarding scheme cost the taxpayer £107 million. What checks are being carried out to ensure that the taxpayer gets good value for money? I concede that many of the schools in the scheme are good independent schools, but the Minister will know from my correspondence with his Department and with the Service Children's Education Association that many of the schools are poor. I have raised this matter with the Minister many times.

The Minister may have seen the article that appeared on 3 December 1995 in *The Observer* which was deeply critical of a school in Somerset called the Quantock school. Many of its children come from service families. I asked a parliamentary question about it to find out what assessment had been made of the suitability of the Quantock school, Taunton, to be retained on the list of the admissible schools. The Minister replied:

"A number of reservations were expressed concerning the quality of pastoral care available, and as a result, the suitability of Quantock school to remain on the MOD admissible schools list is being reviewed."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 479.]

It appears, following a further question of mine, that it will take until March 1996 before anything is done in this respect.

The Minister must deal with the problem of inadequate schools immediately. I do not know whether he has seen a document entitled "Ofsted and Onward". It has been

produced by a private contractor, CfBT Education Services, for the Office for Standards in Education. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West has quoted Gilbert today, and I want to quote Evelyn Waugh's "Decline and Fall", referred to also in the aforementioned document:

"We class schools . . . into four grades: Leading School, First-rate School, Good School and School. Frankly . . . School is pretty bad."

The document goes on to describe a prep school that had been the subject not of an Ofsted report which is then made public but of a rather cosy inspection by other people from other independent schools. The Minister should take note of what was said about the school:

"But in reality this . . . institution is—if the term has meaning—a 'failing school'. Its fees are high and its pupils are drawn from wealthy (albeit often broken) families, the sons and daughters of military officers, British expatriates and successful businessmen. Very many of its pupils failed to gain entry to the public schools of even their second or third choice; several teachers are incapable of keeping order, let alone organising and encouraging learning; bullying and other forms of unacceptable behaviour are rampant; and 'value for money' is a cheerless joke."

This school, wherever it may be, is being supported by taxpayers' money via the MOD. The Minister should look into the problem and investigate the school. If it is indeed failing, the least we can do is make sure that service families are informed.

I hope to get cross-party support for my last point. It concerns service men—it was just men—who served in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and who were exposed in the course of their duties to asbestos. The Crown Proceedings Act 1947 prevented service personnel from making any claim for compensation following exposure to asbestos. The self-same Act gave the right to civilian dockyard workers who had been similarly exposed to claim compensation.

Many of my constituents who are civilian workers were exposed to asbestos and have been able to claim compensation, although not usually a great amount. In 1987 the Act was amended by a private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), to give service men and women the right to claim for exposure to asbestos. By then, asbestos had long been removed from the ships. Of course, no one has claimed; the Bill did not give people the right to claim retrospectively.

This problem affects people who served in the 1939-45 war, others who served in later conflicts and many men who, as youngsters, were sent down to the bowels of the ships and told to strip the lagging off the pipes, thereby being exposed to the worst sort of asbestos. Many of these men, now in their 50s, 60s and 70s, are contracting mesothelioma and other diseases directly related to exposure to asbestos.

This is not a party issue. I ask the Minister at least to make sure that a proper assessment is made of how many men are suffering and of the possible cost of offering them some sort of ex gratia payment for the service that they gave and the suffering that they have endured. This is a rare example of an employer wilfully exposing people to a danger and passing an Act of Parliament to stop them claiming any form of compensation for the danger to which they were exposed.

In my brief contribution, I have tried to address some of the matters of serious concern to former and present service men and women and to those who have given loyal service in the dockyard. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply tonight.

7.19 pm

**Mr. John Hutton** (Barrow and Furness): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). I cannot promise to match his literary references, but I echo his comments about the men and women who serve in the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines. We are lucky to have the services of so many dedicated and professional men and women, and I express my admiration and respect for them.

I pay tribute also to the crew of the HMS Cumberland, who, in the past year, have spent much time supporting my county of Cumbria in its efforts to attract new investment and new jobs. All of my constituents would like to express their appreciation and thanks to the officers and the crew of HMS Cumberland.

My constituency has enjoyed a very long association with the Royal Navy. Over the past 150 years, we have built some of the Navy's finest ships, and we continue to do so. My constituency also plays host to many Royal Navy personnel who are currently involved in the Trident programme, and we look forward to a long and continuing association with the Royal Navy.

I think it is common ground on both sides of the House that the past five years have been a period of enormous change for the Royal Navy. Those changes have seen a significant reduction in the size of the fleet—which has raised doubts about its operational capabilities—and those reductions in turn have had a dramatic effect on the size of the United Kingdom naval shipbuilding industry.

Recently, we saw the closures of the Cammell Laird shipyard on Merseyside and the Swan Hunter shipyard on the Tyne. There have been many job losses at Yarrow on the Clyde and at Vosper Thornycroft at Southampton—and that is leaving to one side what has happened in my constituency since 1991 and the release of "Options for Change".

I am sure that the Minister is aware of what has been going on at Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. at Barrow-in-Furness, where almost 10,000 jobs have been lost in little more than four years. That has had a tremendous effect on the local economy, and has dealt a devastating blow to my constituency. We are a geographically isolated part of the United Kingdom, which has historically relied on one employer—the shipbuilding firm in that area. My constituents have found it enormously difficult to make the necessary adjustments when they have had to endure so much pain over a short period.

Therefore, I make no apology for concentrating on naval procurement policy, and what I believe to be the Government's failure to manage the process of change in an effective and a sensible manner. I shall deal particularly with the Government's continuing emphasis on competition as the driving force behind their procurement policy. However, before I turn to those issues, I shall comment more generally on the Royal Navy's future role.

I believe that our first priority must be to ensure that the Royal Navy is capable of deploying flexible, highly mobile and self-sustaining forces to any part of the world whenever the need arises. That requirement is a reflection of the end of the cold war and the disappearance of a single, monolithic threat.

In his eloquent speech to the House tonight, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) referred to the fact that quotations by

*[Mr. John Hutton]*

admirals featured in all hon. Members' speeches tonight. I shall continue that tradition by referring to the comments of Sir Benjamin Bathurst in his article in the *Royal United Services Institute Journal* of August 1995. I agree with him, when, summarising the effects of the "Options for Change" review and the Royal Navy's change of direction, he concludes:

"Yet overall the move to a broad and balanced expeditionary navy will be seen as a pretty radical change from the anti-submarine warfare orientated doctrines of the Cold War".

If we are to support that operational shift in the Royal Navy doctrine, its forces should include aircraft carriers, long-range submarines and landing ships. I think that it is the responsibility not only of the Government but of the Opposition to construct policies that will ensure that the Royal Navy has that equipment and those resources to meet the challenges of the next millennium.

It would be remiss of me to let the issue pass without expressing regret that, earlier today, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement attempted to give the impression that Labour would unilaterally abandon Britain's nuclear deterrent. That is not the case.

**Dr. John Reid** (Motherwell, North): I am very glad that my hon. Friend has raised that issue, because it seems that, whenever four Tories gather together, they are genetically compelled to spread myths. I shall take this opportunity to set the record straight. Like the Government, we would like to see a nuclear-free world. Towards that end, we will encourage and participate in global multilateral negotiations. However, until that day—which I fear is far off—we shall retain Trident, and have a deterrent as long as any potential enemy has one.

**Mr. Hutton:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for setting the record straight. We all want to see nuclear disarmament—in fact, I understand that it is Government policy to promote it on a multilateral basis. I am glad to say that that is also my party's policy. My hon. Friend has made it quite clear that we shall not indulge in a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament. When discussing the policies and the operational doctrine of the Royal Navy, it is important to have regard to the role it plays deploying Britain's independent nuclear deterrent, in addition to the more flexible approach that we want it to adopt.

Secondly, we must ensure that operations involving long-range deployment of Royal Navy forces can be fully supplied and serviced. A number of concerns have been expressed about the resources available to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and I am glad that at least one of the issues relating to that force has been partly resolved today. We understand that the Ministry of Defence has issued an invitation to tender for two replacements for the O class tankers. That is welcome, but I ask the Minister to say tonight to whom those invitations have been extended.

I see that the Minister is reading a newspaper, which I understand is not the practice that hon. Members should adopt during a debate in this place. I am sorry to see him doing that, and I hope that he is still listening to me.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. I shall clear up that matter. If the Minister is reading a newspaper in connection with the debate, he is in order. If it is not connected with the debate, of course he is not.

**Mr. Hutton:** I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It pains me to refer to the hon. Gentleman in that way, as I know that he takes a very close interest in debates. My constituents will want to know who has been invited to tender, and what time scale the MOD envisages for the tender period. When does the Ministry of Defence expect to issue a contract for the construction of the two new O class vessels?

There is also evidence of continuing overstretch within the Royal Navy. HMS Invincible—an aircraft carrier which was built in my constituency—recently broke almost all the Royal Navy's harmony objectives after its service commitments in the Adriatic. That is a matter of some concern to the Defence Select Committee, because it clearly implies an imbalance between the Navy's commitments and its present strengths. I hope that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will address that issue in his speech later tonight.

I now turn to procurement, both in general and specifically in relation to my constituency. Between 1990 and 1995—1990-91 was the year of "Options for Change"—expenditure on naval procurement and sea equipment fell more than the combined fall in expenditure on land and air equipment. In real terms, there was a decline of 41.3 per cent. in naval procurement, compared with a fall of 18.5 per cent. for land equipment and 16.7 per cent. for air equipment. Over the same period, the Ministry of Defence budget decreased by 18.3 per cent.

It is quite clear from those figures that the Royal Navy has taken the brunt of the reductions in Ministry of Defence spending since 1990 and 1991. Given our maritime role and our unique contribution to NATO forces, many people will ask why those cuts have so deeply impacted on the Royal Navy. The reductions have been twice as heavy in expenditure terms for the Navy as the equivalent reductions for the Army and the Royal Air Force.

No one can argue against the concept of competitive procurement, because it clearly provides the taxpayer, through the Ministry of Defence, with value for money. However, as the recent report by the Defence Select Committee and the Trade and Industry Select Committee has revealed, there are real concerns among those in industry about how that policy is being implemented. I must say that it will be difficult to sustain the policy for much longer, as the industry continues to contract and rationalise.

There are a number of particular concerns to which I should like to draw attention. First, reliance on price as the final determinant ignores the need to maintain strategic capability. We have already lost a UK capability in image intensifier tube manufacturing. I think that the Select Committee was right to comment that there is a need to adopt a long-term approach to the retention of strategic capabilities, and to build that into future procurement policies.

Secondly, competitive procurement tends to undervalue the need to maintain the technological base of the United Kingdom's defence companies. The Ministry of Defence should work more closely with the DTI in that sphere. I welcome what the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said today about the Government's response to the report from the Defence Select Committee and the Trade and Industry Select Committee. It demonstrates movement, and a recognition of some deficiencies in the Government's procurement policies.

Thirdly, companies require more guidance from the Government about their future requirements, which of course was a Select Committee recommendation. That point appears to have been accepted by the Government, which I welcome. The seminar conducted in July by chief executives of defence companies and MOD officials and Ministers was a welcome development. However, it is important that timetables should be adhered to once requirements have been identified.

That did not happen with the batch 2 Trafalgar class update programme, which is currently running almost three years behind schedule. That three-year delay is bound to have adverse consequences for employment and maintaining vital skills in my constituency.

Finally, I should like to refer to some specific issues that are of concern to my constituents. I am thinking in particular about the contract to replace HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, and the prime contractorship for the new Trafalgar class submarines. As for the batch 2 Trafalgar class programme, I am sure that the Minister will be aware that the decision to award the prime contract to the GEC-Marconi team and not to VSEL was a huge disappointment to my constituents. The loss of the prime contract has created a mood of real uncertainty in my constituency.

In a letter dated 22 January this year to the Prime Minister, Tom Campbell, the chief executive of Barrow borough council, said:

"We do not expect the Government simply to hand out work to GEC Marine but we do believe that the Government has a responsibility to the skilled work force of the town and the thousands who have already lost their jobs. We do need your help to alleviate the fear which hangs over every household in Barrow as a result of the now precarious and uncertain defence procurement strategy."

There is a real concern in my constituency about what VSEL's role will be in the construction of those new submarines for the Royal Navy. I understand, and obviously accept, that the allocation of work is a matter for the prime contractor. However, I hope and expect that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will be able to give me some reassurance tonight that he accepts that the expertise and skills of VSEL workers will be fully utilised in the construction of the Royal Navy's submarines.

It is particularly important to bear in mind—the Minister referred to it—VSEL's role, for many years, as the United Kingdom's submarine specialist. The Minister referred in particular to our success in completing the Trident programme to time and to cost. I hope that he is not now contemplating a situation in which the skills and expertise that have been built up in VSEL are put at risk. He must make it his business to ensure that my constituents are fully involved in the construction of those submarines.

Several hon. Members have referred to the replacement programme for the landing platform docks HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. I am afraid that those contracts are quite substantially behind schedule. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell the House that he expects that those contracts will be placed in the near future. My hope is that the contracts will be placed towards the end of April. I hope that he can confirm that he is also working towards that timetable.

The Navy is clearly undergoing substantial changes. It is also true that the Royal Navy continues to enjoy a worldwide reputation. There is no doubt that it will do all that it can, in the present circumstances, not only to maintain that reputation but to build on it. In doing so, it will continue to have the full support and confidence of the House.

7.35 pm

**Mr. Llew Smith** (Blaenau Gwent): During the annual Navy debate, it is usual to hear many hon. Members making speeches to maintain Royal Navy establishments in their constituencies or a special plea that the Royal Navy has already seen too many cuts. I intend to put a somewhat different case, and call for massive cuts in the Royal Navy's Trident nuclear programme.

I do so for a number of reasons. The total lifetime cost of Trident—including construction, deployment, repair and decommissioning—is about £50,000 million. That is somewhat different from the £11,500 million that the Government quote, but that is only in relation to construction costs. Even the low figure of £11,500 million is an obscene waste of money.

As I understand it, about £10,000 million has already been spent on Trident. That means that thousands of millions of pounds could be saved if we cancelled the Trident programme now. Much of that money could be reinvested in communities such as mine in Blaenau Gwent or other parts of the world where people are in desperate need of money.

The Attorney-General, when he recently gave evidence before the International Court of Justice, argued that nuclear weapons could be used legally

"in accordance with the right to self-defence as recognised by article 51 of the United Nations Charter."

However, there is no defence. Once one has used those nuclear weapons, all the things and all the people one purports to be defending are destroyed by radiation and other consequences.

The Attorney-General argued that nuclear weapons could be used selectively without causing too much harm to civilians. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), would be wise to heed the warning that came from the recent anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: step back and learn from us. He could also learn from the tragic experiences of the veterans who were involved in atomic tests and who now, 30 or 40 years later, suffer the terrible effects of radiation exposure. The threat of a nuclear winter is also instructive.

Is it not ironic that this week not only the Attorney-General but all hon. Members have in one way or another debated how we can create a far richer and better world? In this debate on the Navy, the same politicians who are supporting Trident to ensure that our future is safe and secure are willing to put the future of the earth in jeopardy, destroying that which hon. Members want to improve. I do not think that we have a right to do that. It would be the gravest crime of all.

We are not only saying that we are willing to destroy people who are living, but, as someone once said, we are willing to cancel the lives of people who are not yet born. That is what is at stake when we debate nuclear weapons. It is not the dangerous nonsense extolled by the Attorney-General and other Members of the House.

The second reason for chopping the Trident budget is that the Trident programme distorts the entire defence budget, in particular the Navy budget. So Trident should be cancelled now, and we should cut our financial losses, in the knowledge that we must avoid potential disaster.

*[Mr. Llew Smith]*

There is another financial reason for sinking Trident now. Rob Green, a retired nuclear submarine commander, argues that both Polaris and Trident are

"worse than useless, because they undermine our security by provoking the greater danger that we face."

He rightly recognises that, if we are to continue to go down the nuclear road, we cannot argue that other countries which are at present non-nuclear should not join us on that road. Indeed, by our very act of maintaining our nuclear weapons, we encourage those countries to follow us down that road.

Sir Henry Leech, the First Sea Lord, was the first to describe Trident as

"a cuckoo in the naval nest",

meaning that Trident stole money from other parts of the Navy budget. Commander Green also points out that Richard Sharpe, then also a captain on the Royal Navy staff, later wrote in 1988-89:

"Because funding for Trident has come mainly from the naval share of the defence budget it is having an increasingly detrimental effect on the equipment programme for the rest of the Fleet."

Although I do not personally argue for the redistribution of savings made by cancelling Trident to other parts of the Navy's equipment programme, it is clear that some very senior naval officers have come to recognise that Trident has been funded at a serious cost to other parts of the Navy.

My third and last, but not least, reason for cutting the Trident budget is not based on saving finances. It is based on saving this beautiful green planet of ours from the threat of nuclear devastation. Let no one be in any doubt that Trident promotes nuclear proliferation, while the Government claim to combat it.

In the 1995 "Statement on the Defence Estimates", the Government stated:

"Under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which entered into force in 1970, the United Kingdom is committed to work towards nuclear disarmament (and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control). Successive Governments have taken this commitment very seriously. The United Kingdom has only ever deployed the minimum deterrent necessary for security and has been at the forefront of international endeavours to develop the stability in international relations that is the essential step towards disarmament. And, with the end of the Cold War, the Government has made major reductions in the size of British nuclear forces."

I suppose that it is some kind of progress that a document produced by the Ministry of Defence even recognised the existence of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. One would not have thought that it existed from listening to a succession of Ministers at the Dispatch Box during Defence questions, defending our purchase and deployment of Trident. It has been demonstrated many times that Trident is a significant increase in our capability, and therefore a serious act of nuclear proliferation. Even if the number of warheads is kept similar to the number deployed on Polaris, the qualitative difference in targeting capacity and accuracy of the missile system makes it a much more potent weapon.

Last month, the United Kingdom began negotiations in Geneva to reach agreement on a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. The British Government were diplomatically dragged to the conference table, having spent years constructing more and more exotic reasons for postponing the start of test ban talks. The delays were obviously intended to permit the completion of the design tests on Trident warheads. It does not take a genius to work that out.

It is counter-productive for the Government to back the French nuclear testing programme, which undermines the attempts to achieve a test ban treaty. Some of us warned not so many months ago, and it has now happened, that radioactive iodine would leak from the nuclear tests conducted at Mururoa. The French Government even admit that that has occurred. Yet we were informed by both the French and British Governments that there was no risk of such environmental contamination. So an apology from the Minister when he replies to the debate would not go amiss.

Whether we are for or against Trident, I should have thought that, in view of its cost and the terrible consequences if the warheads were ever used, the Government would encourage the provision of the maximum information on that and related subjects. Unfortunately, that is not so. The Minister refused to send a copy of the annual progress report on Trident to each and every Member of Parliament. He argued that to do so would not be a sensible use of resources, even though he had to admit that the cost would not have exceeded £1,000. How is it that the Government can manage to find £50,000 million to support Trident, but cannot find £1,000 to distribute a report on the development of that weapon to Members of this House?

7.45 pm

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): I am tempted to begin by quoting the great—I use the word deliberately and advisedly—predecessor of the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) by saying, "Hands up who agrees with that lot."

**Mr. Llew Smith:** My predecessor agreed.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Absolutely. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) nodding in agreement. We have heard the authentic voice of old Labour articulated with a sincerity and passion that we all admire and which any true democrat respects, but which is light years away from the real world in which we live. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) nodding his head so vigorously. The speech of the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent moved him so literally that he left the Chamber as his hon. Friend began to extol the virtues of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament cause.

**Dr. Reid:** Lest any discourtesy be implied, let me inform the hon. Gentleman that an urgent telephone call led me to leave. As for our position on the nuclear deterrent, despite the sincerity of my hon. Friend's view, I have made our position plain from the Front Bench. We do not agree with him.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's reassurance. Of course we all accept that he had to leave for a telephone call. It is a matter of some relief that the official policy of Her Majesty's Opposition is now more in tune with the realities of the world.

As I listened to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, closed my eyes and enjoyed his rhetoric, I could see the Opposition Benches peopled, as they were when I came into the House in 1970, with serried ranks of those who would have agreed with him. No one can for half a second dispute the integrity of the hon. Gentleman's views and his convictions, but if the view that he espouses now had prevailed in the 1970s, we would not be having this debate in a world in which the iron curtain is down and the Soviet Union has disintegrated and from which, although there are many real dangers to the peace of the world, the terrible threat of nuclear war has been largely removed.

I believe that the doctrine of deterrence, which was espoused by the post-war Labour Government and continued by the Government led by the illustrious grandfather of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, and continued beyond that, saved the freedoms that we enjoy and take for granted.

**Mr. Smith:** I take all the hon. Gentleman's criticisms as compliments, so I thank him. The hon. Gentleman defends nuclear weapons, so I would like to ask him a question that I have asked others. If the crunch came and he were in a position of power, would he be willing to use those nuclear weapons? In anticipation of their use, what devastation would be inflicted on our environment and population worldwide? I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will answer the questions that the Minister has failed to answer.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Nobody can doubt the devastating power of nuclear weapons and how terrible it would be if they had to be used. Their use would represent the failure of the doctrine of deterrence. However, if one has a deterrent, in the ultimate resort, one has to be prepared to use it.

**Mr. Smith:** Would the hon. Gentleman press the button?

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** The hon. Gentleman should not get so agitated. I am answering his question quite unequivocally and explicitly. Yes, of course I would. If the grandfather of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Clement Attlee and others had not had similar courage in 1945, terrible as the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was, the war would have lasted longer, many more people would have been killed and we would have inherited a much darker world. That is now accepted across the broad range of political opinion in the hon. Gentleman's party, my party and the Liberal Democrat party.

I was tempted into a digression at the beginning of my speech. Perhaps I should not have been, although the essence of debate is to reply to what has been said. I should have started with an apology to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I came into the Chamber hoping that I would have the pleasure of listening to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), who told me that he was hoping to speak. I had no intention of speaking in the debate and, for the first time in nearly 26 years in the House, I am speaking in a debate without having heard the opening speeches. That is very bad and I am sorry, but I thought it even worse to have depopulated Benches and not to speak.

I had not realised how many of my hon. Friends, who usually take part in these debates with great eloquence and knowledge, had other pressing engagements this evening. That is a serious issue for all those concerned with the regulation of business in the House. Jopling advocate as I was and remain, it is clear that we have to re-examine the structure of Thursday's business.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. Interesting as that observation is, we are debating the Royal Navy, not the Jopling proposals.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was making a passing reference that was entirely relevant. We are debating the Royal Navy and, for the first time in all my years in the House—and I have been here longer than anyone in the Chamber at the moment—I have attended a Royal Navy debate and there has not been a long list of hon. Members who hope to speak, if not a densely packed Chamber.

Britain is a maritime nation or it is nothing. The rich, proud history of our nation is indissolubly tied up with the history of our maritime exploits, both in trade and in war. We should take enormous pride in the way in which the Royal Navy has preserved the freedom of our country over the centuries. We owe a great debt to the Navy and to the men and women who now serve in it. They are as dedicated and as skilful as their predecessors; they are led with distinction, they have equipment and ships of high sophistication and we should be glad of that. We should take comfort from the fact that although the navies of other maritime nations have been savagely cut, the cuts have not been so great here. I should say to my hon. Friend the Minister that they have been greater than I would have liked. I have a number of points to which I hope he will reply.

I am very worried about the lack of auxiliary back-up for the Royal Navy. We all remember the Falklands war—one of the most glorious episodes in recent history for the Royal Navy, which made an invaluable contribution to the success of an incredibly important venture. The Royal Navy could not have done what it did without the assistance of the veritable armada of merchant ships. I wonder whether a similar operation could be mounted today if there were a need for it. It is important that we have regard for our merchant marine.

I have a real vested interest in the subject, as my father was a master mariner. I grew up by the sea and I have a great regard—second only to my regard for the Royal Navy—for those who, over the centuries, have gone down to the sea in ships and occupied their business in great waters as members of the merchant marine. It is sad that so many of those who now serve in the merchant marine do so under flags that are not British. If the red ensign has not disappeared from the surface of the waters, it is a much rarer sight.

I should also mention the fishery protection fleet. My home town was Grimsby in Lincolnshire and I suppose that I am one of the few hon. Members who has gone to sea with a fishing fleet. I took an 18-day trip in a North sea trawler in 1965 when I was seeking to wrest Grimsby from the clutches of the late Anthony Crosland. I did not succeed, of course, although I made a very good friend who remained one until the day he died. Both Anthony Crosland and I took deep-sea voyages with the fishing fleet. It is sad that the fleet has so reduced in size since then.

*[Sir Patrick Cormack]*

Is my hon. Friend absolutely confident that our fishery protection vessels are adequate to the different, but still important, tasks that they have to perform in defending our fishermen, who have the most hazardous of all peacetime occupations?

I represent what used to be a mining seat. Alas, the collieries have now closed. I used to say that fishermen and miners had the most hazardous of all occupations, but if I had to say which was more hazardous, it would be that of the fisherman, who cannot go home at night to his wife and family and who battles against the elements for 24 hours a day, often in extremely difficult conditions. Our fishermen deserve every possible protection.

I shall mention two further issues. I know that one has been touched on earlier because, with all the wonders of modern technology, some of us can follow proceedings in the Chamber from our offices. I am not sure that it is altogether a good thing.

I shall not expand on that or you might call me to order again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it gave me the benefit of seeing a colourful performance by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), who referred to the royal yacht. I sincerely hope that there will soon be an announcement of a new royal yacht. It is a marvellous floating ambassador that is also cost-effective. It has been used splendidly by the Queen and members of the royal family and I believe that they deserve another one. Britannia has been used far beyond carrying the sovereign. It has been employed to further Britain's trading interests and Britain's image throughout the world. I hope sincerely that, if it is decided that Britannia cannot, with any economic sense, have another refit, there will be another royal yacht. I am sure that no one would grace its decks with greater aplomb than the grandson of the greatest First Lord of the Admiralty that this country has ever had.

Another subject that causes me great concern was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham. It is, of course, the future of the Royal Naval college at Greenwich. I have been much exercised about the future of what is, by any standard or definition, one of the finest assemblies of historic buildings anywhere in the world. It is rich in history and in architecture. We should all take a pride in these buildings. They encapsulate so much of the best of our past because of the historical events with which they are associated and because they represent the high point of architecture in this country.

**Mr. Raynsford:** One of the high points.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Yes. One of the high points. I bow, as it were, to the hon. Gentleman's sedentary correction, in whose constituency—lucky man—the buildings are.

I shall never understand what possessed my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government to advertise—albeit, in the pages of *Country Life*, a good magazine which I take every week—such a marvellous collection of buildings. It was an extraordinary lapse of taste, judgment and sensitivity.

I should like the college to continue in the possession of the Royal Navy. I am not persuaded that the arguments against that are overwhelming. If they are not overwhelming, however, they have at any rate for the moment prevailed. That I accept.

Being ever a realist, and trying to deal with the world as it is and not as I would wish it to be—it would be a very different place if my wishes prevailed—I must accept the premise on which the Government are basing their case, which is that another use must be found. I must accept also that the college has had other uses in the past. It is crucial, however, that the use to which the buildings are put is seemly and appropriate.

There are some buildings that should for ever be part of the national, public heritage—buildings that should never pass out of the control or supervision of government. Pre-eminently in that category are the buildings of the college at Greenwich. Any use that is found for them must be seemly and suitable for the great buildings that they are. The painted hall must still have its proper uses.

I went down the Thames during the summer last year as a guest of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). He was conducting a concert in the chapel at Greenwich. Rostropovich was playing. It was a marvellous evening. We sat in the chapel and had dinner in the painted hall afterwards. We all had an enormous sense of pride. It is—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Minister is peeved because he was not there, perhaps. He would have enjoyed the evening as much as anyone else, I am sure. His love of the good life and his knowledge of music are legendary. Whatever use is found for the college buildings, it is important that such events should continue to take place.

There is a place for great ceremonial service and state occasions at Greenwich. It would be sad if that use were completely taken away. Whoever the new user is and whatever the new use is, they must be compatible with occasional state ceremonial occasions. I am a great believer in state ceremonial; it lifts our hearts and cheers us up in a dull world. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear that in mind.

Above all else, I hope that my hon. Friend will ensure that whoever occupies the buildings—he will be extraordinarily privileged to use them—is British. I do not say that in a narrow chauvinistic sense. Can one imagine the French ever leasing Versailles to a Japanese correspondence college? Can one ever imagine the Dutch leasing the Mauritshuis in The Hague? Change of use might be on a par with that.

The college is part of the fabric of our nation's history. It is part of our birthright as a nation. It cannot and must not pass out of British hands. I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that any future use must have some reference to our maritime past. There must be something of an education content. In saying that, I am not suggesting that there is only one answer or one possible end user. Young men and women who have the privilege of learning in a fine and historic environment have great privilege. We must ensure that some young men and women continue to have that privilege at Greenwich.

I beg of my hon. Friend the Minister to tell my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that there are some on the Conservative Benches—I suspect that the same applies to occupants of the Opposition Benches—who take the view that any lease to any foreign organisation, company or country would be completely unacceptable. Much as it would grieve me to take such action, I could not accept such a lease and I would do everything possible to frustrate it. I cannot believe that it will happen because

I have enormous confidence in the good sense and judgment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who in the past fortnight has demonstrated his many diverse qualities in a brilliant way in the House. He has my committed support. I cannot believe that he would listen to any ministerial suggestion that Greenwich should go to any foreign bidder. It must not, and the suggestion must not even be made.

If it takes a little—

**Mr. Soames:** If I may make a respectful suggestion to my hon. Friend in the spirit of a friendship that has existed during the short time that I have been a Member of this place, I think that he is making heavy weather in a naval debate. There has never been any suggestion that Greenwich would ever be used in the way that he fears or suggests. He rightly says that such use would be wholly unthinkable.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I am deeply grateful to my hon. Friend. If I was making heavy weather, it was because I was hoping that my hon. Friend would rise to make the sort of statement that we have just heard.

During my time in the Chamber this evening we have had two historic pronouncements. We have had an unequivocal assurance on Trident from the Opposition Front Bench and my hon. Friend's unequivocal assurance. On that note of happy amity, I am delighted to resume my place.

8.9 pm

**Mr. Jamie Cann** (Ipswich): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) on his brilliant extemporaneous speech. He emptied the Gallery when he started, but he has since attracted four back in, so he has done well. I might add that I come from Barton on Humber, which is near Grimsby, and my grandfather was a canal man. He used to travel to Leeds and York from the cement works near there, so we have a mutual interest.

In my constituency there is water, but it is used only by commercial ships, not naval ones. We had a Royal Naval Auxiliary Service launch until a couple of years ago. I speak as someone with an interest in naval affairs and as someone who is British and takes a pride in our naval history. Mainly for that reason, I joined the armed forces trust this year, with the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen). We have been around and about. I shall tell the House a little about it and about what I have seen and heard from speaking to people.

So far I have been to Northern Ireland, where I rowed on Loch Neagh, which was the most terrifying thing that I had ever done until I got out on to the Irish sea in a minesweeper and was picked up by a Sea King helicopter in a force 6 gale. According to the sailors, minesweepers in the Irish sea roll on wet grass. I admit that I could not eat my lunch, although I managed to keep down my breakfast, but the hon. Member for Shoreham ate his and mine. The hon. Gentleman and I have also been to HMS Excellent in Portsmouth, where we were put through the firefighting course. As soon as I got back to Ipswich, I changed all the extinguishers in my office, because they were the wrong ones. We have been out on RFA Fort George, off Plymouth. We have been to Northwood maritime command centre. I commend it to anybody, because it is much more interesting than sitting here for four hours waiting to speak.

To a man and a woman, the people whom I have seen in the Royal Navy in this short time have been thoroughly professional, and absolutely dedicated to the service. They work for some 24 hours a day. They are loyal to the Government of the day, no matter what party the Government may be. When I spoke to them and asked them about things, they were straight talkers as well. I very much enjoyed that. I am sure that the hon. Member for Shoreham would agree.

I shall not speak at length about how wonderful the Navy is, as many hon. Members have done that today, and I agree with them, but I did see a number of problems or the odd cloud on the horizon. It was expected that women on ships would create a problem. That is not so, as everybody has told me. There are currently 500 women on ships. Most are junior ratings, but some are senior, and there have been no problems other than those related to accommodation on some of the older ships because of the necessity to have separate mess areas and toilets, but the new ships take account of the fact that there are women on board, and they have no such problems. I am sorry that many women on ships are drifting into jobs that women tend to do on land—stewarding, cooking and so on, which is not quite in the spirit. There is plenty of time for them to develop other interests, and I am sure that they will.

My second point, which is a problem, relates to the Navy's equipment. People say that there are about 35 destroyers and frigates, three carriers, two landing ships and so on, but it is not quite as rosy in certain areas. Yes, we have three carriers—HMS Invincible, HMS Illustrious and HMS Ark Royal—but at any given time one of them is tied up, and there are only two air groups for them. Therefore, in effect, at a time of war, there would be only two carriers, as one does not carry anything, unless one plundered RAF or Army Air Corps units to put on it, in which case, presumably, they would be taken away from where they should be in a time of war. I ask the Minister to tell us when he replies whether that was intended, or is it that way to save money? The House would want to know.

A worse example in some ways is RFA Fort George, a 30,000 tonne Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship that carries supplies, food, fuel and ammunition. It is so big and has so much on it that it is not allowed into Plymouth harbour. I was going to take that up with my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), but he is not here at the moment. It has four areas where 20 mm guns can be placed. It is equipped with an area for Sea Wolf missile systems. It has a hangar and facilities for five Sea King helicopters. But it has no guns, Sea Wolf missile systems or Sea King helicopters. To reach it, one has to fly from Plymouth airport in a private firm's helicopters, which are not allowed to fly in bad weather because they do not have radar. That might be planned, but it does not sound too clever.

**Mr. Soames:** I am sorry to interrupt a thoroughly thoughtful and well-informed speech. The hon. Gentleman may rest assured that, were that ship to need that equipment, it would have it. As to the helicopters flying from Plymouth for sea training operations, that is an entirely sensible and extremely practical step, and flag officers sea training and all those involved report that it is working extremely well.

**Mr. Cann:** I am pleased that the Minister can reassure me of that. I can tell him that guns will be provided, because they are coming off the batch 1 type 22s that have been sold to Brazil.

**Mr. Soames:** What is wrong with that?

**Mr. Cann:** There is nothing wrong with that. I am merely agreeing with the Minister.

When we left the ship, the helicopters would not come out because the weather was bad, so it is not quite as good as the Minister says. We had to suffer the indignity of being picked up by a Lynx helicopter from a Dutch frigate. I should rather have gone by the Royal Navy. A Dutch frigate is an eye opener and a culture shock when one has been on a Royal Navy vessel.

I understand that there are problems with the computerised weapons systems on the type 23s. The Minister might care to elucidate that when he replies. We are selling off on timetable the batch 1 type 22s, but we do not appear to be introducing the type 23s on timetable. In six months, will we still be able to say that we have a destroyer/frigate force of about 35? According to my arithmetic, that does not appear to be so.

Another matter that I wish to discuss is what is euphemistically known in the private sector as downsizing. For example, on the type 22, the three batches have different complements, but they range between 224 per ship and 273. The type 23, depending on which book one reads, has between 157 and 173, so the complement of a type 23 is about four fifths the complement of a type 22, although they do the same job. In a way, that is good, because it means that the ship can be smaller, so it can be built for less money, it uses less fuel and less materiel, and one is paying fewer sailors.

The difference is made up—at least in theory—by the introduction of high technology to control weapons systems, and so on, which means that fewer crew are needed to operate the ship. That must be right. However, there are disadvantages. There is a problem with releasing sailors to allow them the leave to which they are entitled. When people are sick, that causes a problem. There is also a problem with rostering on occasion. I can see that, in wartime, there would be a problem getting a sufficient number of damage control parties together, compared with the number of excess sailors who would be off duty, for example, on a type 22. I ask the Minister to take up those points when he responds.

I hardly like to mention this, but there is a huge problem on the horizon as a result of the European Court's ruling that homosexuality should be recognised in the European Union. I know that that ruling has exercised the minds of those on board ship and in Northwood—and, no doubt, in the Ministry of Defence. The Navy is currently conducting a vast survey of people who must live in close proximity on ships, asking them whether they think that those who are openly homosexual should be allowed to join the service. I do not wish to predict the outcome of that survey, but it has been suggested that there will be strong opposition to the proposal.

I shall not express a personal opinion at this stage, but I will say this. If the European Union must tell us that we must have straight cucumbers, or that we cannot eat King Edward potatoes, let it do so; but no one should be allowed to tell us how we should run our ships, which are crucial to our nation's future. I believe that—irrespective of its views on whether homosexuality should be recognised—the House should oppose the European Court in this case.

Members of the armed forces lead a vigorous life. Those who fight wars must be fit and strong, and able to move fast. They therefore tend to be pensioned off much earlier than people like us: hon. Members can drag on until they are 65. I understand that there has been some talk of taking service men's pension rights away from them—reducing the pension, or perhaps getting rid of it altogether. I cannot believe that the Government would propose such a move, but I should be grateful if the Minister assured us that they will guarantee service men's pension rights.

8.21 pm

**Mr. Harry Cohen** (Leyton): Because my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar)—who is responsible for procurement issues—is to wind up the debate for the Opposition, and because the Minister of State for Defence Procurement opened the debate, I shall make two points on that subject.

In an intervention, I mentioned the Polaris submarine HMS Renown. In 1993, its refit had cost £155 million. Since then it has been mothballed; it has sat in dock waiting to be decommissioned. That has cost more millions of pounds, and we do not know how much longer it will take. The Minister said that it had taken part in three training exercises, but I thought that a pretty poor response. The money could have been much better spent on schools and the national health service. Ministers in this Conservative Government complain that they have not enough money for the armed forces. How do they justify the waste of £155 million?

The other procurement issue was raised at Question Time by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). He was told that stores and equipment to the value of some £67 million had been lost in the past five years—and that did not include what was lost in Germany. Five per cent. was lost in Northern Ireland. The lost equipment included a Royal Navy thermal imager, a set of rockets and tanks. I am not sure how the Ministry of Defence managed to lose tanks, but it does not say much for its control system. When my hon. Friend asked for a list of items that had been lost, he was told that the MOD did not keep a central record of the loss of any item worth less than £100,000. What sort of accounting system is that? Is it thought that anything worth under £100,000 does not matter to the taxpayer?

**Mr. Soames** *rose—*

**Mr. Cohen:** I shall happily give way, so that the Minister can explain why that money was squandered when it could have been much better spent elsewhere.

**Mr. Soames:** The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues queried the cost of the refit of HMS Renown. The decision to carry out the refit was taken at a time when the Trident programme was still many years away from fruition. It was essential to ensure the continuation of the cycle of patrols of Resolution class submarines until the Vanguard class was in service. It was a wholly rational decision. Because the Trident programme had gone so

well, we were able to take Renown out of service earlier than would otherwise have been the case. That was not a gross waste of money; the deterrent has remained operational throughout—quite rightly.

**Mr. Cohen:** That will not do. Millions of pounds were spent on the Trident programme as well. Spending money on both Polaris and Trident must be regarded as a lack of planning. In fact, the Trident programme has not gone so wonderfully, but I shall say more about that later.

In a future debate I may deal with the MOD's new procurement building, which has also cost millions of pounds. It is a castle with a moat and its own railway, surrounded by hundreds of acres of land. Presumably the moat is there so that Navy vessels can sail round it when they are tested before being bought. Now, however, I want to say something about the economics of naval nuclear weapons, a subject that brings us automatically to Trident. Let me ask a simple question: will Trident be the last nuclear weapons system deployed by the United Kingdom?

I ask that question in the context of simple economic necessity rather than politics or strategy. The current official estimate for the purchase of Trident is £11,682 million. I asked the Library to calculate the purchase cost of Polaris in current prices, and it came up with a figure in the region of between £5 billion and £5.5 billion. As with any other military equipment, replacements cost much more than what is being replaced. How much would a follow-on to Trident cost? Between £20 billion and £30 billion, or perhaps more—and that would be just the cost of acquiring the system.

There were many hidden costs in the purchase of Trident, such as the improvement of Aldermaston, which went so badly wrong. The A90 plutonium processing complex, which was due to be operational in 1986, is still not fully operational, and millions of pounds are still required to be spent on the A91 liquid waste facility to get it up to scratch. The cost of those two buildings probably exceeds £1 billion. Many facilities at Faslane and Coulport were not included as Trident works, but were essential to its operations.

If Trident were replaced, it is certain that other parts of the nuclear infrastructure would have to be replaced as well, simply on grounds of age. There would possibly be a much larger contribution to research and development costs, even if a replacement system were bought off the shelf from the United States. The total bill would be more than £30 billion—possibly more than £40 billion in today's prices. Indeed, those figures could be an underestimate. In times of public spending squeezes—indeed, more such squeezes are more likely than our being awash with money—would any Government spend that sort of money?

If Trident were replaced, incurring the high costs to which I referred, the United Kingdom could simply say goodbye to a modern Navy in any other respect. The programme to replace Trident would have to start in five or 10 years, and would probably cost £1 billion a year for the first few years, rising thereafter and taking an increasingly large chunk out of our defence budget.

If Trident is not to be replaced—I have no doubt that, barring some appalling change in the world, even a Tory Government would not spend such money on such a programme in 10 years' time—it must be accepted that nuclear weapons are not essential to the defence of the country. If the argument that Trident is too expensive is accepted, the Government should also accept that the sky is not going to fall on British heads if we do not have nuclear weapons in 20 or 30 years. The crux of the matter is that if nuclear weapons can be sacrificed in 20 or 30 years' time because we do not need them or cannot afford them, are they really needed now?

It is worth looking at how much Trident will cost from now to the end of its life—and therefore how much could be saved if rational decisions on defence policy were made now. About £3 billion has yet to be spent on the acquisition of Trident. The Government say that Trident is also likely to cost about £200 million a year to run, although that figure is considerably hazy, which is understandable as the system is not yet fully up and running. Such haziness pervades all calculations of expenditure on Trident.

Parallels can be drawn with civil nuclear power. For years, costs were hidden away in other budgets to make it look cheaper than it was. Once the books were open to outside scrutiny, the creative accountancy quickly unravelled. Massive expenditure on infrastructure, which would not have been needed if Trident had not been acquired, was attributed to other budgets. Billions of pounds' worth of construction at Aldermaston and Faslane have been hidden from the Trident budget. In future that will not be possible, as all nuclear infrastructure will be in support of Trident and any possible successor to it. There will be far less chance to meet such costs through other budgets and claim that the expenditure was for more general usage, as has been done up to now.

The other costs to be borne in mind are environmental. It is now recognised that the costs of decommissioning military nuclear facilities in the United States will run into hundreds of billions of dollars over coming decades. There is no comparable available information for the UK. The Government have been very slow with a clear-up programme—I refer to the decommissioning of Renown and other Polaris submarines—and do not talk about how much it will cost. There will be a big clear-up bill. In view of costs in the United States, our bill could not be less than tens of billions of pounds.

Another factor to be considered is the increased environmental and health standards that the public now expect. At the height of the cold war, many members of the public were prepared to tolerate radioactive discharges from Aldermaston or Sellafield, because they thought that it was a price worth paying in view of what they saw as the Soviet threat. Those same people will not now tolerate such lax, cancer-inducing behaviour. They expect the Government to make a much greater effort in lessening health hazards and the environmental impact of nuclear power, which will of course cost a great deal more money.

In some ways, it is very sad to return to the economic arguments against nuclear weapons. I should have thought—and have of course argued—that the moral and military arguments were so strong that they would have won the day long ago. I say to my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), who made commitments from the Front Bench, that they must face the economic arguments, just as Defence Ministers must at the moment.

**Mr. Soames:** Yes.

**Mr. Cohen:** The Treasury will have an increased influence when it sees the costs involved, especially the cost of a replacement programme.

**Mr. Soames** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Cohen:** The Minister is nodding. I am pleased that he agrees with me. He must therefore accept that the Conservative Government will end up not replacing Trident because of the same economic argument and that a Conservative Treasury will say that enough is enough. Despite their macho stands, both main parties will have to come to terms with the enormous cost of maintaining nuclear weapons and replacing the Trident programme.

In the past few days, the House has heard the chant, "Do as I say, not as I do," passed back and forth across the Chamber in cheap political gibes. Britain's approach to nuclear weapons is relevant to that chant because we are saying that we must keep nuclear weapons, while we tell other countries that they do not need them and cannot have them. That is one of the most obscene and hypocritical cases of, "Do as I say, not as I do," that I have ever come across.

The Government need to respond to the enormous waste of money in procurement. That waste could well continue, not only in a Trident replacement programme, but in current expenditure. It would be far better for the country if we did not waste the money, but spent it on the growing social problems in housing, education and the national health service.

If Trident is to stay in service to the end of its operational life, the economic cost of replacing it will be too high for any Government to bear. If we accept that the country will not be able to afford the costs of being a nuclear power in 20 to 30 years, why not get rid of nuclear weapons now? We could save the money and put it to far better use.

8.38 pm

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) will forgive me if I do not follow his line of argument. I propose—as I think every hon. Member is already aware—to focus my remarks primarily on the future of the site occupied by the Royal Naval college in Greenwich.

I very strongly endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on the scandal of empty residential property owned by the Ministry of Defence, much of which is found in areas such as Plymouth. I have visited his constituency and seen many former Ministry of Defence properties left empty, and learnt of the important positive approach now being adopted by Plymouth city council, in conjunction with several housing associations, to bring those properties back into use for people in housing need.

It is a cause of considerable sadness to me that the Ministry, in breach of the Conservative manifesto commitment to use surplus houses for such purposes, now proposes to privatise the married quarters estate in a way that will not only deny those homes to people in need, but will probably lead to a substantially increased revenue cost to the Ministry itself, for the leases on the properties it still requires for its own purposes.

I now return to the main focus of my speech, the Royal Naval college. In previous debates on the Royal Navy, and more recently on Second Reading of the Armed Forces Bill, I have spoken about the site's history, its magnificent architectural heritage and the high quality of training undertaken by the Royal Naval college and the joint service defence college, which are both located on the site at Greenwich.

I have often paid tribute to the work undertaken by the commander and staff of the college, who have maintained a consistent standard of excellence in the training that they offer. I do not feel that I need elaborate on any of that tonight; I believe that it is fully appreciated by all hon. Members with an interest in the Navy.

However, the future of the site is shrouded in uncertainty, as a result of the decision taken a little less than a year ago to choose Camberley as the site for the new tri-service college and the consequent decision to cease the activities of the Royal Naval college and the joint service defence college at Greenwich in 1997.

Many times, both in the House and elsewhere, I have raised serious doubts about the merits of that decision, and about the way in which it was taken. The consultation exercise preceding the decision was a most unsatisfactory affair, involving the presentation of information in a way not helpful to anyone trying to make an informed assessment of the merits of the respective sites under consideration. It also contained several financial assumptions that were questionable, to say the least. I took up many of those at the time with the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

The whole tenor of the consultation, the document and the financial forecasts were all clearly designed to convey the impression that Camberley was a cheaper, easier and more cost-effective solution than Greenwich. Those assumptions were always suspect, and what little information has seeped into the public arena in recent months tends to confirm that.

According to the *Daily Express* of 22 January, there are now real fears that Camberley will not be ready in time to accommodate the colleges being displaced from Greenwich. A senior defence source was quoted as saying that Navy and RAF officers would become "refugees", and would have to find a home from home at a university somewhere. That in itself is an alarming enough prospect, not least for all the officers expecting to take training courses in 1997-98. But it is not the only cause for concern—and that was not the first press report suggesting that the Government were in trouble over their Camberley plans.

On 16 October last year, *The Independent* reported defence sources as saying:

"There are grave doubts whether the 1997 deadline for forming the Tri-Service College can now be met".

That article also said that there were serious cost overruns, amounting perhaps to tens of millions of pounds. A senior defence source was again quoted as saying:

"There is a lot of teeth sucking going on about the scale of the costs involved in the refurbishment of Camberley".

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who is not now in his place, answered the debate on the defence estimates on 17 October, but he did not answer the questions that I had asked him about whether there was substance in those reports. In a subsequent written answer,

the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—I am pleased to see that he, at least, is here—assured me that there was no question of the budget for capital costs being exceeded, but he was more equivocal about the revenue costs budget.

I must now ask the Minister those questions again, and I hope that he will give us a full response tonight. Will he tell the House whether the costs, both capital and revenue, of Camberley are turning out in line with the estimates in the consultation paper about the siting of the tri-service college? If not, how much additional expenditure, both capital and revenue, is now anticipated?

Secondly, will the Minister tell us whether the timetable for accommodating all three service colleges at Camberley by 1997 will be met? Can he guarantee that all the staff and all the naval officers due to participate in staff college training in 1997-98 will be accommodated at the Camberley site as promised? If the answer to any of those questions is no, that must raise serious doubts about the basis of the decision to site the tri-service college at Camberley rather than at Greenwich.

Furthermore, if there is any question of the timetable being delayed, surely the right course must be to reconsider the decision to close the Greenwich site in 1997. Rather than consigning officers to temporary accommodation in some as yet unidentified university elsewhere, would it not make sense to keep the Royal Naval college and the joint service defence college operating at Greenwich for at least one more year?

If there were a pressing and appropriate alternative use for the Greenwich site in the autumn of 1997, there might be a case for saying that it must be closed, even if it cannot be guaranteed that there will be accommodation at Camberley for the people who will not now be able to attend courses at Greenwich. However, all we hear about what is happening to the Greenwich site suggests that that is not the case.

Despite substantial expenditure on a marketing operation by a well-known firm of estate agents, the Government have managed to secure the interest of only a handful of potential users in taking over one of the world's finest complexes of historic buildings. That must raise questions about the competence both of the Ministers responsible for the marketing exercise and of the estate agents who were selling the site—Messrs. Knight, Frank, who apparently lost Mr. Rutley along the way.

**Mr. Soames:** They ditched him.

**Mr. Raynsford:** If it was Rutley's fault, will the Minister tell us? Was it Rutley who made a mess of the operation, and is that why his name no longer features in the firm's name?

If reports in last week's edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* are to be believed, only three bids appeared worthy of short-listing, and two of those were from overseas. *The Sunday Telegraph* suggests that those consisted of one from a far eastern consortium that wants to turn Greenwich into a language school, offering learning breaks for overseas business men, and another from an American university.

It is hardly surprising that that prospect has alarmed hon. Members on both sides of the House, as well as people throughout the country. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) made a powerful speech on the subject, in which he spoke eloquently of the alarm and concern that he and many others feel at the prospect of that magnificent site, one of the country's finest historical and architectural gems, being made over to some foreign organisation with no roots in this country, no association with the Royal Navy, and probably only a limited interest in the wonders of Greenwich, other than as a prestigious site for an operation that could perfectly well take place elsewhere.

In response to a question from the hon. Member for South Staffordshire, the Minister said that there was no question of that. I took his assurance to mean that there is no question of an overseas bidder having the use of the buildings. I want to press the Minister on that matter.

If that assurance was as I and the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South understood it to be, and if what is written in *The Sunday Telegraph* is correct, the far eastern consortium which wants to use the site for a language school and the American university should be told emphatically now that their bids are no longer being considered.

If the Minister can assure us that all overseas bids are now ruled out, it is only fair that those bidders be made aware of that immediately. If the bids are not ruled out, the assurance that the Minister has given us tonight is highly suspect. It must certainly raise questions whether we are being told one thing while the Government are contemplating doing another. I hope that we get a clear and unequivocal assurance from the Minister tonight that the bids have been ruled out, and that only an appropriate source involving a British-based organisation with a concern for the naval and historical heritage of Greenwich will be entertained.

To help rescue the Government from the self-inflicted crisis that this botched marketing exercise has produced, Ministers sensibly agreed before Christmas to appoint a committee of experts to consider the various expressions of interest in the site and to advise the Secretary of State on its future use and management. Given the unpromising way in which the operation has been conducted up to this point—an operation that would not have brought credit on the Royal Navy or any other service had it been a military operation—I have the greatest sympathy for Lord Sainsbury, Lord Farringdon, Dame Jennifer Jenkins and Jocelyn Stevens, who have been given the task of bailing the Government out.

Having said that, I am very relieved that it is those individuals, rather than the Secretary of State—whose judgment in this matter has been shown to be flawed—who are now wrestling with the problem. I wish them well, and I am sure that they will have a proper regard for the national interest. I am sure also that they will take proper account of the strength of public opinion on the matter. If they are to do the job properly, they must be freed from the constraints of an unreasonably tight timetable. They must also not be subject to the limitations of the number of bidders that have been identified to date.

There is a case for keeping the Greenwich complex operating as a service college for at least another year to avoid the spectre of officers being camped out in some other university because they cannot be accommodated at Camberley. Clearly it would be logical to maintain the Greenwich site as a training college throughout that year. That would allow more time for other potential uses of the Greenwich site to be evaluated, and a really appropriate use, or mix of uses, to be agreed.

*[Mr. Raynsford]*

Equally, if there are anxieties about the calibre of the bids that have been received in response to Messrs. Knight, Frank's marketing exercise—

**Mr. Soames:** What happened to Rutley?

**Mr. Raynsford:** The name does not trip off the tongue as well without Rutley. But there we are—apparently the firm is now called Knight, Frank. If the calibre of the bids that have been received in response to the marketing exercise is inadequate—and we have every reason to suspect that it is not impressive—would it not be more sensible now to undertake a more sensitive and wide-ranging trawl of other possible uses to ensure that a truly appropriate use is guaranteed for these incomparable buildings?

Having said that, I have no wish to imply that the university of Greenwich—which is, according to *The Sunday Telegraph*, the only British short-listed bidder—would not be an appropriate organisation to occupy at least a part of the site. I believe that the university has a valid claim that should be seriously considered. I also believe that the national maritime museum, which occupies an equally fine site across the road from the college, has advanced a strong case for taking over responsibility for running the painted hall and the chapel—the two elements of the complex most likely to attract the largest number of visitors, assuming the site is to be made properly available to the public.

The two options—the university of Greenwich and the national maritime museum—should certainly be the subject of serious consideration. But I find it difficult to believe that, for a complex of buildings of such importance, there are not other possibilities. We are talking about one of the country's most important heritage sites. Can one imagine any other country considering the future uses of such a magnificent group of buildings, but limiting the options simply to those who have replied to an estate agent's advertisement? It is inconceivable that any other country would act in that way, and the sooner the British Government recognise their mistake and start trying to find an appropriate way forward, the better.

The Select Committee examining the Armed Forces Bill will shortly take evidence at Greenwich about the future of the site. I have no doubt that the members of the Committee will receive a great deal of valuable evidence and advice in the course of that day on the appropriate uses for the buildings currently occupied by the Royal Naval college. There is considerable interest already in Greenwich at the prospect of the visit by the Select Committee, and many people are eager to attend—some to give evidence, others to hear the deliberations of the Committee. That is entirely appropriate and right, and I very much welcome the decision of the Committee to take evidence in Greenwich on the matter.

The discussions relate to the changes proposed in clause 26 of the Armed Forces Bill to the Greenwich Hospital Act 1869, which concerns the uses to which the site can be put. I am sure that members of the Committee will want to consider appropriate amendments to clause 26 in order to circumscribe the wide-ranging powers that the Secretary of State proposes to give himself. As it is currently drafted, clause 26 empowers the Secretary of State to hand over these magnificent buildings on a lease of up to 150 years on whatever terms he determines to whomever he considers appropriate. These are extraordinarily wide-ranging powers for buildings of such importance.

It is not acceptable to allow the future of Greenwich to be decided on the say-so of the Secretary of State, whose zeal for privatisation, I am afraid, has become all too well known. He might allow that particular prejudice to stand in the way of the national interest in ensuring an appropriate public use for these incomparable buildings. After the depressing, but salutary, example of county hall—just five miles to the west along the River Thames—we really cannot allow the possibility of Greenwich suffering a similar fate.

I made it clear on Second Reading of the Armed Forces Bill that I believe it to be incumbent on us to ensure that the legislation guarantees that only suitable and appropriate users can be considered. In this context, a continuing MOD use of the site should not be ruled out. We all know of the long and historic tradition linking Greenwich and the Royal Navy. Many people throughout Britain—not least those with naval connections—feel strongly that that link should be maintained.

There must be no question of an unseemly rush to dispose of those magnificent buildings. On the contrary, we should concentrate on ensuring an appropriate and continuing British use of the site—a use which, if at all possible, should maintain the historic link between Greenwich and the Royal Navy.

8.58 pm

**Mr. John Spellar** (Warley, West): The debate started with an unrecorded aside from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on the currently topical subject of beards. I am not sure whether that was the result of follicle jealousy, but it seemed singularly inappropriate in a debate on the Royal Navy. That apart, it has been a constructive, useful and wide-ranging debate. Especially welcome was the positive announcement on procurement policy by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, to which I shall return later. It was a little spoilt by his need to use a soundbite, but I partly understand that: it provided some covering fire for a sensible shift on procurement policy and will probably keep him out of trouble with the Whips Office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) and the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) discussed the wider strategic perspectives. We do not spend enough time examining that aspect, and perhaps we should give it broader consideration. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber raised the problem of overstretch, which we all acknowledge to be a service-wide problem—especially with the increasing commitments in Bosnia, including the need for rest and recreation. I know that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is alert to those problems.

My hon. Friends the Members for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) and for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) spoke powerfully about the future of the dockyards in their areas and the strong local and community involvement in the rapidly changing circumstances there. As usual, they were effective advocates for their communities.

Several hon. Members were concerned about the order for the type 23 frigates, especially the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). The shipbuilding industry, as Ministers know, anxiously awaits the type 23 decision. That anxiety has been increased by the continuing delays in making the announcement. As the Minister knows, the decision was expected before Christmas. It is a matter of regret that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement was not able to make an announcement today. Given that this debate is a fairly movable feast, it is unfortunate that the decision was not brought forward or the debate postponed for a while until a Minister could make an announcement rather than saying that it would be made in a few weeks. We hope that that will not become a trade mark of Ministers' statements in such debates.

It is vital that an announcement should be made in the immediate future so that the yards and their suppliers and employees know what is going on. Hon. Members have referred to the dangers of protective notices and imminent redundancies as the work load starts to ease off and a gap appears in the work programme. I am sure that the Minister accepts that and I hope that we can have strong assurances of an early announcement.

Such an announcement is especially important because there is concern about how many type 23 vessels will be ordered. It is said that it will be up to three, but there is uncertainty as to whether it will be one, two or three.

**Mr. Peter Griffiths** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Spellar:** I see that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North, who raised that in his speech, agrees. It concerns Hampshire and Glasgow Members and has considerable implications for British industry.

Concern has also been expressed at the delay in ordering the replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. I hope that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will be more forthcoming in his reply. We cannot adopt a policy of wait and see.

My hon. Friends the Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) and for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) raised the question of Trident with firm personal conviction. Mention of Trident has a Pavlovian effect on Ministers and there was considerable noise in support. Their problems on defence policy make them look for fabricated differencés in the Opposition. For years, it has been clear that Government supporters took far more notice of Labour party conference decisions than did the Labour leadership. Now they do not even have that crumb of comfort, they grab gleefully at any Back Bencher's expression of difference with Front-Bench policy.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Does the hon. Gentleman recall that in 1983 and 1987 the Labour party went into general elections with leaders pledged to nuclear disarmament?

**Mr. Spellar:** That is exactly my point. Now, without even that crumb of comfort, the Government try to draw mock differences between Back-Bench and Front-Bench Labour Members. It is good knockabout stuff, but it is not a serious way to develop a national defence policy. I understand why the Minister grabs at that comfort: he is under huge attack from his Back Benches over the Government's policy on defence. The people who have taken Labour party policy on defence cuts most seriously are the Government. They implemented the cuts that the Labour leadership refused to accept.

On a practical matter, now that the French have ended their tests, have the Government considered two lessons? First, should they have been so tied to the position taken by the French in the first place? Secondly, as we move to a test ban, with modern super-computing providing the possibility of simulation, do we have the capacity in this country to undertake such work? If not, what provision are we making to achieve that?

I shall now turn to a most significant and welcome statement made by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement when he opened the debate. He reaffirmed the policy of the previous Minister, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), who gave evidence to the joint Select Committee on Defence and Trade and Industry last May and said that

"the Ministry of Defence needs to continue to give due consideration to the possible consequences of procurement decisions for the defence industrial base and I am happy to affirm this once again."

That issue is also outlined in the Labour party policy document, "Strategy for a Secure Future," which states:

"The defence industrial base, with its state-of-the-art manufacturing processes and its development of cutting-edge technologies, is a strategic part of Britain's overall industrial capability."

Unfortunately there seems to have been a bit of a drift in Government policy. On 9 January the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said of the white vehicles contract that

"the criteria for the selection of the winning bid is based on best value for money, which includes technical and commercial competence."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. *104*.]

On 11 January the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), said of the field ambulance order that

"contracts . . . will quite rightly be based primarily on value for money and operational considerations."—[*Official Report*, 11 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. *295*.]

Those are important and necessary considerations, but they do not provide a total picture. As the Minister rightly stressed in his opening remarks, we must also include the maintenance of the defence industrial base and the maintenance of defence technologies, which are important both for the industrial and economic future of this country and for our ability to supply and maintain our armed forces with their equipment.

Welcome as the words are, we also need deeds. There was the recent case of the Army field ambulances. The final decision was welcome, but we must question why such a campaign was necessary to persuade the Government that they should be buying a world-class, world-beating British product.

Another case will come up shortly involving the helicopter flying school. Privatisation of the initial training for all three services in basic helicopter flying is a dogmatic exercise. It seems odd that, as we have just discussed, we can run a tri-service staff college but not a tri-service training school in basic helicopter flying. I should have thought that it would be an ideal opportunity, especially as the staff and facilities would come from different services.

*[Mr. Spellar]*

The implications on the industrial side are also considerable. Indeed, they are worse. I have asked the Minister of State for Defence Procurement about the purchasing of helicopters for the operation. The spread of helicopter manufacture means that the helicopters will almost certainly come from abroad, given the bids that have come in. If it had been a Government contract, we would have been able to negotiate an offset arrangement; as the contract is private, the Ministry of Defence believes that that will not be possible, so more work will be lost to Britain.

When the Minister of State for the Armed Forces replies, he should tell bidders for the helicopter flying school that there should be some British content arising from the bids or there will not be a contract. We should start playing the game like other countries for once, and start by talking and acting tough, particularly with the Americans, who have had about $5 billion worth of orders from us in recent months. We should make it clear to them that we want to see offset or orders in return for our purchases.

With regard to Ministry of Defence properties, my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport, backed up by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), made a strong case about housing—a subject on which he has campaigned effectively for a long time, as the Minister knows.

In the Army debate a couple of weeks ago, we mentioned the role of Mr. David Hart in relation to MOD properties. That seemed to make the Secretary of State extremely excitable at the time. Mr. Hart, who has been the subject of recent television programmes and press comment, appears to be the shadowy figure who weaves through many stories, to the extent that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has described him as the Rasputin of the situation.

The sale of MOD housing is an extraordinary exercise. I hope that we are now at the bottom of the housing market, but no one, unless they were under intense financial pressure from banks, would sell property at such a time. If a private company undertook such actions, it would send out warning signals that would lead to the calling of a meeting of creditors at a moment's notice. Having sold at the bottom of the market, we shall then rent the properties back at private market rents. As a result of Government policy, those rents have increased far faster than general inflation while house prices have fallen, so we are selling at the bottom to rent back, with rent reviews every five years.

I seek the Minister's response to suggestions that have been made that although the money from the sale will go directly to the Treasury, the rent will come from the defence budgets, so that in effect there will be another long-term defence cut. We are told that the rents charged to tenants will not be affected, but how long will it be before the hard-eyed men in the Treasury notice that there is a difference between the rents charged to service men and the market rent that the MOD pays to the landlord and start trying to claw back the difference?

What about people who buy properties? The discounted sales scheme for service men is being undermined. Since that scheme started, about 5,000 service men and their families have benefited. We were told by the MOD that many of those sales are heavily oversubscribed. Nevertheless, as a result of the current exercise, the Government are considering scrapping that welcome scheme. It is yet another kick in the teeth for our troops. Interestingly enough, it flies in the face of a commitment in the Conservatives' 1992 general election manifesto —it seems that the Minister spends more time reading Labour manifestos than reading his own—to help people in the forces to save towards a home of their own. That was a fairly direct commitment, yet it is likely to be reneged on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devonport spoke about the number of vacancies which might be available for social housing. The Minister of State for Defence Procurement leapt in with alacrity to ask whether my hon. Friend would support the sale as a move towards that. He leapt in a little too readily, which gave me a feeling that the Government are so keen to sell off property for dogmatic reasons that they have not sought short-term, sensible improvements that would have benefited the MOD and the people who needed the housing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), in his opening speech for the Labour party, referred to the Government's slogan about waste into weapons. He rightly turned that around to point out that in many cases weapons have been turned into waste. That has been especially the case with Navy stores. Navy spares worth millions of pounds have been left to rust and deteriorate in the open air as the storage depot closure programme gets under way. Storage bases are being run down and the material is being transferred to the Portsmouth depot. Unfortunately, the base is unable to cope with the spate of submarine and ship spares flooding in, so the material is being diverted to Colerne, near Bath, which is being used as an overspill site. People who have been there say that there are piles of expensive, sophisticated equipment stretching for a quarter of a mile around the depot, and that they are 6 ft high in places. We understand that the storage facilities are below even minimum standards. Hangars are infested with fleas and pigeon dung. Gear worth millions has probably been damaged as a result. Surveys and inspections, including shot-blasting, will be needed to restore much of it. That is not an effective, efficient operation, but a dash towards dogma.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) mentioned the Royal Naval college in Greenwich. Both described the splendid site and I shall certainly not attempt to improve on their eloquence. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich also drew attention to many of the questions that surround the setting up of the tri-service college and its concentration on the site at Camberley, rather than on the splendid site at Greenwich. He posed some serious questions which require answers, especially from a Government who would sell off the Admiralty arch and other bits of our history.

It is right to respect, preserve and commemorate our history. On a slightly more positive note, therefore, may I suggest in passing that the Ministry of Defence starts to give preliminary consideration to how the country will commemorate the bi-centenary of the battle of Trafalgar and the death of Nelson? That could bring together the whole history of the Navy and this country as an island nation and a naval power.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the Merchant Marine and the problems that it faces. It is all very well to go to the Baltic Exchange when we have an international agreement for a multinational force and a United Nations mandate, but it might be rather different if we were more isolated and had less agreement about an operation. In a situation such as the Falklands war, for instance, we might find ourselves far less able to mount an operation following the rundown of the Merchant Marine.

In summary, today's debate has been positive throughout, albeit somewhat marred by the Government's failure to announce a number of decisions. That failure should not detract from the positive side of the Minister's opening statement. Hon. Members who take an interest in defence will be pleased to build on those positive aspects, which will be welcomed by the defence industry and its employees. We look forward to positive implementation for the good of Britain's defence industry base and our armed forces, not least the Royal Navy.

9.16 pm

**The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames):** This has been an interesting and important debate, as is generally the case when the House discusses the armed forces, but I regret that both sides of the House should be so poorly attended when we debate such an important matter.

**Mr. Jamieson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Soames:** No, I will not.

I intend to concentrate on the Royal Navy for the greater part of my speech and on the general issues that have been raised tonight. I hope that hon. Members will allow me the indulgence of leaving any specific points on procurement or the other responsibilities of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to be dealt with separately by letter.

I am naturally grateful for the opportunity that our annual debate affords me to pay a genuine and whole-hearted tribute to the sensational professionalism, expertise, enthusiasm and dynamism of the Royal Navy. I know, as I hope most hon. Members know, that the senior service is held in the greatest esteem and affection at home. I also know, and it is made very clear to me on my travels overseas, that the Royal Navy's exceptional qualities and skills are truly admired, and in many cases envied, afound the world.

We are very proud that the Royal Navy remains the envy of our allies and never fails to impress with its skill, tradition and spirit wherever it goes and whatever it does. I for one am immensely proud to work with what I consider to be the best navy in the world. I salute all the men and women who serve in it with such distinction and I want especially to mark out their families and loved ones who support them heroically and with understanding, true patience and constant fortitude. I congratulate the Navy on the wholly admirable way that it sets about looking after its service families.

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement observed in his excellent opening speech, the past 12 months have, once again, been an extraordinarily busy time for the Royal Navy. Once more, the Queen's ships have been deployed to all corners of the world. As we meet here tonight, the white ensign is flying on Her Majesty's ships, which are carrying out important duties in pursuit of British interests from the West Indies to Hong Kong and from the north of Scotland to the Antarctic. Sailors and Royal Marines are performing arduous tasks, often in demanding conditions, all over the world.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement commented on the importance of the Royal Navy's exceptional contribution to our presence in the former Yugoslavia, and on all the work done thus far to bring matters to their present rather satisfactory —I hope—state of affairs. I am sure that the House will join me in sending our very best wishes to all our ships and their companies currently deployed in the Adriatic and surrounding waters—HMS Illustrious, HMS London, RFA Fort Grange and RFA Olwen, which form the carrier task group and which have done such sterling work. I want to refer also to HMS Brazen and HMS Beaver in the two NATO standing forces.

Nor should we forget the Royal Fleet Auxiliary resource in Split, or the fleet air arm and other units ashore, which are supporting the NATO implementation force in which the UK is playing a truly heroic role. I want to pay particular tribute to 845 naval air squadron, which completed three years of non-stop operations at Split on 11 November last year. B flight of that squadron has supplied four Sea Kings and crews in back-to-back operations. It has made a formidable contribution, and I send the squadron my warmest best wishes and profound congratulations.

The Royal Navy has made, and is still making, a distinguished contribution in the former Yugoslavia. All who have taken part in these crucial operations can look back on their efforts with satisfaction. I am conscious that the work of the Royal Navy in this theatre has not grabbed the headlines in quite the same way as our tremendous land contribution. Its importance, however, cannot be overstated. It has been a significant factor in helping to open the way to a lasting settlement. Indeed, our effort in the former Yugoslavia is a tri-service operation, which is an increasingly common feature of modern military operations that is reflected in our decision to create the new permanent joint headquarters, with all that that will mean for the increased efficiency and conduct of future operations.

I should like also to pay tribute to the Armilla patrol, which has recently entered its 16th year of continuous operations in the Gulf. Throughout, the Armilla patrol—currently maintained by HMS Brilliant and HMS Chatham, supported by RFA Brambleleaf—has provided great reassurance to our good friends and shipping in the area. I recently visited our good friends the Bahrainis and had the chance to visit HMS Chatham and to entertain the Bahrainis on board. She is a remarkable ship with a superb crew, and I am pleased to report that she has had a successful deployment. Her presence in some of the Gulf state ports was a tremendous attraction over Christmas and a tremendous promotion of British interests. I particularly thank Captain Paul Boissier and his splendid crew for all that they have done in the past few months.

I should like also to praise the work of the West Indies guard ship—currently HMS Brave, assisted by her accompanying RFA tanker Oakleaf. The WIGS has provided invaluable assistance to our dependent territories

*[Mr. Soames]*

in the Caribbean and represents clear evidence of the Government's absolute determination to support our interests around the world.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement spoke of the humanitarian assistance given by the WIGS in response to various acts of God last year. I should like to commend her marvellous work in humanitarian assistance of another sort—countering the drugs menace. In recent months, HMS Brave has had two notable successes in this regard. As hon. Members may be aware, in December, she intercepted a suspect boat off Jamaica, which was found to be carrying a cargo of drugs with an estimated street value of £20 million. Again, last month, she intercepted a vessel acting suspiciously, causing its crew to jettison their cargo which, on recovery, turned out to be 40 bales of cocaine with an estimated street value of more than £90 million. It is believed to be the largest ever single drugs haul on the high seas. Such successes, and the deterrent that the presence of the WIGS provides, play an important part—with our allies in the region—in the international fight to keep drugs off the streets.

Elsewhere, the Royal Navy goes about its duties with the quiet—and sometimes not so quiet—professionalism that we have come to expect from all of our armed forces. In the south Atlantic, HMS Westminster is about to be relieved by HMS Northumberland as a deterrent naval presence, together with HMS Leeds Castle and RFA Gold Rover. At the same time, HMS Endurance is conducting her 1995-96 Antarctic season patrol.

And somewhere far out in the deep waters of the oceans one of our strategic missile submarines is providing the ultimate, independent guarantee of our security. Five of our nuclear hunter-killer submarines are also at sea on various tasks.

Closer to home, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement spoke of the new challenges the fishery protection squadron is meeting so admirably in the Irish box. My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) also mentioned that squadron. I was very pleased to have the opportunity to see it at work last year and I was most impressed not only by its equipment and the enthusiasm of its commanders and sailors, but by the excellent rapport that the Royal Navy still enjoys with our fishermen—despite what the tabloid press may say. In spite of some of the more extreme words uttered by some fishermen, the Royal Navy and the fishing community are very good friends and get on very well.

Several ships and royal fleet auxiliaries are today participating in a major NATO anti-submarine exercise off the south-west approaches in conjunction with allied forces and with RAF Nimrods. That is another fine example of the successful co-operation across service and national boundaries at which the Royal Navy excels. Around the coast of Britain, other ships are engaged in training or trials. They include ships undergoing operational sea training off Plymouth, which today will be engaged in the regular Thursday war.

Only a week ago, I had the opportunity to stand on the bridge of HMS Montrose and see at first hand one of those Thursday wars being fought. One cannot fail to be tremendously impressed by the exceptional skills and enthusiasm with which our young men and women respond to the very demanding challenges of that intense training, which exercises a wide range of capabilities in the most realistic and formidable setting. It is absolutely essential preparation for real operational deployments around the world and a mark of the Navy's continued commitment to maintaining extremely high standards of readiness and competence.

I do not want to forget the immense contribution that the Royal Marines make to the interests of this country. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement was right to pay tribute to them earlier. At this moment, much of 3 Commando Brigade is engaged in its annual winter training deployment to Norway, which is important to the Royal Marines specialist cold weather warfare capability; and 40 Commando, Royal Marines has recently deployed to Northern Ireland for a six-month tour as the East Tyrone Battalion, following the deployment of 4/5 Commando to Fermanagh last year.

While the developing peace process and its very welcome ceasefire has reduced the immediate threat, the Royal Marines continue to assist the Army in providing support to the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the Province. The Royal Marines will form an important and core part of the joint rapid deployment force announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last year. That force, which will be held at an extremely high state of readiness, will be a major enhancement to our ability to project power quickly in support of British interests overseas—a role for which the Royal Marines are wholly and admirably suited.

I shall now try to deal with some of the more general points that have been raised in the debate. In an interesting speech, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) made a number of points which centred around an incessant and rather meaningless mantra: the call for a defence review. I do not think that we need to bore the House any more tonight with that.

There is not a shadow of a doubt that all three services have been through a very difficult period. They have been through a period of considerable turbulence after the changes that have resulted from the end of the cold war, "Options for Change" and the defence cost studies. The changes were not about cutting defence, but about cutting our costs.

I must have misheard the hon. Member for Torfaen. I thought he said that he believed that the Royal Military school of music would be moving into temporary quarters. That is not correct. It will move to its new, permanent, quarters at Portsmouth by mid-April, which is on time. There is no question of the school going into temporary quarters. The move will save £3 million a year in infrastructure costs, which is not insignificant.

In relation to the Upholders, we await the decision of the Canadian Government. Meanwhile, we continue to discuss the affair with other friendly Governments who have shown an interest. The hon. Member for Torfaen also mentioned the Reserve Forces Bill, which will come to the House soon. I know that it will command all-party support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), who is a tremendous and doughty supporter of the Royal Navy, made an admirable speech in which he made much of the question of Wrens at sea.

I wholly endorse and support all that he said about them. There were quite plainly some initial difficulties when the policy was introduced, but it is working well—even if rather unevenly every now and then for reasons of which my hon. Friend will be more aware than most.

There are about 700 female officers and ratings in 25 Royal Navy ships. I noted my hon. Friend's point about the need for women to be promoted through the ranks. As time passes, as the rank structure evolves and as their shipboard skills evolve, I am sure that the ladies will roar through. I entirely share the sentiments that he expressed about the splendid contribution made by our people in the Royal Navy. I am grateful, and I know that they will be grateful, for what he said about them.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) must surely be the Navy's pin-up. Indeed, she must be all the services' pin-up because of the marvellous support that she gives all three services. I was trying to think of how we can best mark that. We should have the hon. Lady sculpted in wood and put on the bow of one of our more splendid and formidable battleships. She made an admirable speech in which she dealt with the matters that are always close to her heart.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement told me that he always greatly admired the way in which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West dealt with her constituency interests. Her constituency has no doubt been through a very difficult time, and I know that my hon. Friend will deal with the points that she made when he speaks to her or writes to her.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West made a reference to morale in the Navy. That is always a matter of concern. High morale is very important, particularly in a service that is undoubtedly operating at a very high strike rate. Our people are extremely busy, they are away a great deal of the time and they are doing a formidable job. From my extensive contact and business with the Royal Navy, my impression is that morale is very high, but plainly it is not something that one would ever take for granted. One of the reasons why morale is very high in the Royal Navy is that it has a high standard of leadership and commitment—qualities which play an important part in maintaining high morale. However, I note what the hon. Lady said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) made what I can only describe as a splendid speech which has done much good for everyone who heard it, as it will for everyone who hears it on Radio 4 tomorrow morning. I hope that Radio 4 broadcasts the whole speech. It was marvellous. Anyone who listens to it tomorrow will know that if Members of Parliament were on performance pay, my hon. Friend would deserve a substantial pay rise just for making us feel much better about ourselves. I warmly endorse the views that he expressed. If I may say so, his comments come very well from a person in whose veins flows the wine of the Navy.

The Navy is at the core of my hon. Friend's life. His father was a distinguished and gallant sailor and my hon. Friend is a graduate of the Royal Naval college at Dartmouth. As he said, he joined the Navy twice before he was 20—and not many people have done that. He spoke with real feeling and understanding about the Navy and it was a pleasure to listen to him.

I agree with what my hon. Friend said about the importance of the Warship Preservation Trust and the work of our former esteemed and revered colleague, Sir Philip Goodhart. Like my hon. Friend, I am constantly bombarded with the most admirable and succinct memos from Sir Philip on various matters concerning warship preservation. Although we can give only limited help, there is no doubt that it is an important subject. My father-in-law, Sir John Smith, was the architect of the saving of HMS Warrior—a remarkable preservation project—which is berthed beside HMS Victory, creating a fantastic centre of the history of the Royal Navy and our maritime history.

As my hon. Friends the Members for South Staffordshire and for Twickenham and the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) said, British naval history is one of the most glorious and triumphant records of our past and it is incumbent on us to do all that we can to ensure that it is properly remembered.

Several hon. Members mentioned the royal yacht. We have received a number of proposals on the future of HMY Britannia following her decommissioning, and I can truthfully say that no decision has yet been taken. The Government are actively considering whether to replace HMY Britannia and an announcement will be made in due course. I take particular note of the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin), who has had to leave the Chamber. My hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham and for South Staffordshire were among those who mentioned HMY Britannia. I am sorry not to be more forthcoming, but I am not yet in a position to do so. These are not weasel words; they are completely truthful.

**Mr. Jamieson:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As the Minister is moving away from replying to the debate, may I ask you whether it is the habit and practice of the House that hon. Members who participate in debates are present at the start of the debate to hear the speeches of the Minister and the Opposition spokesman and attend the winding-up speeches? Are you aware that the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) was not here for the opening speeches, came in a few minutes before his own speech and left a few minutes afterwards? He has now done the Minister the gross discourtesy of not being here for his winding-up speech.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** It is not for the occupant of the Chair to order anyone to be here at any time. It is, as the hon. Gentleman observes, a courtesy to be present, but there may be good reasons why a particular Member is not present and I certainly would not wish to adjudicate on that.

**Mr. Soames:** I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. That was a typically spiteful and pointless remark by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). Those hon. Members who are not here now said in their speeches that they would be unable to stay. They all did me the courtesy of giving me a note to say they would not be here.

Greenwich was mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham and for South Staffordshire and the hon. Member for Greenwich. Quite plainly, we all agree on the remarkable importance of the buildings. The hon. Member for Greenwich and I have discussed the matter on many occasions. My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire, who has played an enormously distinguished role in heritage, will know that no words of

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mine or anyone else can do justice to what is truly the most remarkable collection of buildings in Britain. There is a consensus on that and on what needs to be done.

I am aware of the many points that have been made from the Opposition Front Bench on these matters. I know that some parts of my letter have been queried. I have noted all those queries and they will be taken up in detail in a letter, copies of which will be sent to members of the Opposition Front-Bench team. I would welcome discussions on it with hon. Members, along with my officials.

I hope that all those who have spoken in the debate will take comfort from the formation of the Greenwich advisory group, chaired by Dame Jennifer Jenkins. It consists of Lord Farringdon, Dame Jennifer Jenkins, Lord Sainsbury and Jocelyn Stevens, who have been good enough to give of their time to advise the Government on the expressions of interest received and on the future use and management of the college. The group is considering the way forward. It is paying special attention to the extent to which the proposals are sympathetic to the status of the buildings and to their wide enjoyment by the public. It will take account, I am sure, of all the many points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House, including the absolutely fundamental and unshakeable requirement that the use of the buildings should be seemly, fitting, suitable, dignified and entirely in keeping with their history and traditions.

**Dr. David Clark** (South Shields): Will the advisory group have any direct or indirect input through the Minister to the Select Committee that is considering the Armed Forces Bill, especially clause 26? If there were such a means of passing the group's views to the Committee, that might be a helpful way forward.

**Mr. Soames:** The advisory group is advising the Government on all matters to do with the future lease of the Greenwich college. As the hon. Gentleman knows—he is a most distinguished and helpful member of the Committee—clause 26 will be considered when we are received, I am sure with due pomp and circumstance, by the hon. Member for Greenwich, who will be standing wearing a top hat waiting for the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on the steps of Greenwich pier. I am sure that all members of the Committee look forward to visiting Greenwich. I hope that the advisory group will have something helpful and useful to put before us.

**Mr. Raynsford:** I do not have a top hat.

**Mr. Soames:** I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman is issued with one through central stores.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston)—the hon. Member for Devonport forgot to mention him—was good enough to tell me that he would not be able to stay in the Chamber until the end of the debate; he had to catch a train back to his constituency. It was a delight to welcome to our debate a former officer in the intelligence corps. He lent tone to what was otherwise a vulgar brawl on the Opposition Benches. He welcomed the formation of the naval support command and then took a typical Liberal Democrat position by criticising its implementation.

I say to the hon. Gentleman in his absence, and to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), who similarly is not in his place—he has represented with courage and consistency the interests of his constituents—that Ministers and the Navy are entirely confident that we have made the right decision on the naval support command. We look forward to prompt implementation. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber for his supportive words on the Navy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South spoke principally about Britannia, an issue with which I hope I have dealt. The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) made a formidable speech. He is always well informed. His speech was connected with procurement matters, which I know my hon. Friend the Minister of State will have heard and that he will deal with.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant)—

**Mr. Jamieson:** Where is he?

**Mr. Soames:** He is the one with the hair, or the other one with the hair. My hon. Friend has gone for an appointment with his hair consultant. He was good enough to tell me before he left that some minor technical adjustment was required to that technological wonder which sits astride his splendid brow.

My hon. Friend made an extremely effective and efficient speech, which was dignified by its intelligence and by its brevity.

The hon. Member for Devonport raised a number of questions, which I propose to gloss over.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) made, as usual, an extremely well-informed and powerful speech, and raised a number of important issues concerning his constituency. I shall ensure that they are reported to my hon. Friend the Minister and dealt with.

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) did not tell me that he would not be here for the wind-up, and therefore I am somewhat constrained in what I may say about him and to him—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because he is such a dear man—he is also completely barking and represents, as we all know, the true voice of the Labour party on defence. He is living evidence of the fact that one simply cannot trust the Labour party on defence—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) can wave his hands around like an out-of-work conjuror, but the great silent majority in this country, as he will come to discover, know that one cannot trust the Labour party on defence.

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent is the genuine and authentic voice of the Labour party on defence. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire said, the hon. Gentleman is a worthy and true inheritor of his distinguished predecessor in the House. He made a speech that was utterly sincere, absolutely straightforward and very brave given the unbelievable volte face that his own party has made, almost en masse, although one knows perfectly well that it does not believe a bloody word of it. The fact of the matter is that if the Labour party—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces is on very good form tonight, but he has just gone a shade too far.

**Mr. Soames:** I am extremely sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. I fancied myself enjoying a cocktail with you in a wardroom and went a touch too far. I apologise.

It remains the truth that, had Labour won any of the past four elections, we simply would not have had Trident. Labour would have had it scrapped. We would have been without our minimum independent nuclear deterrent which is the ultimate guarantee of our national security and makes a significant contribution to NATO's strategy of war prevention. The Labour party should hoist that fact aboard.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) also speaks with absolute sincerity and real passion about this matter and really minds about it. Nuclear weapons remain an important, integral and essential part of our defence, despite the end of the cold war.

I see the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) on the Labour Benches. He is another hon. Gentleman with a beard and wears a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament badge. One does not see them any more. They have all gone, because there is no room for a rose and a CND badge.

If, in years to come, the Trident system were found not to be suitable for the task that it had to perform, and there still remained, in the judgment of Her Majesty's Government, a threat of nuclear war, I am sure that, in answer to the point that was raised, we would go ahead with the procurement of another system to ensure that we retained our own minimum independent nuclear deterrent.

**Mr. Cohen:** Would the Minister be prepared to order a replacement for Trident, at huge cost, which I outlined in my speech, if it meant that the conventional Navy would be run down as a result, which could happen?

**Mr. Soames:** The hon. Gentleman can conjure any form of fantasy out of what he speculates, but the whole Trident programme costs 2.5 per cent. of the defence budget over the procurement period. It is probably the greatest technological achievement of all time in terms of what it has done, and its cost and value for money are quite outstanding. If we needed to procure another system in years to come, I have no doubt that we would examine that closely, and if the threat were great enough, I am quite sure that any Conservative Government would ensure that our people were properly defended. All the beards and the CND badge wearers can shake their heads until they are blue—or red—in the face, but we know that Labour cannot be trusted on defence.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire made an altogether entirely welcome, but unexpected, speech. He came in with the honourable intention of supporting the hon. Member for Greenwich, who shares his concerns about Greenwich. As always, my hon. Friend gave us an eloquent and invaluable lesson in history, which I watched the few Labour Members who were present absorbing with interest, as none of them had ever heard it before.

I am satisfied that the fishery protection squadron is extremely well equipped and does a superb job; I am also satisfied that the Royal Naval Reserve has implemented a sensible, achievable, realistic and necessary recruiting drive to increase its current strength. My hon. Friend was right to say that it is an extremely important part of the Royal Navy. Part of its excellence lies in the fact that much of its training is now individually planned; moreover, much of it takes place at sea, involving service on operational naval ships. That gives trainees much more experience, and increases their skills in the use of equipment.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) on joining the armed forces scheme. I am sure that he will enjoy it, and that the Navy has enjoyed showing him some of its equipment. He made a thoughtful and interesting speech. It is difficult to argue with someone who has visited various ships and has heard opinions expressed on those ships, but in my view people in the Navy almost never whinge. They are almost unique in that regard. Of course, they express themselves forcefully when they find the need to do so.

It is true that our ships are tautly manned. There is a disparity in the numbers; numbers have been forced down, and the ships are very busy. But, as the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, much of the technology and equipment on them allow leaner manning. There is no great merit in employing more people than are needed. Nevertheless, I think that the Navy has now reached a point at which it cannot cut manning any further.

I was grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said about homosexuality in the armed forces. As the House will know, Ministers commissioned a paper on the subject, which we shall submit to the Select Committee considering the Armed Forces Bill. We have not yet seen that paper, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that it remains our policy to exclude homosexuals from the armed forces—not in connection with a moral judgment, but purely because of the special nature of service life, which, as the hon. Gentleman now knows very well, is completely different from civilian life.

As a Minister, I am constrained by what I may or may not say, and it is impossible for me to agree in public with what the hon. Gentleman said about the European Court. *[Interruption.]* I mean that in a very caring way.

The hon. Member for Leyton—whom we all love, and without whom any debate involving the nuclear deterrent would risk being called a dismal failure—made his usual splendid speech, full of marvellous charges and figures none of which remotely stands the test of time. He speaks with passion and clarity, and I accept that his argument is at the core of Labour party thinking. He represents a substantial majority of party members, and it was important for us to hear the true voice of the Labour party tonight rather than the sham circus on the Opposition Front Bench.

The hon. Member for Greenwich has just left. I hope that he heard the speech of the hon. Member for Devonport, or he will get a frightful rocket. [HON. MEMBERS: "He has also left."] So he has. I hope that the hon. Member for Devonport asked you if he could leave, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was going to say something about his speech, but, as he has gone, there is not much point in my doing so. I was saving it for the end as a bit of a surprise.

The hon. Member for Greenwich made an extremely well-informed speech, as he always does. He feels very strongly about the matter; he also feels that the Ministry of Defence has not handled it in a way that would serve the best interests of his constituency. There is still a good deal of discussion between us, and my colleagues and I will listen carefully to, and deal seriously with, the points that he has made.

As usual, the hon. Member for Warley, West made an extremely competent winding-up speech, with which we found ourselves in total disagreement, and he failed at any

*[Mr. Soames]*

stage to deal with the essential interests of the Royal Navy, or, as far I could see, to talk about the role, deployment or anything else of the Navy.

With regard to French nuclear tests, the French have responsibilities as a nuclear power for ensuring the safety and reliability of their weapons. President Chirac has decided on the scientific advice available to him that the series of tests was utterly essential before France could sign a comprehensive test ban treaty. We support the French in their action. The important thing is to achieve international agreement on an end to all nuclear tests. France has made clear its commitment to a comprehensive test ban treaty, and we hope that a treaty will be signed in the first half of 1996.

All that I have said tonight provides little more than a snapshot of royal naval activities, but it gives a very clear insight into the range of tasks that face the Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel. I am only too well aware of the demands that the present level of commitments places on all those in the Royal Navy at all levels, and especially their families. However, I believe that the families understand the importance of the work—indeed, I know that they understand it.

Whether it is a life-saving search-and-rescue mission off the south coast in filthy weather, helping to restore essential services in hurricane-struck Anguilla, providing reassurance to remote dependencies in the south Atlantic, or the fisheries squadron looking after our fishermen, there are few other walks of life that can offer the challenges, opportunities, excitement and, above all, profound personal satisfaction of doing one's duty that the Royal Navy provides day in and day out.

Whenever I visit the Royal Navy, I am always truly struck by the wonderful spirit and—almost always—first-class morale of the people whom I meet, even at a time when the level of our peacetime commitments and obligations is higher than ever before. That is testimony to the training and character of those who serve in the Navy at all levels, and above all—let no one forget it—to the qualities of those who lead them. Without those people, all the high-tech equipment in the world would be completely useless.

The Government fully recognise the value of the naval personnel who serve us all so splendidly, and we maintain our whole-hearted commitment to balanced forces who are well equipped, well trained and well motivated. We need to appreciate that the changes in the strategic setting since the end of the cold war have, of course, caused turbulence and difficulties—we have never attempted to say otherwise—but that is now largely behind us, and I hope that we are now steaming into calmer water again.

I take enormous comfort from the amazing flexibility that has been shown by all the services during the period of change. We cannot and do not take that for granted, for it is that same flexibility and resourcefulness that equip the Royal Navy so splendidly for the myriad of tasks that it carries out.

I also warmly congratulate all those thousands of civilians who support the Royal Navy so loyally and tremendously, be they in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, the naval bases, the depots, the Ministry of Defence or elsewhere. They are often overlooked and they should not be. They play a vital part in the conduct of naval business and I greatly praise their role.

There has been much ill-informed speculation and comment recently about the Royal Navy's ability today to fight the battles of the past. The Labour party can carp on that theme as much as it wants, but in doing so it reveals its complete misunderstanding of modern warfare. We have gone to great lengths to ensure that we do not need to fight past battles again by ensuring that the lessons of recent conflicts are enshrined in our training, doctrine and equipment.

We well appreciate the importance in this ever-changing uncertain world of being able to project power and exert influence over great distances. If anything, that is more important than it was during the height of the cold war, as the range and spread of the potential operations that we face are that much more diverse.

The United Kingdom continues to play a major part in world affairs, out of all proportion to its size. That we carry such influence is due in no small way to the real respect in which our armed forces are held. The Royal Navy has made a fantastic contribution to that—past and present.

Today, of 26 available destroyers or frigates—the workhorses of the fleet—21 are deployed on, preparing for or recovering from operational tasks, and the remainder are engaged in high-priority trials or training. That shows how very hard our senior service is working, and speaks volumes for the qualities of all those who serve in it. We place the greatest importance on all the Royal Navy's capabilities, and maintaining a strong and effective Navy, lean in the tail but with razor-sharp teeth.

I am sure that it greatly reassures the House to know that the Royal Navy is protecting our vital interests—a Navy that meets the challenges that it faces head on, and overcomes them with skill, hard work and good humour, for which it is renowned the world over. We are indeed truly fortunate to have such a fantastic and marvellous Navy.

**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin** (West Derbyshire): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion, by leave, withdrawn.*

## Downham Fire Station

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

9.59 pm

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice** (Lewisham, East): Before I begin—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. Before the hon. Lady continues, I ask those who are leaving to do so quietly, out of courtesy to her.

**Mrs. Prentice:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I hesitated—

*It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

**Mrs. Prentice:** I should like to begin a debate on the fire service by paying tribute to the two firefighters, Kevin Lane and Steve Griffin, who lost their lives today in a tragic incident in Gwent. I am sure that the House would wish to send our condolences to their families and to the family of young Daniel Hartford, whom they tried so courageously to save.

I want to raise the question of the future of Downham fire station, in my constituency, and also to mention the possible closure of three other fire stations in London and the withdrawal of 22 further appliances. I believe that all that will have a serious effect on the quality of service that the London fire brigade can offer Londoners.

I am distressed that I should have to raise the issue at all in the House, because, when I was the Labour candidate for Lewisham, East in 1991, Downham fire station was threatened with closure. We fought alongside the local community group to keep it open—and we won. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) visited the station with me, as he was then the shadow Home Secretary.

I shall mention again one of the issues that we raised then—the definition of risk categories. That will not be the main thrust of my argument, which will be about keeping the fire station open and raising the standard spending assessments for the fire service in general, but I hope to show that, if those categories were redefined, it would support that main argument.

Downham fire station is in Reigate road, in the centre of the Downham estate, a large inter-war housing estate. Many of the people who live there have done so since the estate was built, and it has the largest percentage of pensioner population in Lewisham borough. More than 30 per cent. of the borough's pensioner-only households live in Downham. In fact, one in four of Downham's residents is a pensioner, compared with 21 per cent. in the borough as a whole and a similar percentage in London as a whole, and compared with fewer than one in five in the country as a whole. Downham is also the area in the borough with the highest percentage of people with long-term illnesses.

There are seven primary schools in the immediate area, as well as two secondary schools and two schools for children with special educational needs. I am aware that the fire authority takes the needs of schools into account, but Downham is in risk category C. That means that only one fire engine is required to arrive within eight to 10 minutes. Had it been in category A, it could have expected two fire engines to arrive within five minutes and another within eight minutes.

Those are the Home Office minimum attendance standards. Fortunately, the London fire service tries to send two engines to category C incidents. In other words, it tries to provide cover above the Home Office minimum standards. Surely we do not want to reduce the standard of service provided to Londoners.

**Mr. John Austin-Walker** (Woolwich): Is my hon. Friend aware of the research that has been carried out by Greater Manchester fire authority, which argues for a total review of risk categorisation for the very reason she gives—that category C areas like Downham are where the greatest number of deaths occur? Does she agree that attendance times based on those risk categories determine the allocation of resources? Is it not crazy that we seem to have a system that gives more priority to the protection of property than it does to the lives of Londoners?

**Mrs. Prentice:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is absolutely right. The Greater Manchester survey is very important, and I want to come back to what the Audit Commission said later.

It is quite wrong that the categories are weighted in favour of protecting property rather than lives, and I have never accepted the sense of that. It is particularly unfair given that modern buildings now incorporate sophisticated fire prevention detection features, while estates such as Downham and others in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) clearly do not. I have said, and I still hold to it, that something is not quite right when Members of Parliament here in the Palace of Westminster are in a higher-risk category than my elderly constituents in Downham.

I hope that the Minister will be aware that the Audit Commission document "In Line of Fire" has recommended that there should be a fundamental review of the levels of fire cover which would take into account the extent to which circumstances have changed and are changing. That is now a matter of some urgency.

Another point that my hon. Friend might have made is that the services that the fire service now provides are very different. It is not just about putting out fires: firemen are called to all sorts of emergencies and disasters. None of that is properly taken into account when the categories are assessed.

That is a matter of great concern, because all the evidence—as my hon. Friend has mentioned—is that it is in category C risk areas, such as the whole of Downham, where people are most at risk from injury or death from fire. Those people, and people who suffer socio-economic deprivation, are most at risk. It would seem logical that the risk categories should be weighted in their favour. I believe that it has now become a matter of the greatest urgency that they are protected, and protected well.

I should say, in fairness, that the London fire service has done its level best to do just that—it provides cover above the minimum standards set by the Home Office. But if the present funding arrangements are not changed,

*[Mrs. Prentice]*

it will cease to provide that level of service for Londoners. The leader of the fire authority in London, Councillor Tony Ritchie, said today that he believes the cuts are inevitable, but I do not want to believe that.

The closure of Downham fire station—along with those at Shooters Hill, Manchester Square and the Barbican—as well as the loss of pumps at 22 other stations, must inevitably mean a serious reduction in service. Downham fire station takes more than 1,000 calls a year, and those calls will have to be taken up by stations elsewhere. If that is compounded by the loss of engines around the capital, the system will not be able to cope. If the system cannot cope, people will die—it is as simple and as horrifying as that.

Councillor Ritchie also said that the effects would be disastrous, but I think that that may be an understatement. The people of Downham cannot understand why, having worked together as a community to save the fire station in 1991, they should now have their safety threatened again. They are especially angry that the station is threatened with closure when £852,317 has been spent on raising the station to a proper standard.

The chief fire officer, Brian Robinson, told me in a letter:

"as a result of the works that were carried out, the asbestos problems have been remedied, better working conditions and a modern, much larger appliance room have been provided and better security afforded from the provision of new appliance room doors."

When did that happen? It happened over the past three years. Where is the sense in making such a commitment to the people of Downham if it is to be destroyed three years later?

I close by paying tribute to the people of Downham and the surrounding area, who have banded together again to protest publicly about the threat to their fire station. They have been out in the streets of Lewisham and Bromley during this cold winter, and collected more than 2,000 signatures from local people in the hope of persuading the Government that the fire station is essential. The feelings of people across the capital are such that the Fire Brigades Union has a petition with some 30,000 signatures protesting at the possible closure of the four stations.

I was in Bromley tonight speaking to a public meeting about the closures. People there asked me to ask the Minister whether he would be prepared to come back to the House, should the closures go ahead, and tell us the number of people who will have died or been seriously injured because the fire service could not reach them in the times that it now sets itself. This evening, in Ballamore road in Downham, there was a fire involving an elderly resident who might have been seriously injured but for the quickness and alertness of the local fire station.

This is a cross-party issue. I have had a note from the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), who could not be here this evening, in which he said that he shares my concerns. Part of his constituency abuts Downham. However, the debate is not only about Downham but about the quality of the fire service across London. The previous chief fire officer, Mr. Clarkson, is on record as having said that he has already cut the service to the bone, and that there is no more room for cuts. He is, I believe, a Conservative nominee on the police committee in Kent, so we may presume that he is unlikely to be accused of unnecessary scaremongering.

I do not want to believe that the Government want a reduction in service, or that they think that the minimum standard is adequate for areas such as Downham, given the type of population that lives there. I want to believe that even this Government will see the sense in increasing the standard spending assessment so that my constituents in Downham, and those of other hon. Members, can continue to rely on a service of the highest quality that saves lives rather than putting them at risk. I therefore plead with the Minister to reconsider the SSA for the London fire service, and ensure that people's lives in Downham and across London are not put at risk.

10.12 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville):** I join the hon. Lady in expressing sadness at what happened to the two Gwent firefighters who died so courageously while attending a house fire. I am sure that the House will join me in paying tribute to them, and sending our condolences to their families.

I understand the concern that the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) and her constituents feel about the quality of the fire service and the plans to close four stations, including Downham, which affects her constituency. However, to reduce provision in a way that fire service professionals believe to be possible without reducing necessary fire cover should not always be taken as an opportunity to say that people will die as a result. That is clearly facile, and it is slightly unworthy of the hon. Lady to jump to that conclusion and attempt to frighten her constituents unnecessarily.

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** The Minister is being naive or unfair to the residents of Downham. They currently receive a service that is above the minimum standards set by the Home Office. If the cuts go through, there will be a reduction in that service, and it is almost inevitable that people will suffer serious injury or death. He must recognise that.

**Mr. Sackville:** A balance needs to be struck in the provision made to cover each area. As the hon. Lady well knows, the authority's report, which was drawn up by professionals, not by politicians, states that the proposed reductions could be made

"without affecting the Authority's ability to meet Home Office recommended attendance times."

That is the criterion that must be used, in all fairness, all over London. It is the same criterion that is used all over the country.

We in government understand the sensitivity of the question of the provision of fire services. I echo what the Audit Commission recently said—that the fire service can be proud of its record in responding to incidents, of its high level of skills, of its very able managers and the great esteem in which it is held around the country.

The hon. Lady referred to the funding of the fire service. There are three underlying issues: whether the total public expenditure provision for local government is sufficient; given that total, how we distribute it in terms of the standard spending assessments among local authorities; and the criteria for council tax capping. The Government concluded that, for 1996-97, the total fire service element of standard spending assessment in

England should be increased by £17 million—1.5 per cent.—from £1,168 million to £1,185 million. That is not as much as many of us would have liked, but in the Government's view the settlement is realistic in the context of low inflation and the requirement that pay increases in the public sector, which form a large part of the cost of fire services, should be met from increased efficiency.

The Audit Commission has found that significant savings are possible if best practice is adopted by all fire authorities. The fire service, like other public services, must operate as efficiently and effectively as possible, and it will continue to be supported in that respect by Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services. The Audit Commission also made a number of detailed recommendations in a management handbook that should help brigades to carry out their responsibilities in the most cost-effective manner.

The revenue support grant, which is allocated to individual fire authorities, is dependent not only on total provision, but on the distribution formula. Together with the Department of the Environment and the local authority associations, we looked carefully at the formula for the fire service element of standard spending assessments for next year. We decided that the formula should be adjusted to include factors for fire safety enforcement, fire safety education and firefighters' pensions. That is in line with recommendations by the Audit Commission.

As a result of the inclusion of those new elements and the updating of the data in the formula, the London fire and civil defence authority's standard spending assessment, including capital financing, will increase by £1.1 million. Under the proposed capping criteria, the authority will be able to set a budget for 1996-97 of up to £5.1 million more than in the current year.

Statutory responsibility for the provision of an effective and efficient fire service rests with the individual fire authorities. It is now for the London fire and civil defence authority—in the light of the settlement, the proposed criteria for council tax capping and its reserves—to decide how much to spend on the fire service for 1996-97 in order to comply with its duties under the Fire Services Act 1947 and with the nationally recommended minimum standards of cover.

If the authority should take the view that it is necessary to set a budget above the proposed capping limit in order to fulfil its statutory obligations, it is open to it to set a budget above that limit, and to make out a case for redetermination of the cap. Alternatively, it may decide to draw on its reserves, as it has done in the current year, or seek to identify further increases that may be made in efficiency without reducing fire cover below recommended standards.

I am aware that, as part of its three-year strategy, including the implementation of its fire cover review, the authority has already identified potential net savings of about £3.5 million in 1996-97, which may increase to between £6.5 million and £7.5 million per year by 1997-98.

As I said, statutory responsibility for the provision of fire services rests with the fire authority. The fire service has been a local authority service since the Fire Services Act 1947, which transferred firefighting functions from the wartime National Fire Service. However, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has various duties under the 1947 Act. He monitors performance through Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services. He is also responsible for promoting consistent standards in training, equipment, promotion, recruitment and so on.

Under section 19 of the 1947 Act, my right hon. and learned Friend is required to be notified of the fire authority's establishment—that is to say, the number of its fire stations, fire appliances and firefighting posts—as at 1 January each year. Of special relevance to the debate is the fact that the fire authority may not reduce its establishment, although it may increase it, without his consent.

My right hon. and learned Friend has a specific and limited role in considering applications under section 19 of the 1947 Act. He grants approvals when the following conditions are satisfied.

First, the proposals must have sufficiently wide and detailed publicity, with adequate time to enable any interested party to make representations. Secondly, the representations must have been considered by the fire authority. Thirdly, after taking advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services, my right hon. and learned Friend must be satisfied that the national recommended standards of fire cover will be maintained.

I emphasise that it is not the role of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to decide whether a fire authority's proposals represent the best arrangements for fire cover. Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services is available to advise the authority about that. Ultimately, however, responsibility for fire cover rests with the fire authority, which is accountable in law for the service that it provides.

**Mr. Nigel Spearing** (Newham, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Sackville:** I will not. If the hon. Member for Lewisham, East wishes to intervene again, I will give way.

Although there is no statutory right of consultation about section 19 applications, we have made it clear in guidance to fire authorities that we consider it desirable that they should undertake proper consultations. It has also been made clear that my right hon. and learned Friend will consider representations in addition to those already forwarded to the fire authority, provided that the person or organisation concerned forwards those representations promptly on being advised that a section 19 application is to be submitted.

The 1947 Act does not define the test of an effective and efficient fire service, which a fire authority must provide to meet normal requirements for fire cover, but it is long-standing practice to interpret that by reference to the nationally recommended minimum standards.

Those standards rest on four main standards of service, according to the risk category into which an area has been placed. The system of risk is based on the characteristics of the buildings and property in an area, and assumes for each category that a predetermined number of firefighting appliances should attend within a certain time. I should add that the standards represent the target to be achieved in normal circumstances. They dictate only the initial

*[Mr. Sackville]*

response to any fire in weight and speed of attack. The officer in command at an incident may at any time request additional firefighting resources.

**Mr. Austin-Walker:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Sackville:** No, I will carry on if I may. The standards are not just nationally—

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** The Minister is right to say that the local officer can ask for more resources, but if the resources have already been removed, including the closure of a fire station and fewer pumps at nearby stations, where will that officer get those extra resources?

**Mr. Sackville:** Those are operational matters that have to be considered when deciding whether it is possible to make reductions in the number of appliances in an area. Those matters form part of the review, and they have not come before my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. I have already explained what considerations need to take place if they do, but the review has been carried out by the professionals and they have decided, as the hon. Lady has already spelled out, that Downham station and three others should be closed. That is the proposal in their review. They also recommend that other stations can be reduced from two appliances to one without reducing cover below the designated standards.

**Mr. Spearing:** There will be half the cover if it is reduced.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Sackville:** Those standards are not just nationally recommended. They are nationally agreed in the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, which was established by the 1947 Act and on which the relevant fire service organisations are represented. They were also extensively reviewed by the joint committee on standards of fire cover in 1985 for the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils of England and Wales and for Scotland. The standards enable all those involved to be aware of the minimum level of service that they should deliver.

The Audit Commission's report called for greater local flexibility in the application of fire cover standards. The commission did not say exactly how the standards should be changed and recognised that no change should be considered without careful research. The issue is being considered by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, but it is a complex matter on which much work will be needed.

Following the 1985 review, all fire authorities in Great Britain reviewed their risk categorisation and the resources necessary to comply. Authorities update those reviews regularly to take account of local circumstances. As has already been said, London currently has 113 stations with 189 pumping appliances. Currently, 76 stations have two appliances, and 37 have one. The on-going review process in London has recommended the closure of Downham fire station and three others, and the removal of one pumping appliance from each of 22 stations which have two at present.

The review has also recommended that an additional appliance be provided at two stations that have only one, and proposes that the authority seek to develop new fire stations at Heathrow, Surrey Quays and Isle of Dogs. In respect of the proposed reductions, a report by the authority—I have already quoted this, but I will tell the House again—states that those changes can be made without affecting the authority's ability to meet Home Office recommended attendance times.

**Mrs. Prentice:** The chief fire officer said that, but he also said—it is only fair that the House should know—that the changes would seriously reduce the present service.

**Mr. Sackville:** The chief fire officer has to consider whether to recommend that the overall cover would continue to meet the minimum standards. That is a technical matter, and he must consider any proposals that the authority makes.

The proposals are reflected in the authority's review by its professional staff. In the case of Downham station, the review clearly considered that its ground could be covered by surrounding stations, while still maintaining the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover. It does not envisage that the increased work loads on surrounding stations would be unacceptable.

I am aware that the authority has consulted on the recommendations. It is not for me to comment about the consultation exercise or the recommendations in the review. That is a matter for the authority to judge. I know that the authority proposes to take decisions about the fire cover review later this month in the course of meetings. I am sure that the authority will give careful consideration to the points that the hon. Lady has raised tonight.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Friday 2 February 1996*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

9.34 am

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to present a Bill that will make it an offence in this country to conspire to or to incite a person to commit certain sexual offences abroad against children.

In the 20th century, there has been a revolution in overseas travel, which was once the preserve of the privileged few, but which is now enjoyed by virtually everyone. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert), who was one of those who helped to encourage people to go abroad on relatively inexpensive holidays. The advent of the package tour industry has enabled many millions of people to visit far-off lands and to enjoy the cuisine and culture of other countries.

In the 1930s, Bob Boothby once took his lady friend to Portugal because he thought that no one would see him there. Today, he would have to go somewhat further afield. In the 1950s, when I lived in Glasgow, people would go to the Isle of Arran for their holiday; today they go to the beautiful island of Cyprus. In the 1950s they went to Cornwall; today, they go to Corfu.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): People still come to Cornwall.

**Mr. Marshall:** As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, some still go to Cornwall, but many others go to Corfu. Whereas in the 1950s people went to Brighton, today their horizons have been widened to Benidorm. For most people, that has been liberating, and for many countries international tourism has been an engine of economic growth. Countries such as Spain, Cyprus and Greece are blessed with fantastic weather and scenery and have prospered as a result of the growth in tourism.

The growth in international travel has not, however, been an unmitigated blessing. We have all seen the lager louts who are the most unfortunate ambassadors for this country and one of our least attractive exports. Other people use this new-found freedom to travel for far darker purposes. Paedophiles, or child molesters as they ought to be called, go to countries where child prostitution is rife in order sexually to abuse young children. We should be aware of the scale of the problem in some countries.

A radio programme last night reported that there are 200,000 child prostitutes in Thailand, that young girls there will sell their virginity for £35 and some boys become prostitutes at the age of 10. I am told that there are 60,000 child prostitutes in the Philippines.

I should like to thank a number of people who have helped me by writing to me about this particular problem. I also thank *The News* in Portsmouth for sending me extracts from a publication circulating in that part of the country and from which I shall read one or two paragraphs:

"If you want more information on Thailand and the hot spots of Bangkok, FXS Farang offers a classic underground paperback on where to go, how much to pay, and what to avoid in Bangkok and Pattaya."

For a fee,

"Scope International Ltd. will get you a copy of the paperback *Bangkok Back Streets* and a year's subscription to their newsletter."

That is just one example of the sort of publication circulating in the United Kingdom but which one should seek to avoid.

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North) *rose—*

**Mr. Marshall:** I shall give way to my hon. Friend. For some years I was a constituent of his, and I know how well he represents all his constituents.

**Mr. Greenway:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those kind remarks; they are much appreciated. I congratulate him on presenting this very important Bill. Does he envisage any basic way in which would-be molesters of children and those with evil intent towards them who travel to Thailand and similar places could be cut off from the information that he has just described? Although that could be very difficult, should not an attempt be made? Does he intend to address the problem?

**Mr. Marshall:** That is precisely what my Bill seeks to do. Once the Bill has become law, it will be an offence to publish such information because it will be regarded as inciting individuals to go to such countries and take part in such forms of activity. Indeed, the offence will be punishable by a substantial period of imprisonment.

**Mr. Greenway:** My query relates directly to the subtlety of some of the advertisements. The problem is one of definition. Does my hon. Friend think that his Bill succeeds in defining matters? I am not sure that it will get at the more subtle advertisements, where—ultimately—the problems lie.

**Mr. Marshall:** The publication that I was sent had no subtlety about it at all. Not even a one-eyed Albanian, as the late Robert Maxwell once said, would have difficulty understanding it. *[Interruption.]* I have nothing against one-eyed or two-eyed Albanians, and I should add that sexual tourism is not a problem in Albania.

In describing a hotel, the publication suggests establishing

"a rapport with the night staff or manager. See how tolerant they feel that week. They have seen it all before, so if you want to entertain 30 teenagers a night tell them."

The advertisement says that it is

"An inexpensive British run hotel . . . you can meet some like-minded dirty old men in the bar on the sixth floor."

*[Mr. Marshall]*

It is clear what is meant in that description.

Referring to somewhere in the Philippines, the publication says:

"There's no other resort like it on this planet, set among the pure white sands . . . with lazy palm trees meeting the blue sea, you will find a whole village devoted to the pleasures of total unadulterated sexual excess."

I do not think that anyone could say that that was a mealy-mouthed turn of phrase.

In Brazil, a city is described in terms of the age of the street prostitutes. The publication says:

"Some of them have not even reached puberty."

It is described by someone who

"has a passion for these very, very young women and has studied them for several years."

It is all very clear what is being suggested in such publications. Such people ought to be prosecuted and certainly they would be under my Bill.

Last year, an article in *The Sunday Times* quoted from a newsletter that referred to

"exciting adult playgrounds of the Far East."

It said:

"If you have the odd Pounds 100 each to spend or can spare Pounds 500 for a brief interlude with a hostess you may have an enjoyable evening."

The company, Thai Adventures, was obviously advertising very explicit sexual holidays, and such firms would certainly be caught within the remit of my Bill.

One cannot find words sufficient to describe the contempt felt by us all for the disgusting, degrading behaviour of some individuals. Unfortunately, some of the perverts who visit other countries for such holidays are British. I was appalled yesterday to discover that those who take part in acts against young children have no sense of shame.

At a conference organised by Elizabeth Sieff, which the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), also attended later in the afternoon, I heard a policeman describe someone who had gone to Thailand, indulged in acts of sodomy against a 12-year-old boy and returned to this country with a video of everything that he had been doing. One would have thought that instead of having a sense of pride in what he had done, he would have had such a sense of shame that he would never want to look at it on video. Yet that man was willing to do so; it is quite disgusting behaviour.

**Mr. David Ashby** (North-West Leicestershire): Will not companies simply move their operations to countries where it is legal to advertise, such as Belgium, Holland or France? Are not we really considering an issue that requires more of an international agreement? Should we not be looking beyond ourselves to something wider?

**Mr. Piers Merchant** (Beckenham): It is not legal in France.

**Mr. Marshall:** As my hon. Friend said, it is not legal in France to advertise such holidays. We can pass a Bill in the House to ensure that such operators do not advertise in Britain. We want to ensure that no one in the United Kingdom incites others to take part in those so-called holidays. We do not need to try to establish a European Union directive on the issue.

**Mr. Ashby:** Why not?

**Mr. Marshall:** Frankly, why should we wait for 15 European countries to agree on such an issue when we can get on with it here without the delay in Brussels?

**Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Eltham): My hon. Friend is right to say that we can pass a measure here; indeed, we should. We should then widen the forum, perhaps taking it to the Council of Europe, which goes beyond the European Union and is interested in such human rights issues.

**Mr. Marshall:** I am sure that we shall hear from the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), who has been a rapporteur at the Council of Europe, which of course has representatives from more countries than the European Union.

The House must take action to make it more difficult for paedophiles and child molesters to travel abroad and ply their profession.

**Mr. Alun Michael** (Cardiff, South and Penarth): It is important for us to be clear about what is being done and what is not being done. Am I right in thinking that the advertising and incitement of the sort of activities that the hon. Gentleman cited would be open to prosecution if his Bill were passed, but that nothing could be done in respect of the individual whom he described, unless there was an act of organisation or incitement? In other words, the Bill would not catch the individual whom he described.

**Mr. Marshall:** Hon. Members are adept at anticipating and asking me about what I am going to say in five or 10 minutes' time, which makes it much more difficult for a speech to have a theme. The Bill makes it more difficult for individuals to find out about such holidays and also makes it a crime for rings of paedophiles to discuss the issue and consider going to, say, Brazil. I am told by legal experts that such behaviour would be an offence under the Bill.

I think that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) is concerned about the concept of extra-territoriality. As he knows, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said yesterday that the Government are looking again at the matter and have set up an inquiry. I shall be talking about the concept in some detail, because I think that there are two different issues—first, what we do with those who return with a video, and secondly, whether one can try to produce witnesses from, say, Thailand in United Kingdom courts.

**Mr. Michael:** I was just trying to be clear. The hon. Gentleman described a particular incident that every hon. Member finds distasteful. Yet if there were no organisation or incitement in this country, the behaviour would not be caught by the Bill because of the problem of extra-territoriality to which he referred. The problem is that inquiries have been promised in the past and little progress seems to have been made.

**Mr. Marshall:** We have to accept—I shall deal with the matter in greater detail shortly—that the Bolin case,

the Swedish case, would not have resulted in a successful prosecution in the United Kingdom. Under this country's laws, it is possible for anyone to be extradited to a country such as Thailand. Yesterday, I talked to the dean of the Faculty of Advocates in Scotland—the head of the Scottish Bar. He confirmed that the British Government would be willing to extradite individuals to any of the countries concerned.

I remind the House that the tests that apply to extradition are less strong than the tests that apply when the prosecution seeks to convict. An individual can be extradited from this country if there is a prima facie case to suggest guilt. If an individual is found guilty of a crime, the jury has to be satisfied beyond any reasonable doubt. In the Bolin case—the Swedish case—no British jury would have convicted the person concerned because of the way in which the evidence was collated and the way in which the witness was trained by a non-governmental organisation. The Government are right to say—

**Mrs. Llin Golding** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Many lawyers think that the person concerned would have been convicted in this country. It is a matter of legal opinion and until we test it, we shall not know the answer.

**Mr. Marshall:** Of course it is a question of legal opinion and lawyers, as the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby) will confirm, make money by giving conflicting opinions. Every lawyer will say that one has a good case; that is the only way in which lawyers can survive.

As the House is interested in the Swedish case, I shall refer to it briefly. We have to remember the way in which the evidence was collated. The victim was threatened by a police officer with a gun. He was looked after and prepared for the court hearing by a non-governmental organisation. Under those conditions, any rookie lawyer would have had the evidence ruled inadmissible in a British court.

Bolin admitted molesting the boy to an undercover Swedish police officer, who arranged for the conversation to be recorded by a Danish television producer. I suspect that that would have been regarded as entrapment. We should remember that someone accused of murder recently was found not guilty on the basis that the evidence could not be counted because an undercover police lady had trapped him into making a confession. When we remember that and when we remember the circumstances in which the boy's evidence was collated in the Bolin case, we have to come to the conclusion that we would not have got a conviction in a British court.

I point out to the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) that the only reason why the Swedes prosecuted the case was that under Swedish law, the man could not be extradited to Thailand. Under British law, he could have been extradited. One of the problems in comparing our system with that in Sweden, France or Germany is that those countries do not allow their citizens to be extradited to Thailand, the Philippines or other countries. We are on a different plane.

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): My hon. Friend is right to suggest that anyone who is suspected of such a crime could be extradited to Thailand. Is he convinced, however, that the Thai authorities are enthusiastic to prosecute people in those circumstances? Is he sure that they are robust in terms of wishing to stamp out these activities?

**Mr. Marshall:** The Thai authorities are becoming more robust. Last year, they passed a law that introduced a maximum penalty of 10 years for an act of under-age sex—

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Marshall:** Can I just finish this sentence? I have given way frequently; I have been very generous.

Only this week, I spoke to someone from Thailand who told me that an individual had been sentenced to 50 years' imprisonment because he had been found guilty of five acts of under-age sex. I believe that there is some evidence that the Thai authorities have become slightly more robust. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) is right. The problem can be eradicated only if the authorities in the countries concerned decide that they will close down the brothels, that they will prosecute and that the police will become honest.

At the end of the day, if the local authorities in Thailand and the Philippines will not do those things, extra-territoriality is irrelevant because the evidence will not be collated. We cannot expect the Metropolitan police to go to Bangkok to collate the evidence. It must be collated by the local police. If they do not show enthusiasm to do that, it is pure gesture politics to alter our law to make extra-territoriality possible. The law enforcement agencies in Thailand would need to show enthusiasm for enforcing their law to stop this disgusting trade.

**Mr. Anderson:** The hon. Gentleman cites extradition as a possibly significant factor. How many examples have there been of British citizens being extradited to countries where that trade takes place?

**Mr. Marshall:** That underlines the point that I was trying to make. Extradition can take place only at the request of another country. If the countries concerned want to enforce their laws, they may seek to extradite British citizens. If they do not want to enforce their laws, there is nothing that the British Government can do. We cannot extradite citizens unless the countries concerned produce the evidence and it is up to them to do so. I very much hope that they will.

**Mr. Michael:** Is the hon. Gentleman saying that if the authorities in those countries do not want to protect their children, it does not matter what British citizens do abroad? Surely that is not what the hon. Gentleman intends to say.

**Mr. Marshall:** I do not think that I said that. I was trying to say that the problem of enforcing the law was the responsibility of the authorities in Thailand, the Philippines and Brazil. We must try to persuade them to protect their children.

What we can do in the House is to ensure that it is far more difficult for British citizens to indulge in those activities by making it an offence to incite people to go

*[Mr. Marshall]*

on those holidays, an offence to organise those holidays and an offence for rings of paedophiles to encourage others to go on those holidays. We can do that with no difficulty. What we cannot do in the House is to force the Government of Thailand to enforce their own laws.

What we can also do—I am glad that the Government are doing this and I shall refer to it again later—is to consider the use of videos. People come back to this country carrying self-incriminating videos. Having listened to what the police said yesterday and having listened to what others have said, I believe that a video should be sufficient evidence to charge people in the United Kingdom. Such people would be damned by their own video in their own luggage. At the moment, people can be charged only for having a pornographic video. Having listened to what various organisations have said, I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has announced an inquiry. I hope that the issue will be regarded with great urgency by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville). The inquiry is important and could lead to a number of convictions.

**Mr. Ashby:** If there is a video of someone committing a pornographic offence with an under-age child, that is evidence. If the person is identifiable on the video, why cannot he be prosecuted?

**Mr. Marshall:** Unlike my hon. Friend, I am not a lawyer. As I understand it from the lawyers, one cannot be prosecuted in the United Kingdom as a result of a video that shows one having under-age sex outside the United Kingdom—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that I am making myself clear even to lawyers. I am glad that a layman can educate a lawyer on the law.

**Mr. Ashby:** If the Bill becomes an Act, that will be evidence. It will be usable.

**Mr. Donald Anderson:** Of what?

**Mr. Ashby:** If there is a conspiracy.

**Mr. Marshall:** I do not know whether that would necessarily be evidence of a conspiracy under the Bill, but it is the sort of matter that the Home Office inquiry will consider.

The Under-Secretary has been most patient—as patient as I have been with all the interruptions—in listening to the argument put forward by several of my hon. Friends, but perhaps it might be advantageous to the House if I were now allowed to start describing the Bill, rather than dealing with more interruptions, which seem slightly repetitious.

Clause 1 makes it an offence to conspire in England or Wales to commit certain sexual offences abroad. Conspiracy means agreement on a course of conduct. It would certainly include an arrangement between a tour operator and a client to provide travel facilities where an acknowledged purpose of the trip was the sexual abuse of children.

However, the matter goes wider than that. Many of those creatures, although they make their own arrangements for travel and accommodation, none the less plan their trips with others of their kind. Such activity could amount to conspiracy and fall within the scope of the Bill.

The act or event must be an offence in the country where it was intended to take place—the so-called dual criminality test, which is an important safeguard. We in Parliament rightly consider that it is our function to pass laws that apply in the territory of the United Kingdom. We would take great exception if the law-making body of another country attempted to pass laws that would apply here. Equally, therefore, we must not attempt to export our laws overseas. The dual criminality test avoids that trap.

The conspiracy and incitement provisions would mean that travel companies could not organise holidays, and it would become illegal to publish booklets telling people about particular centres and hotels, and for rings of paedophiles to conspire together to suggest to others where they might go for their holidays.

Other clauses apply the Bill's provisions to other parts of the United Kingdom. For example, clause 4 applies them to Northern Ireland, and clause 5 introduces the schedule, which sets out the conduct in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that is covered by the Bill.

Clause 6 contains the Scottish provisions, which are framed slightly differently from those that apply in other United Kingdom jurisdictions, because of the differences in Scots law. Several offences caught by the Bill are in Scotland common law rather than statutory offences. However, the effect of the Bill is essentially the same in Scotland, England and Wales, and Northern Ireland. Clause 7 makes the necessary provisions for commencement and extent.

The offences under the Bill are those of conspiracy and incitement, and the maximum penalties for those are the same as for the substantive offences being planned or encouraged. Thus conspiracy to rape would carry a maximum life sentence, as would conspiracy to commit intercourse with a girl under 13.

We have already discussed the concept of extra-territoriality. At this stage I intended to refer to the Bolin case, which has already been mentioned. There is a strong feeling that any rookie barrister would have succeeded in securing non-conviction in a British court, because of the way in which the evidence was collated and the witness trained by the non-governmental organisation, and the entrapment.

We should normally rely on prosecutions in the country where the offence is committed. As I said, there is the power to extradite, and we can extradite individuals where there is a prima facie case, whereas someone can be found guilty in the courts only if a case is proved beyond reasonable doubt. I am told that we can even extradite people to other countries with which there is no treaty.

We must recognise that the scale of punishment is also important. I was told the other day of someone being sentenced to 50 years' imprisonment in Thailand. I can think of no greater deterrent than being told that one will have to spend 50 years in the Bangkok nick. If any criminal were asked, "Where would you prefer to be imprisoned, Bangkok or Ford open prison?" most criminals would say that they would prefer the luxurious conditions in some British prisons to the anything but luxurious conditions in Bangkok.

At the conference organised by the Sieff foundation, I was impressed by the arguments of the police and others that individuals should be capable of being convicted on the basis of the videos that they brought back to the United Kingdom. A story was told at the conference about a man who committed an act of sodomy with a 12-year-old boy and brought back the video. When he was stopped at Heathrow, he could be charged only with possession of a pornographic video. That is not enough.

When the Government consider the matter, that issue should be closely examined. It is insufficient to charge such people with that offence. They should be damned by their own video evidence. That is the view of the police, and I understand that the Association of British Travel Agents would also like the Government to take that line, so that firms could put little leaflets in their brochures telling people that if they go to Thailand and misbehave, there is a risk of their being prosecuted in the United Kingdom. I welcome the Home Secretary's decision to review that idea.

I do not claim that the Bill would solve the problem. It must be solved in the countries themselves. Their Governments must recognise that it is a problem, and that it is their children who are being defiled, who at the age of 10 enter on a life of prostitution from which there will be no escape. They must put the good of their children and the moral health of their countries before the revenue from tourism. Indeed, their tourist revenue could increase if they got rid of that foul trade, so that people could say with pride that they had been to Thailand, whereas now a single person who has been on holiday to Thailand may prefer to keep it a dark secret, rather than advertise the fact to most of his friends.

Those countries must close the brothels on the back streets and ensure that their police are no longer the best police that money can buy, but become honest policemen, because corrupt policemen are the friends of the paedophiles.

The Bill will not eradicate sex tourism, but it will make a valuable contribution to the battle against that evil trade—a trade that every Member of the House must condemn. I commend the Bill to the House.

10.7 am

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on his initiative with the Bill, on his diligence in researching the background material, and on the fact that he has not tried to oversell the scope of what is a rather limited Bill. I am glad to join him as a sponsor of it, but I suspect that, as he has implied, he is realistic about its rather small reach in terms of what will happen in practice.

That is partly a reflection not on the hon. Gentleman, but on the weakness of the private Member's Bill procedure. Such Bills make progress only if they have the full blessing of the Government, and this is as far as the Government would allow. On that understanding, I shall fully support the Bill. It has been introduced in the context of public anger—anger that deserves an effective response.

I was glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman attended the conference yesterday promoted by the Sieff foundation, where I understand there was considerable embarrassment, as Britain is the only country with no extra-territorial jurisdiction or legislation on this matter in place. There was also a strong feeling among the delegates that the Government should consider the problem more seriously than they have yet done.

I shall pose three questions—what is the mischief aimed at by the Bill? Will it be effective? What further types of legislative and other measures are likely to prove to be necessary? First, in respect of the mischief, it is clear that all decent people must feel a deep revulsion and abhorrence at the exploitation of defenceless children—mostly in the third world—for sexual gratification by perverts principally from the developed countries of the west. We must press for action to end such exploitation and punish those responsible.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the trade is easier nowadays thanks to the ease and cheapness of international travel, and to the communications that can link together perverts from around the world. In my judgment, our campaign is in some ways equivalent to the crusade in past centuries against the slave trade. There must be a special place in hell reserved for those who are so ready to take away the innocence of young children for sexual gratification.

The aim of the legislation is surely to protect potential victims by facilitating the detection, prosecution and punishment of those who perpetrate such offences. There is currently a wide gap between the law and what the public believe to be necessary. The law will be brought increasingly into disrepute so long as it manifestly fails to respond adequately—or at all—to public perceptions of, and anger at, child molesters, either in this country or abroad.

Secondly, how effective is the Bill likely to be? At one level, it must be an advance on the current position, even if it is to a large extent declaratory and not a giant step towards tackling the problem. We have in law many examples of areas where the Government and public opinion have, by legislation, shown themselves to be against certain practices, even if people know realistically that such legislation can mainly be a signal and cannot tackle the whole problem. It is one thing to introduce race relations legislation, but another to solve the problems. In a different context, when we began to introduce insider dealing legislation in the early 1980s, we knew that it only signalled a certain opposition, and was unlikely to be effective in preventing the practice, for obvious reasons.

In the context of extra-territoriality, one thinks of war crimes legislation. While that is not perhaps the best example, we had a healthy and clear knowledge of the problem, but felt that, because of people's deep moral revulsion, it was proper to go ahead, even if the measure was mainly declaratory.

The fear of publicity and exposure may in itself act as a deterrent to those tempted to indulge in such vile practices. The scale of organised tourism for child sex is uncertain, and there are no reliable statistics. I understand that child care workers believe that single freelance travellers are more prevalent than organised criminal groups in this country. Thus, the scale of organised child sex tourism may be relatively small, and therefore "agreements" and "incitement" caught by this Bill may be of relatively little significance. People rely on information in magazines or obtained through the Internet, but such limited organised child sex tourism as may exist may change its focus as a result of the Bill, further to avoid "agreements" caught by this Bill in the United Kingdom.

*[Mr. Donald Anderson]*

In one sense, the Home Secretary has promised much. I noticed the ringing declaration in the Home Office's press release of 8 December, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman said:

"The full force of the law must be used against the evil people who sexually exploit children for money.

It is an abhorrent activity. We must do all we can to prevent it and protect children everywhere."

If this were a rather more partisan debate, perhaps I would say that—to coin a phrase—he says one thing and does another. He talks tough, but wields a feather.

Some of my best friends are lawyers, but we must recognise that lawyers and Home Office officials are of a special breed and can always find 1,001 ways to say that things will not work in practice. As a result, I forecast that there will be a very wide gulf between the public's expectations of this Bill and the reality of it, though I welcome the minor change. Actual "agreements" in the United Kingdom may be few, but they may be reduced further or avoided as a result of the Bill.

The Crown Prosecution Service will have to be satisfied on the usual test—that there is a reasonable prospect of success—and the prosecutor will have to show to the satisfaction of a jury that the intention of the operator was to organise sex abroad with children. Thus, one can anticipate the defence. "Yes, I was organising individuals to go to Thailand for the purposes of sex, but it was for sex with adults. How was I to know that one or two individuals who happened to go on this trip that I organised were rather more interested in sex with children?" Yet the jury will have to be convinced that the tour was for child sex tourism and not sex tourism generally. Even if the CPS is satisfied, the outcome of any trial may crucially depend on the judge's exercise of discretion on matters such as admissibility. Clearly there are some major hurdles to be overcome.

Finally, having looked at the mischief and the purpose of the Bill and at its likely effectiveness in practice, I shall deal with what more needs to be done. As has been said, this is an international problem which depends for its solution on international co-operation. We must examine what other countries are doing. While I heard what the hon. Gentleman said about the Swedish example, an individual was certainly prosecuted successfully in that country.

**Mr. Tom Cox** (Tooting): On that very point, as my hon. Friend and other hon. Members know, I serve on the Council of Europe. Is he aware that nine member states within the Council have legislation to deal with those very issues?

**Mr. Anderson:** It may be argued in response to my hon. Friend that those countries in the Council of Europe may work on a Roman law basis and not on our common law basis. Their rules of evidence may be different. I suggest to the Minister that he looks at the case of Australia. Australia is within the common law tradition and has rules of evidence very similar to our own, and it recently enacted extra-territorial legislation in this matter.

We need to monitor more carefully what is being done elsewhere. I note the concession that the Government made yesterday in announcing that they would review the experience of other countries. I understand that a similar suggestion was made in July last year. The fact that the Government's announcement was made only yesterday surely prompts the question, "Why so late?" I am sure that it has nothing to do with the fact that this debate was to be held today.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville):** My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary was addressing a conference on the topic yesterday, so it was, a suitable moment make the announcement.

**Mr. Anderson:** Yes, there was a conference yesterday, but when the Home Secretary issued a press notice in July, it was said that he would draw up a consultative document. Concern has been expressed by many hon. Members about the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) has campaigned vigorously on the matter for years. I merely suggest that to have left the announcement until yesterday gave the impression of a certain reluctance.

**Mr. Michael:** Does it occur to my hon. Friend that if the announcement last July had been followed through, yesterday's announcement could have been the outcome of five months of consideration and investigation rather than the beginning of it?

**Mr. Anderson:** I welcome the change proposed in the Bill, but there can surely be no answer on the part of the Government to the charge that such a belated concession gives the impression to the House of a reluctance and a lack of commitment at a time of intense public concern on the matter. What other construction can be put on such a belated announcement?

We need to examine carefully ways of intensifying international police co-operation through Europol, Interpol and various bilateral contacts between our police force and others such as the Thai force. I was glad to learn that Interpol and the National Criminal Intelligence Service held a conference on the subject in mid-November, which was the sixth meeting of the standing working party on offences against minors.

We must also consider the possibility of increased intergovernmental co-operation. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) plays a distinguished role in the Council of Europe. Perhaps the geographical extent of its membership makes that body more relevant than the European Union to this problem. What initiatives, if any, are the Government seeking to promote within the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe? What progress is being made towards co-operation in the mutual obtaining of witness statements, which has been part of the problem cited by the Government?

We need to ask what current legal procedures and rules act as barriers to successful prosecutions. However hallowed by tradition those procedures might be, we must ask whether they are still necessary. I concede that the law on corroboration by minors has improved substantially recently, following the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. It is also much less traumatic now for children to give evidence in court. We should also explore the possibility of witnesses appearing on television or by satellite.

That has already occurred with some success in major fraud trials. If there is a problem with young children in Thailand giving evidence, why not adopt the same procedures, including cross-examination, as appropriate?

I predict that public opinion will not be satisfied by the results of the Bill and that the Government will have to consider further steps. They may have to do so as a result of amendments moved either in Committee or in another place, as I believe some have threatened to do. There will be further international pressure on the Government, as the conference which was held yesterday showed. I understand that a meeting is to be held in Sweden in August of the world congress on commercial exploitation of children. Do the Government propose to be present at that conference? If so, at what level are they to be represented? Will they seek to defend the Bill as an adequate response to national and international concern?

I give one cheer to the Bill. It is a small first step, but the public will properly demand more.

10.24 am

**Mr. Michael Alison** (Selby): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) who, like me, is a sponsor of the Bill. He speaks with the authority and clarity of a lawyer. I am only sad—or am I glad, I am not certain—that he paddled on the edge of introducing a note of controversy when he questioned the extent to which my hon. Friend the Minister and his senior colleagues expedited the changes that we seek in the Bill. It is reasonable to remind the hon. Gentleman that when large and important changes are in prospect—say, the modernisation of the Labour party—they need to be made with some hesitancy, deliberation and caution. Reflection on the changes has been slow and careful. I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's aspiration to utter two cheers, rather than one, for the Bill. I am certainly moving in the direction of seeking to obtain two cheers for it.

I must turn the spotlight on my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), whom I congratulate on his success in winning this important place in the ballot. I must talk to him some time about his choice of numbers. His success may have a wider application. I should be interested to hear how he happened to pick that particular number. Perhaps we can talk about that some time—or perhaps he will keep it secret, but he was successful.

**Mr. John Marshall:** I am surprised that the Second Church Estates Commissioner wants to know which numbers to select for a Saturday evening.

**Mr. Alison:** It is purely for disinterested advice to my constituents, as my hon. Friend will appreciate.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend on his discrimination in selecting this vital and timely topic and making the protection of the world's most vulnerable children his priority. Unlike the hon. Member for Swansea, East, I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and his colleagues on the important role that they have played in the Bill. The Bill derives in part from the initiative which Raymond Hylton, Lord Hylton, took in another place last year to secure the passage of his Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, which was designed to extend the jurisdiction of United Kingdom courts to sexual offences against children committed overseas.

Regrettably, the Government could not see their way to supporting Lord Hylton's initiative—I shall say a few words about that later—but they have made the effort, in the light of discussions on Lord Hylton's Bill, to do something on this sensitive and critical matter. I warmly commend them for that.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, almost certainly agree that nearly every aspect of the sexual abuse and molestation of children is shocking, and often unimaginably shocking. It is sometimes too painful even to bear contemplation. I think of the picture of the child chained to a bed and burnt to death in a massage parlour that was incinerated, by accident or by design, in an Asian country. That is what the police found. There is an almost unimaginably horrific dimension to the abuse of children, but that is what we are dealing with. Our motivation for sitting on comfortable green Benches on a Friday, with spring approaching, in an advanced western country, is the thought of that child chained to a bed and burnt to death.

If there is one feature of the phenomenon that is more shocking than others, it is the deliberate and calculated practice of relatively well-to-do adults—mostly men, it must be said—from wealthy first-world countries such as Germany, Britain and the United States, arranging to travel abroad to some of the poorer countries of Africa and Asia for the purposes of sexual exploitation of those poor and deprived children. Boys and girls, often orphaned, wander around the streets in capital cities. If their families are still alive, they may be separated from their poor rural family roots. The children are usually illiterate, sometimes drugged for purposes of compliance, sometimes completely enslaved like the child chained to the bed whom I mentioned earlier, sometimes suicidal at such an early age and always abused and damaged—sometimes irrevocably.

One of the most obscene features of sex tourism is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said, the use of self-photography. With movie and video cameras, adults film themselves molesting, abusing and assaulting children and then sell the product in paedophile and generally pornographic circles to finance the cost of their trips. That is an unacceptable perversion.

I want to remind colleagues of a striking fact about the saleability of pornographic material. A circular sent out by some Australians landed on my desk. It points out that, in Australia, the sale of X-rated video cassettes is one of the largest trades and is flourishing. The circular states:

> "The sex industry's mailing list is the second biggest mailing list in the country, ahead of American Express and Readers Digest."

There is a gigantic market for the material. We must not overlook that, because using video cameras to exploit children is immediately profitable to tourists of the sort that the Bill is designed to stop.

The sexual abuse of children requires organisation and communication. One cannot just go to Thailand, or the Philippines or Sri Lanka and pick up the product, so to speak, as one might pick up a bus or hail a taxi in the streets of London. There is a documented correlation between organised tourism from the richer first-world countries and the growth of child abuse and child prostitution in the less developed world.

*[Mr. Alison]*

I make no apology for quoting from a very useful publication called "An abuse of innocence", which has probably been circulated to many colleagues, produced by the charity Christian Aid. It gives some idea of the scale of child prostitution:

"It is difficult to assess how many children work as prostitutes in the developing world. It is believed some 200,000 Nepali girls have been sold into sexual slavery in Indian brothels. It is a serious problem in Brazil. Probably 60,000 children work as prostitutes in the Philippine sex industry, and perhaps as many as 200,000 in Thailand. These countries are ones in which child prostitution is established.

In others, it is new but growing fast. In Colombia, for example, the number of child prostitutes in the capital has increased fivefold in the past seven years; one third of all prostitutes are now under 14 years old and one in twenty is under 10. In some countries, many child prostitutes are boys. This is true in Sri Lanka, where up to 10,000 children aged between six and fourteen are enslaved in brothels and another 5,000 aged between 10 and 18 years old work more independently. The problem is recognised to exist in countries across the southern hemisphere—including Kenya, Goa in India, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam and Cambodia."

Against the background of the astonishing dimension and spread of that fearful phenomenon, one must also remember the huge increase in tourism. The Christian Aid document states:

"International travel has vastly increased since the end of the Second World War. Tourism is expected to be the world's largest business by the year 2000."

That is worth repeating. Tourism, the subject that concerns us today, is expected to be the world's largest business by the millennium. The document continues:

"Though most journeys take place between the OECD states, developing countries have also experienced huge increases in traffic. Between 1950 and 1993 journeys to the Americas increased 14 times, to Africa 34 times, and to East Asia and the Pacific 360 times."

That is where the huge growth is.

One element of the growth of tourism from the west and the growth of child prostitution needs underlining. The document states:

"Tourists expect to fulfil their fantasies of pleasure. Far from home, detached from normal social constraints, they may fulfil these desires in ways that are exploitative or abusive. Sex tourism is an extreme example of this process."

Everybody who goes on a foreign tour is stimulated by the brochures showing beautiful photographs and enticing scenarios of fabulous waving palms on silver beaches, and expects to fulfil their fantasies of pleasure.

There is no doubt that inhibitions are diminished when one travels overseas, particularly to countries very far away. The very loss of inhibition about paedophile activities, which may be a feature of overseas travel—exploiting children overseas—will have a result at home. Not only might such people bring back a video recording of their activities, but they might be less inhibited, so children in the home country might be exposed to the hazards. There is a direct correlation between what happens overseas, where inhibitions are loosened, and what happens on returning home.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East mentioned a matter that was referred to him by a charitable organisation with which he has had some contact. He said that many of the worst offenders travel as individuals, not on package tours. In the past week, we have all been sent a brochure by a reputable trade association connected with overseas travel and tourism. I shall not name the publication because I do not want to cause an innocent publisher any embarrassment or trouble. I skimmed through the list of references to Thailand. About a dozen tour operators included that country in their literature, and I found the following allusions in that perfectly innocent publication:

"Individually tailored itineraries produced",

"Totally flexible, tailor-made, itineraries",

"Specialists in soft adventure in Asia",

"60 per cent. of people travelling alone",

"Ideal for single travellers",

"Tailor-made tours for independent travellers",

"Unique holiday ideas"

in the Far East.

"Soft adventure tour modules",

"Intimate knowledge of destinations".

In themselves, I am sure that those are perfectly innocent phrases—or are they? I do not know.

The argument of the hon. Member for Swansea, East about the single traveller in Asia is reinforced by the sort of phenomenon that is now widely available to all sorts of people. Can the Bill do anything to break the fearful correlation between a thoroughly desirable and benign development—the massive increase in the capacity and scope of citizens all over the world to travel beyond their own countries—and the parasitic abuse of tourism, which is focused on children and battens on to an acceptable international industry? I believe that we can do something about it.

I am grateful to Ann Badger and the Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism as, I think, is the hon. Member for Swansea, East. She commissioned and sent us some refreshing legal opinions from, for example, the distinguished counsel Muireann O Briain QC, who states:

"Conspiracy is not necessarily difficult to prove. The crime consists of an agreement between two or more persons to effect an unlawful purpose. The crime is in the agreement; it is irrelevant whether the agreement is ever put into effect.

Incitement precedes a conspiracy; it is the encouragement of others to commit a crime. A person incites another to commit a crime; when that other agrees, there is a conspiracy.

A tour operator might incite someone by his advertising or promotion to commit acts of sexual abuse against children. He could be prosecuted for that crime."

In quoting that I am half looking at my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), who is an expert in this field. Much of the drafting of the Bill seemed gobbledegook to me, but I assume that my hon. Friend will help us in this matter.

It will be interesting to discover whether the sort of hints and trailers that I quoted from reputable tour operators might mean that they, accidentally or deliberately, have strayed into an area in which they can be prosecuted. It might be necessary for tour operators deliberately to disassociate themselves in their advertising from any link or contact with that fearful and illicit trade—in other words, to use failsafe advertising. That may well be one of the beneficial effects of the Bill.

As the hon. Member for Swansea, East suggested, we want to be able to raise a second cheer and, in my view, we can do so only when we have a power of extra-territorial prosecution. I am glad that the

Government are not closing their mind entirely to that and that they are investigating it. Because tourism is a growing industry, a large number of countries are reluctant to prosecute tourists in their own country and would rather kick them out. If they do not jump bail, they encourage them to get away. That does not mean, however, that they would not produce evidence to prove that there had been sexual offences against their children if the people they kicked out were prosecuted in their country of origin. It does not follow that, because a country is reluctant to prosecute child sex offenders, it would not be prepared to co-operate with the home jurisdiction, by producing evidence to secure prosecution. One might find that those countries would be more prepared to do so than to use the extradition processes and have unsavoury court cases in their own jurisdiction involving precisely that broad range of clientele—overseas visitors—whom they want to encourage to come to their countries.

We have to go down the road that the hon. Member for Swansea, East suggested in pursuit of the second cheer. In giving my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South my first cheer, I very much look forward to being able to give the second cheer in due course.

10.48 am

**Mr. Tom Cox** (Tooting): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). With regard to his argument about prosecution, he and the House will know that on so many issues concerning the overall welfare of youngsters, other countries which, sadly, suffer from the kind of problems that we are discussing look to countries such as ours to set standards, strengthen legislation and give them the confidence to take action in the knowledge that they will be supported. That is an important point.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on introducing this important Bill, which I am sure will have wide support. The two early-day motions on the subject show the wide range of hon. Members of different parties who support it.

As a member of the British parliamentary delegation to the Council of Europe, I have for the past year been rapporteur in the production of a report on a "European Strategy for Children". Many organisations involved with the welfare of children have been supportive of the work of our committee, which has met in several European countries. On 19 December 1995 Carol Bellamy, executive director of UNICEF, wrote to me from its New York headquarters saying,

"Thank for sharing with me a copy of the report on a 'European Strategy for Children'. I commend you and your colleagues at the Council for undertaking this farsighted initiative for the future of children."

The report was discussed at the Council of Europe assembly meeting in Strasbourg on 24 January and overwhelmingly approved by member states. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said, the Council of Europe now has 38 member states and includes countries which are not in the European Union such as Iceland and Turkey.

Our "European Strategy for Children" highlights the problem of sexual offences against children. We have heard a great deal about Thailand in this context. The right hon. Member for Selby also mentioned other countries which, sadly, suffer from this continuing problem. The evidence that he gave from press releases and travel brochures clearly shows what is happening. As rapporteur in charge of a report on the abuse and neglect of children which the Council of Europe has agreed should be presented, I have spoken with our legal advisers in Strasbourg and we shall meet in Paris on 5 and 6 March for the first preliminary presentation of the report. The Council of Europe supports the Bill brought forward by the hon. Member for Hendon, South and we look to the Government also to support the measure. As I said in my intervention to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East, nine Council of Europe members already have legislation of the kind that the hon. Member for Hendon, South is seeking to introduce.

We all know of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. Article 34 deals with "Sexual exploitation" and the unofficial summary of its main provisions states:

"The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography."

Powerful organisations and conventions such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations convention on the rights of the child support the Bill.

With other hon. Members, I serve on the executive of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Its conference this year will be in Malaysia in August. Our secretary, Andrew Pearson, has invited us to submit items for the agenda. I have suggested that we discuss child prostitution and sex tourism for the reason suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East when he mentioned the laws in Australia. Sadly, several Commonwealth countries have this terrible problem. It therefore is right that the subject should be discussed at Commonwealth level and the views of Commonwealth countries about how to work together explained and discussed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East mentioned the conference in Stockholm on 27 to 31 August this year. I congratulate the Swedish Government on making all the arrangements. They are working closely with UNICEF and an organisation called End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism. That conference will have a worldwide attendance and I expect to be the Council of Europe delegate to it. As my hon. Friend said, we are looking for a senior Government Minister to attend that conference. Ministers will not be able to say that they were not aware it. I have given the dates. I and the Council of Europe expect Britain to be represented by a Minister who will be able to do more than say that he is listening with interest and will come forward with clear ideas about what to do—backed, I hope, by the measure now before the House.

The agenda for the conference includes consideration of developing policies worldwide to combat the growing problem of child sexual exploitation, and we know that it will be attended by representatives of Governments, law enforcement agencies and health professionals as well as representatives from the tourist industry and the media. The right hon. Member for Selby made some valuable comments about the power of travel brochures and how enticing and exciting they can be. We should not lose sight of the fact that television can be equally exciting, as people in the comfort of their own homes can be enticed to visit other parts of the world. I hope that we shall be represented by a senior Minister at that conference.

*[Mr. Tom Cox]*

I shall not go into great detail about the Bill because I believe in the intentions of the hon. Member for Hendon, South. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East is a barrister and as a result of his professional background he has asked certain questions. He is perfectly entitled to do so and no doubt Conservative Members from the same professional background will ask such questions. Those of us who have been in the House for a while, however, know that the right place for such questions and discussions is in Standing Committee. If the Bill encounters any difficulties, I hope that the Government will support the hon. Member for Hendon, South.

Those of us who have been here for a while have sat on many Committees and we have seen Conservative Members, speaking for the Government, argue that they basically support certain legislation, but that it is too complex and therefore they cannot go along with it. I shall not repeat what has already been said about yesterday's statement, but those of us who hope to be members of the Standing Committee on the Bill hope that it and the hon. Member for Hendon, South will receive total support from the Government. I accept that certain amendments may be necessary, but they should be tabled for discussion in Committee.

The Bill is designed to overcome the problems faced by youngsters in foreign countries who are abused by British nationals, but we should not close our eyes to what is happening in our own country. Yesterday's edition of the *Yorkshire Post* contained an article headed, "Little Girl Lost". The paper reported:

"Children as young as 11 are turning to prostitution to pay for their drug habit, says West Yorkshire's Chief Constable Keith Hellawell."

Vile offences against children are taking place in foreign countries, but such offences are also committed here. The article states:

"On a freezing street corner in Leeds last night, Wendy was doing business. At the age of 12 she was selling sex to feed a drugs habit which has already been part of her life for more than two years . . . Her boyfriend—she insists he's that rather than her pimp—drives her to the areas in Leeds and Bradford where she does business. He also supplies most of her drugs.

'I don't do it every night,' she says, 'may be just a couple of nights a week depending on how much money I need.'"

That article was not describing Thailand, Kenya or Sri Lanka, but the United Kingdom in February 1996, where a young girl of 12 years is selling her body on the streets. The Bill addresses a specific issue, but I ask the Minister, please, not to forget the tragic problems which exist in many parts of our own country.

Kerb crawling is a problem in my constituency, although I do not suggest for one moment that the prostitutes in my area are as young as 12 years of age. I have great confidence in the local police and I know that they would take immediate action if they found such a girl. Even if it is not happening in my constituency, however, it is happening elsewhere. We should not forget that fact, and we need to do something about it.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South and I support his intentions. As I have said, the Council of Europe also offers him its total support. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East and I, with other hon. Members on the executive committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, hope that the important issue addressed in the Bill will be on the agenda at the CPA conference in August in Malaysia.

I also beg the Minister to heed what my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East and I have said—no doubt honourable Conservative colleagues will repeat it—about the need to ensure that a senior Minister attends the conference in Sweden in August.

11.5 am

**Mr. David Ashby** (North-West Leicestershire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on his Bill and I agree with its purpose. Attempts to deal with a conspiracy to commit offences abroad and incitement to commit such offences are, however, fraught with legal difficulties. I was involved in the leading case on conspiracy to commit offences abroad—Attorney-General's reference No. 2 of 1988, or 1987. From my experience, such cases are a legal minefield. I am therefore happy to give the Bill one cheer rather than two.

There is no point in hon. Members making high-flown speeches about morals abroad and how we should influence behaviour abroad. We must be pragmatic. I do not believe that we achieve anything by trying to persuade other countries to do certain things or to behave in certain ways. It is far better to consider what we can achieve here and to legislate to achieve that. That may be limited, but I offer three cheers for one cheer rather than giving the two or three cheers called for by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison).

We must remember, as judges have said time and again, that the courts are not courts of morals but courts of law. One must look to the law, which reveals that the Bill is fraught with many problems, not least about sentencing.

When the House dealt with the age of consent—on that occasion in homosexual cases—I always maintained that the age of consent should be the same for both sexes, because that is so in most countries abroad. I have always felt that one of the inherent difficulties in legislating is the difference in the age of consent in every country. One can go round Europe, not least within the boundaries of the Council of Europe, and find differing ages of consent. It is much lower in some countries than in the United Kingdom. After all, it is just few hundred years since our kings married child brides of 13 and 14.

The reeent case in Turkey where a young British 13-year-old has married also reveals the problems involved in attempting to legislate. The Turkish authorities have said that that marriage is illegal, but I believe that it might be legal in the religious sense rather than in the civil sense. I believe that the age of consent for marriage in Turkey is 15. It is 16 in the United Kingdom, as noted in the Bill.

Imagine what would happen to Turkish people or those of Turkish extraction, who are now British citizens, who got on a coach to Turkey to celebrate the wedding of one of their 15-year-old daughters—a love match in Turkey. According to the Bill, they would be guilty of conspiring to commit an offence abroad, because clause 1(2)(b) covers

"the happening of some other event, intended to take place in a country or territory outside the United Kingdom."

That may well—

**Mr. John Marshall:** Clause 1(3) says:

"The second condition is that that act or any other event constitutes an offence under the law in force in that country or territory",

so it could not, under the Bill, be an offence to persuade a person to go to Turkey in the conditions that my hon. Friend described.

**Mr. Ashby:** I take that point.

I was coming to the issue of sentencing, which becomes difficult. Will judges be persuaded to sentence according to the law in this country or the law in the country where the offence will be committed? If under-age sex attracts a six-month or one-year penalty in the country where it happens, will the judge sentence according to the penalty in that country or the penalty in this? I understand that the Bill prescribes that the sentence abroad will be the penalty in this country, but that creates an injustice because the foreign country may enforce its laws very vigorously.

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton): Surely—it is clearly expressed in the Bill—the sentence would apply to the offence contained in the Bill, to the offence of conspiracy, not to the sexual act that took place in another country.

**Mr. Ashby:** Conspiracy is an agreement to commit an illegal act or an illegal agreement to commit an act, but the judge must consider the substantive act when sentencing on conspiracy. If he judges a case about a conspiracy to commit an illegal sexual act, he will consider the sexual act to decide what sentence will apply for that act.

Judges will have to consider sentences in the country where the offence is committed, which may be a country that vigorously enforces the substantive law, and whose view is different. I think not so much of third-world countries such as Thailand and the Philippines as of European countries where there is a marked difference in attitudes towards sexual offences and the penalties that are prescribed for certain offences—places such as the Spanish peninsula and Italy, which are quite vigorous. That is a difficulty.

The Bill should be limited in scope, because we do not have a great duty in this country to prosecute and protect citizens of other countries. We must rely on those countries to protect their citizens.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) mentioned Wendy, a child prostitute. If a French group of paedophiles arranged to visit this country to meet Wendy and Wendy's friends in Yorkshire, what attitude would this country take to a prosecution of those people? I imagine that the newspapers would be angry that the case was being prosecuted in France, and would call on our police to prosecute the French visitors for the substantive offence of under-age sex with Wendy and other people, rather than the other way round. A nationalist uproar would be created because the case was being decided in France, not in this country. I imagine that certain newspapers, mostly tabloids, would take that view.

Although one finds the whole area of under-age sex abhorrent and distasteful, I wonder whether we should present ourselves as people who will police the world in respect of under-age sex with children. I wonder whether we should instead rely more on those countries to protect and police themselves. In any case, there is wide scope for an international agreement on that.

I think of child pornography. I think of computer pornography, which is now international, and which is spread on the Internet. We have created the offence of computer pornography, but much of that comes from abroad, down the telephone line. We could have a great deal more agreement about that.

We could have a great deal more agreement about what constitutes under-age sex and what is the age of consent. I envisage couples—even young couples—travelling from one European country to another, going from legality to illegality to legality to illegality. One must consider that in the international sense.

We are discussing an offence of a conspiracy in this country, and the people who prosecute must be careful to confine themselves to conspiracy in this country. I dislike the idea of sending squads of police officers throughout the world to countries such as Thailand and the Philippines where under-age sex is prevalent, to gather evidence to prosecute people in this country. That is not how I envisage the role of our police force.

That would be an expensive process. I am sure that the police would be delighted to visit those countries and would enjoy being sent to investigate, but it is not a good idea to send our police abroad to pursue such investigations. It is far better that we persuade those countries to bring prosecutions of our nationals in their country for the substantive offence rather than for conspiracy. We should help those countries to prosecute, and perhaps teach them if necessary.

The Bill will be far more useful in connection with charges of incitement to commit offences, and acts of conspiracy in this country that make it clear what the purpose is. The publications that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South described would give rise to those offences. I recognise the difficulties with video tape, but a video tape might be part of the evidence of conspiracy. If a video tape showed several people committing offences against known children, it would be admissible evidence.

It is far more important, however, that we turn our attention to similar publications and the incitement that they engender—advertising that one sees and that one understands is prevalent—and seek convictions for that offence, instead of sending our police officers abroad to collect evidence of substantive offences abroad. That is a dangerous area.

I realise that the Home Office pays increasing attention to offences of conspiracy to commit offences abroad. It is a dangerous area. I am not sure that it is a good idea to go too much into that aspect, which is limited and has evidential difficulties.

The nature of the offence and the fact that it is abhorred throughout the world makes it an exception. We should be looking for more treaties and international agreement in respect of such offences. That is the way forward as much as the Bill, which would have a restricted use in practice. I do not believe that it would result in many prosecutions—certainly not successful ones.

11.20 am

**Mrs. Llin Golding** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I also wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on introducing the Bill, which is a step in

*[Mrs. Llin Golding]*

the right direction. I shall not start cheering until it has passed through the House, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

I shall speak first in the words of a young child, who said:

"I was put in a room. I asked myself why they did that. After a while a man entered the room. He asked me if I do not like men. I said no and if he didn't get out of the room I would shout for help. But he said that even if I shout no one will help me because he has already paid for me. He succeeded in raping me . . . feeling helpless I could do nothing but cry."

That is the face of modern sex tourism; those words were spoken by a 15-year-old girl who thought that she had obtained a babysitting job.

As the world grows smaller and as the risks at home become greater, sex perverts, many from developed countries, travel abroad to find poverty-stricken children who will have sex for money. They rely on the poverty of the countries that they visit, the vulnerability of the children whom they want for sex and the ability to return home after their holiday without the fear of a law that will lead to their prosecution.

But the tide is turning against child sex tourists. The countries that tend to be the receiving countries for such men and women are beginning to tackle the problem. Some of the main sending countries have taken steps to implement laws that would allow prosecutions to take place when the perverts return home.

Every year it is estimated that 1 million children worldwide are lured, forced, sold or tricked into prostitution. Children make their way to the cities in a variety of ways, all of which arise from poverty. Some children are turned adrift by their families, who cannot afford to keep them. Some children are sold by their families to people who simply deal in children. Some children are handed over with an assurance that they will be adopted into a better life. Some children are orphaned; many are tricked into believing that they are to be given employment in respectable jobs. Some children are even kidnapped. Some children are sold into slavery in the surrounding industries, and attractive ones are taken to child brothels where they stay until they die of disease or simply exhaustion. The brothels do not exist to satisfy local need, but are there as tourist attractions. Paedophiles from wealthy countries come to spend holidays in the brothels.

The exploitation of children, both boys and girls, is growing in all countries where poverty is rife. Efforts are being made to stop it; in many places, organisations have been set up. Many groups are committed to stamping out that vile crime. As a collective group, they call themselves End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism, or ECPAT. That group has joined with other organisations such as Christiah Aid, the Jubilee campaign and the Save the Children Fund to form a coalition against child prostitution and child tourism.

The group knows that the sickening tourist trade needs to be tackled at its source and that the place to campaign is not India, the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, Bangkok, Sri Lanka, Romania, Brazil or Argentina—to name but a few of the many countries where the abuse takes place—but the affluent countries that are the source of that foul tourist trade.

I do not want to leave hon. Members with the impression that the countries where the abuse takes place are indifferent, as that would be far from the truth. But while poverty exists on such a scale, it is hard to wipe out such corruption. One of my parliamentary colleagues, my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), told me that his daughter was staying in a hotel in India when she discovered that a German business man was bringing very young girls to his room. She had no doubt that she was witnessing the sexual exploitation of children. She made such a fuss with the hotel manager and created such a row that the German man was thrown out of the hotel. She returned to Britain determined to do something to combat such exploitation. Brave individuals can help; Governments could and should do more.

Many Governments have acted by legislating to allow the prosecution of their citizens on their return to their home countries after their sexual activities abroad. Sweden, Germany, France, Australia, Belgium, Norway, Switzerland, New Zealand, Iceland, Denmark, Finland and the United States of America have legislated to give their domestic courts jurisdiction to prosecute residents and nationals for sexual offences abroad. Britain has not yet done so. The Bill will help to flush out that evil trade, but it does not go far enough—it deals with prosecuting the organisers, not the individual perpetrators.

The law involves the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable; it sets the boundaries. We should never say that it will be too difficult to enforce the law, so we will allow the unacceptable to merge with the acceptable. That is what the Government are doing in saying that, in this country, we will not prosecute sex perverts for abuses that they have committed against children abroad. I do not want to wait for the Government to spend months on an inquiry.

Many hon. Members have signed early-day motions calling on the Government to take action. Many other countries have accepted the reality of their responsibilities—perhaps they have looked at the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and decided that such evil men should have nowhere to hide.

The Government should not leave it to hon. Members to try to amend the Bill at a later stage, but should do it themselves. They should not allow the perverts to return to this country thinking that they will never have to look over their shoulder in fear. Children have such small voices—do not leave them alone to cry in the dark.

11.27 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville):** The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) movingly put the case for controlling this evil trade. There is no difference between us about how we feel about the subject, but the problem is whether we can find effective legal ways to deal with it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on the Bill; he has been in close contact with us over its preparation. The Bill involves paedophilia, one of the most disturbing and distasteful aberrations of the human mind. It is much more widespread—not just abroad, but here in this country—than many people realise.

I am afraid that for the six offences under which people can be prosecuted for the abuse of children, there were 2,272 convictions in 1994 in this country. Three of the

offences carry a maximum sentence of life—as has been said, that is the substantive offence which the penalties in the Bill would match if a person were convicted of incitement or conspiracy.

It is a sad fact that the problem may be getting worse, here as well as overseas. It has been said that foreign travel has made it much easier for people to exploit children in poor countries and for people from the west, using their economic muscle, to corrupt families and children in those countries. Jet travel becomes ever cheaper and more available, and that has made the problem worse.

I am afraid that the availability of so much pornography on the Internet, a phenomenon that has arisen and come into serious use in the past couple of years, will exacerbate the problem because people who have such sexual tastes encourage each other. They talk to each other about what they wish to do to children, and they distribute literature to each other, usually covertly. Increasingly, such material is getting on to the Internet and is being distributed under all sorts of codes so that the sources can be disguised. That will undoubtedly encourage more people with such tendencies to wish to carry out their fantasies on children. They will want to go to countries where opportunities to do that are available because corrupt people in those countries make them available.

We are lucky that child prostitution on the scale that we have heard about in the debate is not a feature of Britain. I hope that it will never become so. However, it is available in different countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. A case has been noted in Cambodia and there are cases in other countries, especially those in south-east Asia. There are child prostitutes in many parts of the third world and, with sex tourism, the trade could spread to other parts of the world. We should all unite in trying to find an effective way to control it.

There has been much debate here, at yesterday's conference and in other places over the past few months about whether extra-territoriality should become part of our law—whether jurisdiction should be extended to cover crimes that are committed overseas specifically to catch people who engage in these filthy habits. A number of arguments, some of which have been heard in this morning's debate, have been advanced for extending jurisdiction. The first and most general argument is that we all deplore sexual abuse and the exploitation of children and that everything possible should be done to prevent or deter people from engaging in it. It has also been said that failure to extend jurisdiction means that child abusers from this country will commit offences overseas for which they cannot be prosecuted here and will go free. That is a powerful argument.

It has been said that reliance on extradition is unsatisfactory because the countries concerned may not request it or may not have sufficient political will to carry it out. Another argument is that we already take extra-territorial jurisdiction over a number of offences and that there are precedents. It should not be forgotten that, before taking the route that led to the War Crimes Act 1991, two distinguished lawyers, one of them a former Director of Public Prosecutions for England, were sent abroad to collect and assess the quality of evidence that could be found so as to come to a decision about whether a reasonable prosecution could be mounted.

**Mr. Donald Anderson:** In the War Crimes Act, the age of the evidence rather than its relevance was the point.

**Mr. Sackville:** Not entirely. The availability of evidence that would be admissible in this country was clearly a key factor.

When those two distinguished lawyers returned here, they presented a report to the Home Secretary and others and it was decided that it would be worth amending the law because prosecutions could be brought. We must be very clear that there is adequate probability that the quality of the evidence that is needed in British courts, which is different or perhaps of a higher quality than is required in many other countries, would be available. I shall deal with that later.

It has also been said in support of extending jurisdiction that abusers often return home with a video of themselves committing an act and that that might provide evidence. That is certainly a strong argument, although defence lawyers would want to ask questions about the provenance of the video. It could not be seen as absolute evidence, although we should consider it in the review of extra-territorial jurisdiction that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has announced. The other strong argument is that other countries have taken extra-territorial jurisdiction and that we should do the same to declare and prove our abhorrence of these practices.

The case against extra-territorial jurisdiction is principally that criminal jurisdiction in England and Wales is traditionally territorially based. That is to say, there is an assumption that for any conduct to constitute an offence under English law, it must to some degree be connected to the territory of England and Wales. The strength of that argument is its simplicity. We take the view that crimes are best investigated in the country in which they are committed by the relevant prosecuting authorities. Subject to certain conditions, we are willing to extradite our nationals to stand trial abroad and we have extradition agreements with many countries.

Of the European Union states, only Britain and Italy are completely free in extraditing nationals but France and Germany, for example, never do that. Where agreements do not exist, ad hoc arrangements may be made in certain circumstances. We take the view that one sovereign state should not interfere in the internal affairs of another.

**Mr. Michael:** How many examples can the Minister give of extraditions under that head?

**Mr. Sackville:** I am not aware of anyone who has been extradited for this offence. There is a lack of will at present in many countries, and that must be taken into account.

Although other countries have adopted extra-territorial jurisdiction, the number of prosecutions based on the principle is small. We know of only two successful extra-territorial prosecutions for child sex offences. Therefore, the practical value may be limited. Later in my speech, I shall mention some of those cases.

If extra-territorial jurisdiction were to be adopted, we could use it only in cases of dual criminality, that is to say, in cases where the behaviour constituted an offence here and under the laws of the country in which the offence occurred. The disadvantage is that there are wide variations in the law between different states. For example, the age of consent varies widely, even among

*[Mr. Sackville]*

European countries. Although an act of sexual intercourse with a 14-year-old child is illegal in the United Kingdom, it is not an unlawful act in Spain, under Spanish law.

Although there is legislation in the United Kingdom to allow prosecutions to be brought extra-territorially in specific circumstances, in practice that is seldom done. Precise figures for the number of successful prosecutions have not been compiled, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been only one in the past three years.

We also cannot disregard the considerable practical difficulties that are involved in mounting prosecutions in the United Kingdom of offences committed within another state's territory, which would be likely to render extra-territorial legislation unenforceable. Our police have no authority to gather evidence abroad. Contrary to the prevailing system elsewhere in Europe, in which written evidence can be admissible, our courts have a long tradition of oral evidence and cross-examination. However, there is no power to compel witnesses from abroad to attend court in this country.

There are doubts as to whether extra-territorial jurisdiction would be of assistance in bringing to justice British nationals who commit offences against children in other countries. Therefore, we feel—subject to the current review—that our efforts should be concentrated on assisting foreign authorities as much as possible. Later in my speech, I shall give some details of the actions that we are taking to give such assistance.

Some of the cases that have taken place have already been mentioned. Some countries have taken extra-territoriality, including Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. However, I must say that the number of successful prosecutions that we are aware of is fairly limited. Germany, for example, passed legislation such as this in July 1993. Proceedings were instigated against three German men, again in relation to alleged offences against children in Thailand, but all three prosecutions failed due to a lack of evidence.

In Norway, three men were convicted in 1990 for sexual offences against children in Thailand and the Philippines. They were sentenced to 18 months', eight months' and six months' imprisonment respectively. They had been found guilty of sexually abusing 13-year-old boys in the Philippines, and two of them had also been found guilty of the same offence while on holiday in Thailand. Apparently, the boys were local prostitutes.

In those cases, films and videos which showed scenes of the offences taking place were confiscated and used in evidence. As well as the videos, the prosecution produced letters that the defendants had written to each other which mentioned the acts that were committed against the boys. No proof of the boys' ages was required or provided, and there was no requirement to show that the acts that were involved constituted offences under the law of Thailand or of the Philippines. An expert witness from Norway, who was a medical practitioner, gave an estimate of the boys' ages after viewing the videos. No affidavits were required to support the allegations, and no witnesses were called from the Philippines or from Thailand.

It is therefore unlikely that the evidence which was produced in that case would have been adequate to secure a conviction were a similar case to be brought in the United Kingdom—of course assuming that we had the necessary jurisdiction.

The Bolin case from Sweden has been mentioned by hon. Members several times. While not wanting in any way to minimise the desire to pursue such individuals, I must say that we are not confident, having carefully examined the Bolin case, that the evidence that was produced in court would have secured a conviction in the United Kingdom under our rules of evidence. I understand that the offender in that case was initially arrested by the authorities in Thailand but absconded. He returned to Sweden. However, because the Swedes do not extradite their nationals, they could not send him back to Thailand. Had a similar incident occurred involving a British national, we would have been able to extradite him to stand trial in Thailand; we would certainly prefer to take that approach.

In that case, the boy alleged that he had settled on the final version of his story after being threatened in Thailand. That was at least what he said. He was looked after, and prepared for his court hearing by, a non-governmental organisation. One must again consider, as has already been mentioned, what would have happened in a British court had he given evidence under cross-examination. Any defence lawyer would have had no difficulty in casting aspersions on the quality of that evidence.

In the Bolin case, the Swedish court preferred the boy's version to that of the defendant because the defendant had admitted to an off-duty police officer who was posing as a fellow child molester that he had molested the boy. The conversation was clandestinely videoed by a Danish television crew. On that evidence, it is unlikely that a court in the United Kingdom could convict.

**Mr. Michael:** From my experience as a journalist and as a magistrate, I counsel a little care in relation to depending too much on the case summary, however accurate, whether the case is tried in the United Kingdom or abroad. There is often considerable misrepresentation, of which those who have sat through a case will be aware. Is not the Minister resting his case entirely on one particular incident, in which his criticisms of the prosecution may be entirely justifiable, to say that there should be no possibility of a prosecution even if there was good evidence in this country?

**Mr. Sackville:** I am to trying demonstrate the difficulties that could easily occur. As to the hon. Gentleman's first point, my comments were not based on press reports. Officials in my Department had access to the transcript of the case and have gone into some detail about it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not think that anything that I have said is pure hearsay.

There are clearly problems with rules of evidence. There is a problem in some countries that have granted extra-territoriality because the concept of best available evidence is allowed. In some cases, judges can decide what weight to give evidence. In our system, that evidence would be absolutely inadmissible. So there are some absolute differences between the way in which our legal system and those of some other countries work. However,

a video of a person committing such an act would appear to constitute admissible evidence. In the coming review on extending jurisdiction, that is something that we shall carefully examine, as the hon. Gentleman asked us to do.

I do not want the House to think that we are in any way not taking a positive stance. We shall carefully examine the pros and cons of extending jurisdiction, and we are taking steps internationally, which I hope will be helpful. We work hard in the various international bodies, particularly in the United Nations General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, to combat child prostitution. We supported the adoption by the commission in 1992 of a programme of action for the prevention of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and have urged all countries to implement the measures contained in it. We frequently raise the question of child prostitution in contacts with the authorities in countries where it is a major concern, including Thailand.

Our own Overseas Development Administration provides assistance to a number of non-governmental projects which involve the rehabilitation of street children and deal with the associated problems of prostitution, drug abuse and violence. The link between drugs and prostitution, including child prostitution, is clear, and has been mentioned today.

Although the United Kingdom police have no powers to pursue child abusers abroad, I should point out that the police service provides assistance to local law enforcement officers directly and through participation in training sessions at the Interpol standing working party on offences against minors. The National Criminal Intelligence Service—NCIS—is able, through Interpol, to provide every assistance to police in countries receiving sex tourists to help to identify Britons among them.

The hon. Members for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and for Tooting (Mr. Cox) referred to the world conference in Sweden. We are, of course, well aware of the proposals and have been invited to participate in it, as have our EU partners and others. However, we have first to consider the extent to which such a conference will be successful, and we need to be very clear what its aims are. We have asked for more information, as have other countries. Once we have received it, we shall decide about representation, but neither hon. Gentlemen should be in any doubt that we are aware of that important conference.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said, despite all the various arguments about the best way to proceed—whether to try to encourage extradition or to go for extra-territoriality—in the end, neither can solve the problem. The problem can be solved only in the countries involved and only if their Governments decide that they do not wish this activity to take place in their jurisdiction. We shall continue to urge all those countries to accept their responsibilities, foremost among which must be the protection of their children from abuse. The issue will continue to be a running sore until they do so.

As has been suggested, unless the situation improves, people who go on holiday to such countries will be under suspicion of being involved in one of these activities in question. It can only be to the disadvantage of those countries, their tourist trade and, indeed, their international reputation if they do not take action.

I hope that the House is aware of the Government's concern and of our determination to ensure that we take any steps we can to limit this vile trade. I believe that the Bill will be a very useful first step down that road.

11.51 am

**Mr. Alun Michael** (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The Minister's response has been extremely disappointing. It appears that we are going to continue to trail behind other countries, including the United States, many of our European partners, Australia and New Zealand. Do we have to wait for them to iron out all the difficulties instead of joining in a multinational initiative to stamp out this trade in degradation and misery?

Members of the public and hon. Members want to hear Ministers coming up with solutions to problems rather than seeking to justify apathy. The Minister confessed that there has not been a single extradition, which makes the offer to extradite pretty lightweight as a means of tackling the problem. Indeed, it is almost meaningless since the countries concerned fear the disastrous effect on the fragile economy of their legitimate tourist industry from any intervention by powerful western countries in respect of those people who participate in sex tourism.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there has not been a single extradition because there has not been a single request for one? No one in any of the countries involved has produced any evidence on which to prosecute British citizens, so whether or not we had extra-territoriality would have been irrelevant because no case would have been made.

**Mr. Michael:** The hon. Gentleman was clearly so keen to frame his intervention that he did not listen to my final sentence. I said that the economic impact on such countries was likely to be disastrous. They fear the impact of any prosecution or any request for the extradition of people from powerful western countries. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recognises that problem.

The existence of pornography and titillation via the Internet is not a reason to despair but a threat which should galvanise us into stronger action to tackle the problem. The Minister is also wrong to suggest that the question of prosecuting acts abroad is a relatively new problem. He made it sound as though the issue had come up only yesterday.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) rightly referred to the prosecution of war crimes. If the quality of evidence available abroad is the real obstacle to action, as the Minister seemed to suggest, why did the Government not send people abroad last summer or two years ago to examine that element of the case? Or is the argument merely designed to act as a further obstacle in later discussions? The issue did not arise when we debated the activities abroad of people involved in drug trafficking, and so on, which hon. Members have wanted to tackle and, indeed, have legislated on in the past couple of years.

In referring to the War Crimes Act 1991, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East was right to point out that the House decided that something must be done through domestic legislation to recognise the need to allow the prosecution of some of the most horrendous crimes of our century, especially those involving bestial

*[Mr. Michael]*

activity during the holocaust. It was intended to show our moral revulsion and express our shame at the actions of fellow human beings. It was also, however, specifically to allow prosecution in this country of acts that were committed abroad.

I agree that there is a difficulty in obtaining convictions. There would, however, also be a difficulty in obtaining prosecutions, although that is in some cases a general problem in the operation of the Crown Prosecution Service. That wider issue also needs to be tackled. We cannot start to tackle the problems at all, however, until we accept that British citizens abroad not only should not exploit and abuse children, but should not be able to use their financial power and influence as British citizens to exploit and abuse children. The right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) was also right to suggest that activities undertaken by British citizens abroad impact on the danger to children in our own society.

The Minister said that he does not want us to think that the Government are doing nothing, but the answer given yesterday to his hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) was not especially reassuring. The hon. Member for Ealing, North asked the Secretary of State whether he would extend the jurisdiction of the courts to enable them to deal with offences committed by United Kingdom nationals outside the territory of the United Kingdom. The question was understood by everybody to refer to the Bill before us today. It is merely a matter of convenience, of course, that the answer was given yesterday.

The Home Secretary stressed the general principle that the jurisdiction of the courts throughout the United Kingdom is territorially based, and said that he believed:

"There are long-standing arguments of principle and of practicality which support this approach."

The answer went on to suggest the little germ that has been spun by the Home Office press machine into being some sort of action or undertaking. The words, however, are very clear:

"It is right, however, that we should from time to time examine whether those arguments remain valid in the light of changing circumstances."

The Home Secretary said that he had

"established an inter-departmental review to look at the implications of change."

That is not exactly a tough or vigorous promise to take action—and neither is the promise of a review, which is expected to take five months to complete. That sounds very much like another delay in responding to hon. Members' very specific concerns.

I began by responding to the Minister's speech because I was surprised and disappointed at his response. I want to place it on record, however, that I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on his success in obtaining the opportunity to introduce a Bill and on his sense of priorities in trying to tackle the abuse of children abroad by UK citizens. Anybody who heard the powerful speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) will have been galvanised into wanting immediate action. The Bill is a small step in the right direction, towards allowing the prosecution of those who organise and profit from such a distasteful trade.

I thought that the Government would help and that we would have a shelf Bill, but if this is a shelf Bill drafted by the Home Office, it is one of the most inelegant to come from a Government Department in a long time. It seems almost to have been phrased so as to make it difficult, if not impossible, to amend it so that the issues aired in this debate could come within its scope. That is extremely disappointing.

Last week, we debated a private Member's Bill dealing with offensive weapons. Today, we are discussing sex tourism. Those are issues that the Home Secretary should have used his initiative to tackle rather than using the praiseworthy initiatives of hon. Members through private Members' Bills.

Despite the general impression of movement, the Home Office in its press release yesterday went out of its way to spell out the difficulties in legislating. Yet as long ago as last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and other hon. Friends expressed concern about the fact that the Government were not taking the initiative. They made a number of suggestions, including the suggestion that the Home Secretary should introduce legislation to facilitate prosecution in the United Kingdom of UK citizens who commit sexual offences against children overseas.

Many months have passed since the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), replied to the letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, and we need to inject a sense of urgency. I am disappointed at the Minister's response today and I call on him to argue the case to the Home Secretary that there is a need for a sense of urgency and for a promise that he will not wait five months for the outcome of another inquiry. The Home Office should get stuck in and make the Bill the vehicle for creating much tougher legislation and for tackling the real issues.

**Mr. Sackville:** Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he supports the extension of jurisdiction to crimes committed overseas? Is that his position?

**Mr. Michael:** In respect of sex tourism and the abuse of children, yes it is, and I hope that the Minister will express his support for that position even if it takes him some time to produce the mechanism to implement it. I am happy to give him an opportunity to give that reassurance to the House. Hon. Members of all parties and the public want action to be taken.

Last year, the Minister of State expressed the Government's

"determination to protect children from all forms of abuse."

He said:

"The sexual exploitation of children is particularly abhorrent, no matter where it occurs".

That element of the Minister's statement goes straight to the heart of the matter. He then claimed that

"our own laws in this area are among the most stringent in the world."

But they are not sufficiently stringent in relation to the activities of British citizens abroad, even though the Minister recognised that those activities were abhorrent wherever they occurred.

We referred earlier to the videos carried back by sex tourists. The House can imagine the possibility of a successful prosecution so long as there is legislation for

such prosecutions to take place. If the door is closed against the possibility of prosecution, nothing can happen. That should not be the approach adopted by the House.

It is clear that the Government are uneasy about creating the power to prosecute in such cases. We should recognise, however, as a number of hon. Members have mentioned, that Britain has obligations under the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which we ratified in 1991. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) especially referred to that in his speech.

The Minister rested a great deal of his case on the effectiveness of the law in regard to prosecutions. Prosecutions fail all the time, but the result is not that the law is abandoned—the House is asked to look for ways to strengthen the law and make it more effective. A successful law is one that leads to no prosecutions because it is obeyed.

The failure to prosecute abroad people such as football hooligans has also led to concern in this country because the problems come back to this country when the individuals involved return.

Those are the issues to which we must pay attention. I do not accept that it would necessarily involve British police wandering the streets of third-world countries at great expense to the taxpayer, as was suggested earlier. Non-governmental organisations have shown a will to help the prosecuting authorities in this country if prosecution were possible.

Australia has the same sort of common law tradition and, I believe, shares the attitude to extradition that the Minister described as ours, yet that country has decided to pass legislation to try to tackle the problem.

We must instil the fear of being caught and prosecuted, to clean up the activities of British citizens abroad and to protect vulnerable children abroad. I hope that as the hon. Member for Hendon, South takes the Bill through the House, the Minister will help him to make it a more powerful piece of legislation which more closely meets the wishes both of members of the public and of Members of Parliament to tackle the activities of British citizens abroad.

The United Nations convention on the rights of the child makes specific reference to bilateral and multinational measures. That is right and important, but the passage also involves an undertaking to

"take all appropriate . . . measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form."

Let us demonstrate a cross-party determination to produce an Act which lives up to that responsibility.

12.6 pm

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): I do not want to detain the House for long. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on promoting the Bill, and on introducing it to us as he did. He gave a sound and sensible explanation of its limited intentions, recognising the difficulties, especially those involving extra-territoriality. Indeed, he relied to some extent on the fact that we have an extradition treaty with Thailand. The Under-Secretary of State, on behalf of the Home Office, also placed considerable weight on that treaty.

That concerns me somewhat as I was a member of an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Thailand and Indonesia in 1989 and our experience at that time was that the Thai authorities, far from wanting to discourage such activity, simply turned a Nelson eye to the whole procedure. We had a busy week. We went to East Timor, the Cambodian refugee camps and the River Kwai, and we met countless politicians and generals. But it was held that our education about Thailand would not be complete without a visit to the district of Patpong. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) seems to find that somewhat amusing, as we all did; it is indeed an appropriate name for that district.

We were told that we should view some of the clubs, and that is what we did. In that rather unsavoury seedy area of Bangkok we were greeted by all sorts of touts offering all sorts of services, but principally trying to sell the clubs by which they were employed. At one club the first thing that met our eye was what I can describe only as a balletic coupling by two young people, with a large audience enjoying the spectacle. From then on, it was downhill all the way.

The second club looked more like something out of Hieronymus Bosch. We were assailed on all sides by very young hostesses who made it entirely clear that all sorts of services were available. There is always comfort and strength in numbers; we were a party of eight of nine people and we all behaved perfectly, but it was clear that all those activities in that substantial district of Bangkok must have been known to the authorities, who were turning a blind eye to them. I do not for one moment believe that the Thai authorities would wish to promote sex tourism in their country, but they were certainly doing very little to discourage it. I am therefore somewhat sceptical of the robustness of Thai efforts to extradite from this country anyone who might be held to have committed any sort of crime against children in that area of Bangkok.

If I have some concern about the Bill, it is in so far as it could impinge on legitimate tourist traffic to the countries concerned. The Bill is rightly aimed at fringe organisations which are offering a particularly unpleasant service and a particularly unpleasant type of tourism, but my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South will have to be careful in drawing up the boundaries between prosecuting those companies which promote sex tourism and those which are part of the legitimate tourist industry.

I am concerned that both my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South and my hon. Friend the Minister place such a great weight on the extradition treaty, given that no one has been extradited thus far. I do not expect a flood of extradition orders to send British citizens to Bangkok to be tried for offences against children—more's the pity. Only when the countries involved clean up what is happening in their own countries will that vile and unpleasant trade come to an end.

12.11 pm

**Mr. Piers Merchant** (Beckenham): Behind this Bill lie hundreds of thousands of sad and tragic cases of children who have lost their childhood, who have been assaulted and abused, who are kept in confined conditions, who descend into an evil world of crime, drugs, disease and often death and who may survive to adulthood, but will carry with them for the rest of their lives mental and physical scars.

I very much welcome the Bill, the aim of which is to address some of the problems connected with this matter. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the work

*[Mr. Piers Merchant]*

that he and his colleagues did last year and on bringing up recommendations for action before Christmas. I should like to see further action than just that encompassed in the Bill, but I do not want to say or do anything that will stand between this excellent Bill and its enactment. For that reason, I wish it a healthy and successful passage into law.

The Bill will try to deal with a severe problem—paedophile sex tourism. I believe that the Bill will drive substantial inroads into destroying that industry in this country, as it should be destroyed. Above all, the Bill provides a mechanism whereby successful prosecutions can be achieved. My hon. Friend the Minister has rightly outlined the practical differences in terms of evidence and achieving prosecutions that could be encountered by other approaches.

One of the most unacceptable features of the paedophile sex trade is the fact that, while serious offences exist in this country, which carry heavy penalties for those who break the law, there is at present no law against the same people carrying out the same offences abroad. The Bill will help address that, and that is very much to be welcomed.

It is a matter of great sadness that the UK is one of the countries responsible for large numbers of citizens going abroad to exploit children. We are in the top four—as far as statistics can carry relevance in this area—with the United States, Australia and Germany. That is greatly to be condemned and it urges action upon us.

The problem worldwide is indeed severe. I do not want to delay the House by quoting the figures, but on totting them up, one quickly approaches 1 million children who are in one way or another connected with that vile trade. The countries that have been referred to as having a severe problem are probably the tip of the iceberg. In other countries in Latin America and Africa, the same problem, or all the potential for it, exists. I am worried that, although the Bill will deal with many of the severe problems, there is a risk that it will have the effect of shifting the trade elsewhere.

For example, the requirement in the Bill that the acts must be illegal in the country in which they take place may result in the trade moving to those countries in which those acts are not illegal. As the House has been told, age limits for certain sexual acts vary greatly across the world. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and my hon. Friend the Minister will continue to look closely at the possibility of extending offences so that they apply extra-territorially and of including either now or at a later stage an extension of those offences that it will catch. Several severe offences are included in the schedule, but we should consider also including crimes related to the production of pornography abroad and perhaps even some offences against adults. If this Bill is not the right forum for that, I hope that the issue will be considered separately.

As my hon. Friend the Minister rightly said, there are precedents for extra-territorial offences in English law. While they may not be common under our system, there is no principled reason why they should not be examined as a possibility. As he said, other countries have introduced similar laws. While my hon. Friend the Minister is right to say that at present there are not many examples of successful prosecutions, that has to be set against the time scale. Most of these laws have been introduced only recently. Indeed, some have been introduced only in the past 12 to 18 months. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the matter in detail and to monitor it as time moves on and other cases are brought and there are perhaps further successful prosecutions.

While my hon. Friend the Minister is right to say that it may be difficult to gather adequate evidence and for it to be presented and properly tested in the British courts, and while I would never wish to see our standards of evidence and of justice diminished, it may well prove in the light of experience to be easier to pursue such cases than expected. Even if that turns out not to be the case, there is an argument for having on the statute book a strong law, even if it is rarely applied, because it acts as a deterrent and a clear sign that this society condemns those activities. When there is not a law and there has been no attempt to put one on the statute book, that might salve the consciences of those who are probably inhibited mostly by their guilt and who communicate with others who have similar tastes principally to overcome that guilt. That is an important factor that must be borne in mind.

I welcome the Bill. I wish it a hasty and successful passage. I hope that it is effective in dealing with this terrible problem across the world. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South and my hon. Friend the Minister will continue to monitor the issue in the hope of introducing further legislation, if and when the need arises.

12.18 pm

**Sir Michael Neubert** (Romford): At the end of this month, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you and I will have served as Members of this House for 22 years. In all that time, I have never once been successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills. To have a reasonable chance of advancing legislation, one needs to come out in the top 20 in that ballot. Not once has my name appeared. So I wish immediately to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on his good fortune in securing a high place in this year's programme of private Members' Bills, and to wish him success with his Bill. My welcome is whole-hearted, unlike that of at least one other sponsor of the Bill, who gave it only half-hearted and lukewarm support.

The Bill is an excellent example of what a private Member's Bill should be. It meets a current and perceived need, it is specific and practical in its purpose and it has attracted a consensus of support which should ensure its passage to the statute book. I think the Bill will serve the country and the cause of children well.

Although I have not had the opportunity to introduce legislation on this matter, I was able to offer a debate to the House in April 1994 on safeguarding the younger generation. One issue that arose in that debate was the sexual exploitation of children by tourists, which also arose in a similar debate in April 1995, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) contributed. We are making progress and we are indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South for using his opportunity to advance the cause of children. Children have their champions in the House, as has been evident. I wish to mention at least one other champion—my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), who cannot be here today, but who plays a prominent part in the campaign.

Shakespeare lamented man's inhumanity to man, but today we are discussing man's inhumanity to children. There is nothing new about that activity. I remember reading a novel by Lawrence Durrell about child prostitution in Alexandria. What is new is the access that we now have to all parts of the world and to other countries and cultures, which makes such activities easier to pursue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South mentioned my past involvement in the travel industry and it is true that from 1960 onwards I helped to open up the world to travel by organising inclusive air holidays throughout the world. On balance, travel has been a benefit. It has enriched people's lives, given them new insights, and made them more tolerant of others. The difference it has made is quite staggering. Back in 1960, only 5 million people in this country had been abroad at all. Two or three holidays a year are now usual and almost regarded as people's birthright. People think nothing of travelling abroad, and people now travel widely.

One consequence of wider travel is that, once people are abroad, the social sanctions, the constraints, the taboos and the stigmas no longer apply. That is why we see lager-lout behaviour, for example, when people go abroad to support their clubs in international football competitions. That is also true in the sexual sphere as well. I remember that Frankie Howerd once made an amusing point about cruising—once the ship was out of port, the barriers were down. When people go abroad, they take advantage of the fact that they are away from the constraints of their colleagues and relatives, who know them, and they can engage in behaviour and activities that would be quite unacceptable here. In the case of the sexual exploitation of children, that is particularly perverse and distasteful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South has scored on one point in the Bill, which has not been recognised. One especially odious aspect of what we have been discussing this morning is the commercial exploitation by third parties of this activity. It is bad enough for individuals to go abroad and engage in the exploitation of under-age children, but I think that it is one degree worse for others to take commercial advantage of that in this country. They are detached from the acts, but they benefit financially. To the extent that the Bill will tackle those whose business lies in arranging such tours, it is an innovation that should be welcomed—limited though it may be.

On the question of implementation, some of this morning's comments have been jejune—I think that that is the right word—because they have failed to recognise the great difficulties of this sphere of action. The Government have rightly outlined those difficulties and have made haste slowly. For reasons that I will develop, their action is entirely reasonable.

I am glad to say that my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), as a barrister, was able to point out some of the problems. When we are merely one country among many, it is naive to suggest that we can take effective action to stem the flow of tourists abroad and stop the practice of prostitution in other countries. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby said, if a country has 60,000 child prostitutes, does any hon. Member imagine that that level of activity is sustained solely by foreign tourists or by Britons going abroad on holiday? Of course it is not. It is a deeply endemic problem for the country involved, which will have its own priorities that it must tackle. The idea that such countries will devote a high priority to the extradition of British nationals, to pursue cases against them for one act of child prostitution, is neither rational nor reasonable. We must keep these things in perspective.

The United Nations has sought protection for children, but not from one country as to another. We are not going to have a Gulf war on sexual exploitation, with a coalition of nations going into Thailand to stamp out child prostitution. The UN is calling for the basic human right of protecting children, but principally by countries within their own borders, and not by one country interfering in the affairs of another, however disreputable and despicable the activities of that country's nationals might be when they go on holiday abroad.

As a result, there have been regrettable divisions between the campaigning organisations that have been putting pressure on hon. Members and the Government to take action. I have been very impressed by the activities of the Action for Children Campaign, whose director is the Reverend Graham St. John Willey, who raised many signatures for an early-day motion, to which I was persuaded to add mine—not immediately because, as we know, early-day motions now proliferate to such an extent that we have several thousand a Session and no one takes any account of them. That motion attracted much support—from more than half the Members in the House—and unquestionably played its part in bringing the shameful activity of sexual offences against children to the top of our agenda this morning and to that of other counsels in government and elsewhere.

Another organisation, the Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism, has many worthy and eminent charities among its membership, which are not being entirely reasonable, but reflect some of the views that have been expressed this morning. That organisation arranged for one of my constituents to send me a printed card—no doubt other hon. Members have also received such cards—that states:

> "Britain is one of the few western nations that still refuses to prosecute its subjects who commit sexual offences against children around the world.
>
> I am disgusted at the Government's opposition to passing a law that will allow prosecution of these people."

That begs a considerable number of questions. In view of all the difficulties that the Minister rightly outlined at the Dispatch Box, it is not right to take that view of the Government. Cases have failed in the courts and it would be irresponsible of us, as legislators, to suggest that an ineffective law is better than no law. The British public would be the first to complain about the costs of aborted cases, as when the Serious Fraud Office has failed to convict people whom it has charged with major offences. I see that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is in his seat. He would be the first to criticise the waste of public money. Similarly, police costs are not inconsiderable.

One of the difficulties has been illustrated by the references to the War Crimes Act 1991, an analogy to which we should turn our attention because there are similarities. It deals with what are now seen—though they were not necessarily so regarded at the time—as anti-social, criminal offences committed in another country by people who are now citizens of the United Kingdom.

*[Sir Michael Neubert]*

Those of us who supported the War Crimes Act did so with extreme reluctance. I was hesitant about embarking on a course of action that would rely on 50-year-old evidence from elderly people whose recollection of events would be unsound. None the less, like a majority of hon. Members, I decided to support the Bill on the principle that if a crime has been committed, no matter what the lapse of time, it must be pursued and prosecuted. However, I have no confidence in that Act as an effective means of judgment and punishment of those responsible for the dreadful deeds of the holocaust. It is on the statute book, but we have not had a single conviction. I doubt whether we shall. I would long hesitate before I supported a Bill such as that urged on us by the Opposition that would be as likely to be ineffective in practice, despite all the theory.

The speech of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) demonstrated the difference between being in government and being in opposition. In opposition, one can beat the air with outrage and urge all sorts of action on the Government. In government, Ministers have a responsibility to assess matters coolly from all points of view and particularly from that of the public interest. They must consider cost, feasibility and the reputation of the law and come to a decision. The Minister, rightly, is moving slowly and his review will, I hope, produce further evidence. Little evidence has been put before us this morning to persuade us to take the more radical action urged by those who are impatient, especially by those outside the House.

I shall close with a point made by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), which I had also intended to make. To get such matters into perspective, we have look at our own back yard and observe the mote in our own eye. To talk about child prostitution as though it were a phenomenon encountered only abroad on holiday is not to see what is tragically happening in our country. I, too, saw articles about the revelations of the chief constable of West Yorkshire, Keith Hellawell, earlier this week. He said:

"on current trends up to 70 per cent. of teenagers could be involved in drug taking by the year 2005."

Of the effect that that was having on young people who sell themselves for drugs, he said:

"There are prostitutes in Bradford, 11, 12, and 13-year-olds, who are crackheads. We can't lock them up; all we can do is take them back to their care homes, where they have a bath and are back prostituting for crack later."

Those children are in our care. Even they are not protected against exploitation by those who engage in sexual activity, even though they are under age. That can happen in our country, only a couple of hundred miles away. We are not doing anything effective about that, but we are seeking to achieve protection for thousands of young people worldwide.

We must keep such matters in a proper perspective. Declaratory legislation is not of much value; it is just an empty gesture. We can all state that we deplore certain activities, but in government we must be effective. I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister that we should explore all the possibilities and take our time to produce the evidence.

We are all under some obligation to ensure that the climate in which people can consider going abroad for certain activities is conducive to that wish. I am afraid that certain companies operating in my former sphere of interest, the travel industry, such as Club 18-30, unashamedly promote their holidays as an opportunity for sex with strangers. That is all that company is aiming at and it has run a distasteful series of advertisements for its current season's holidays. It is only a relatively short step from an 18-year-old going abroad for sex with strangers to going abroad to have sex with under-age children. We must be more strict and reintroduce some of the old stigmas and taboos to make such practices seem less attractive and less acceptable than apparently they are in today's modern world. If we can play any part in achieving that in the long term, that will help, too.

For now, I renew my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South and I welcome his initiative. I hope that his Bill will secure a speedy passage.

12.35 pm

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton): I am in total agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert). His realistic approach to the Bill is entirely sensible.

I felt that earlier in the debate some confusion crept in in the encounter between my hon. Friends the Members for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), which essentially focused on the legitimacy of the jurisdiction contained in the Bill. The Bill has got it right. I must take to task slightly the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), who made an impassioned and moving plea to address some of the ghastly things that go on in other countries. I urge her to appreciate that no one on the Conservative Benches is in anything but total agreement with her, and we share her reaction to what goes on in other countries. We are all against child prostitution, wherever it happens.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire said, we make law in the House and the courts must be courts of law, not courts of morals. Whatever we put into law and whatever we legislate for must be founded in sensible legal principle that our courts are able properly to enforce.

The real issue over which we slightly disagree with other hon. Members is how far the jurisdiction of the English courts should be allowed to stretch. Can the long arm of the law go from here to Bangkok, or should it stop at the boundaries of our country? There is a severe danger of which the House should be deeply wary in saying that we have the right to legislate for behaviour in other countries.

In prisons in Bangkok, there are British citizens who have been prosecuted for murder or drug peddling in Thailand. Quite rightly, the offence that took place in that country should be prosecuted and tried there. If we were to say that English justice could stretch that far, be it for child prostitution, murder or peddling of drugs, we would create a situation in which one country was subject to two laws. That would be profoundly confusing and difficult for us to administer. It would mean sending British policemen to other countries to apply our law in their territories. If one messed about with the fundamental principle of justice—that it should be confined in one nation—severe problems would emerge.

The Bill says that the offence can be prosecuted if it can be defined as one that is rooted in Britain. The Bill has properly been drafted to say that if the offence is

advertising, and recruiting people for, child prostitution in this country to practise it in another country, it can be prosecuted in this country.

If, however, we regard the offence as taking place in another country, and believe that the jurisdiction of the British courts can apply to it, we step into extremely dangerous territory. We must be clear in our mind about the judicial principles in which the Bill is rooted. It is essential to understand those principles.

12.39 pm

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton): I apologise to the House for not being in the Chamber earlier in the debate—I was slaying other dragons in other parts of the building.

More than a year ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and I met the Home Secretary to try to persuade him that the evils of international child pornography were so great that we should bend every sinew, as a Government, to help stop it. He was rightly worried about our abilities to do so at that time, and my right hon. Friend and I left the meeting with no great optimism that legislation would ever reach the statute book.

When I first came to this place about 22 years ago—with you, Madam Deputy Speaker—I felt strongly, as a lawyer, that we should not introduce any legislation in this place that was likely to be unenforceable. I believed that that was not the function of Parliament or of our courts, that it was a waste of time and that we should always be constrained in the limits of our ambitions.

My opinion has changed and qualified over the years. I have learnt that there is a value in laws that are declaratory of seriously wrong behaviour, which we do not expect of our citizens.

I have not completely gone over to the opinion that we should have declaratory laws, but I have moved in that direction because I realise that some people feel that there is nothing wrong in doing something against which no law exists in this country. I am, therefore, prepared to accept a law that is predominantly declaratory, provided that in some circumstances it may have a practical and enforceable effect.

There is merit in the warning sounded by my hon. Friends the Members for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) and for Romford (Sir M. Neubert), both of whom made interesting and significant speeches, but in my opinion, this place has a function in passing laws in such circumstances as these.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on his determination and dedication to this cause and so many other causes, in the pursuing of which he is a distinguished representative of, at least, the Conservative party in this place. I also wish to encourage my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who have shown interest and expressed concern that we should advance this matter as far as we sensibly and reasonably can.

There has been a change in the climate in the Home Office, or at least among politicians in the Home Office, since my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby and I first spoke to the Home Secretary about those matters. I welcome that very much, because the evil of the exploitation of children is one of the most sickening and horrifying modern manifestations of social behaviour. It is one of the modern horrors of the world and we must all co-operate to do what we can to stop it.

People say that there are doubts about extra-territorial legislation—there have been doubts, and one reason why I have changed my view is that those doubts have been, to a substantial extent, diminished. We have introduced extra-territorial legislation in the world of finance. We had some agonising debates about whether we could do anything about California imposing double taxation. There are various subjects on which we originally said that we could do nothing, but found that we could do something. Equally, we found that we could do something under the war crimes legislation that the House passed with an overwhelming majority. A prosecution is currently under way—the matter is sub judice, so I shall say no more about it.

**Mr. Couchman:** Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** I cannot give way. My hon. Friend has already spoken and I am under time constraints.

There are examples of extra-territoriality and it remains to be seen whether they are enforceable. Certainly, the stand that we took in the House over extra-territorial financial relationships with America may have modified the financial laws that were being laid down in the United States. If we co-operate with the laws of foreign countries, we may also see some positive results. That is surely the key to the change in the world in recent times.

We have all become more international and our legal systems have had to become more international. Yesterday, in a question to the Leader of the House, I deplored the fact that the Government had meekly agreed to an extension of five years for the right of individual references to the European Court of Human Rights. I strongly object to the fact that we have done so without referring the matter to Parliament for discussion, because it is important. But I do not argue from that basis that we have no obligations to link ourselves into European or international laws as part of the new process of the open world. We shall deal with the appalling child pornography, as shown by the exploitation of children as set out in the Bill, only if we co-operate and give our legal support to countries that are trying to deal with the problem.

I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South and to encourage the Government to do what they can to support this Bill, to make it effective in practice and to remove as many barriers as possible to the law's enforcement. We should be thinking positively and constructively and we should show the Government's concern for the care and welfare of children, wherever they are in the world. I hope that the Government will be emboldened, not just by my speech, but by the Bill introduced so admirably by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South.

12.48 pm

**Mr. John Marshall:** We have had an interesting debate comprising 10 Back-Bench speeches. As three of them were made by lawyers, the House may be surprised that the debate is shortly to come to a conclusion.

*[Mr. John Marshall]*

Everyone is agreed that the sickening trade in young bodies is offensive. We all want to do our best to bring it to an end. I am sure that the Minister will have heard speeches from both sides of the House commending the Government on their initiative in proposing a further inquiry into extra-territorial legislation, particularly in respect of videos. Clearly, the main action has to come from the Thai, Philippine and other such authorities, but the Bill will help to tackle the sickening trade. The fact that young children can lose their innocence at the age of 10 or 11 must offend every decent Member of the House and all our constituents.

I hope that the Bill receives its Second Reading and that it will have a positive but not too prolonged period in Committee.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).*

## Trading Schemes Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

12.49 pm

**Sir Nicholas Scott** (Chelsea): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is the first time for many years that I have moved a Second Reading without the comforting support of the Dispatch Box. However, the appeal throughout the House of this Bill was not apparent for many of the measures that I moved from the Dispatch Box, especially when I was a Social Security Minister. I hope that the Bill, which has simple aims, will have widespread support and that it will pass swiftly to the statute book.

The Bill seeks to tackle loopholes that have emerged in current legislation governing selling and trading schemes. The Bill does not seek to impose unreasonable restraints on legitimate direct selling businesses. Before turning to the Bill's substance, I should like to thank the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), and his advisers for their help and guidance. The Department of Trade and Industry published a consultation paper on the issue last year, which provoked considerable interest in this area of commercial activity and, in due course, support for early action, which is represented by the Bill.

I am also grateful to the Direct Selling Association for its advice and guidance. It has taken the lead in advising those engaged in direct selling and by drawing up a code of conduct for its members. In every way, it has sought to ensure that those engaged in direct selling—which, as I shall show, plays a significant part in the overall retail sector of our economy—understand their rights, responsibilities and duties to those to whom they sell.

I am especially grateful to the DSA's director, Mr. Richard Berry, who has been an immense help, and to Mr. Mike Smythe of Lawrence Graham, who also has considerable expertise in this area and helped me in the preparation of the Bill. I also thank hon. Members in all parts of the House who, in one way or another, have expressed their support for the Bill and its aims.

In essence, the Bill is designed to close a loophole in the Fair Trading Act 1973 through which the promoters of a wide range of "get rich quick" schemes have managed to avoid proper regulation. It is estimated—it can only be a tentative estimate—that over the past two years investors, especially those looking for a good way to invest redundancy payments, have lost some £30 million as a result of the way in which some of those schemes have operated.

The most worrying schemes are strikingly similar to the widely reported pyramid selling scams prevalent in Romania and Russia in recent years. Under those schemes, people are persuaded to make regular payments to the promoter and to encourage others to do the same, having been promised that after a time they will receive a large return not only on their own investment but on those made by others whom they have introduced to the scheme. To gain credibility, some of the promoters have made payments to a few of the original participants, but usually within a year many of the promoters have absconded or managed to transfer the accumulated funds into offshore and thus untouchable bank accounts. That type of scheme is not, alas, covered by the present trading laws.

I have been advised by the DTI that the most effective solution—one that the Department is anxious to have on the statute book—would be to widen the scope of the pyramid selling regulations introduced under the Fair Trading Act 1973. The regulations were originally introduced to deal with abuses in the promotion of direct selling businesses. At that time, inexperienced participants were often encouraged to over-invest in stocks and products and were offered no opportunity to recover their investment if they were unsuccessful in their part-time businesses. The purpose of the Bill is to update the existing regulations.

As I have said, it is not my intention to impose bureaucratic restraint on the direct selling industry. The legitimate direct selling of consumer goods now accounts for approximately £1 billion of retail trade and offers very useful part-time employment to thousands of would-be entrepreneurs. It is an industry that deserves encouragement. In view of the growing number of people seeking ways to supplement their family incomes, however, it is right that we should ensure that such opportunities are properly and fairly regulated.

I am aware that some hon. Members—especially my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who is not able to be here—wish the Bill to go further. I do not believe that it would be practical to produce legislation—certainly not a private Member's Bill—to cover every aspect of the misuse of trading schemes and pyramid selling operations. Once the Bill has reached the statute book, as I hope that it will, it might be possible for the Government or another hon. Member to consider whether other legislation—primary or secondary—could extend the protection of people involved in a sphere of commercial activity which is overwhelmingly positive for our economy as a whole and for those engaged in it, but in which there have been too many abuses in recent years for us to turn our back on them. The Bill is therefore restricted to so-called pyramid selling and similar schemes.

Nearly everyone will have come across pyramid selling or direct selling operations. There is a distinction between them which I shall make clear. Pyramid selling activities, which are covered in the Bill, are the ones about which we should be concerned. I imagine that hundreds if not thousands of our constituents earn or supplement their income by selling goods or services through a trading scheme. This can be a rewarding and legitimate sideline or a lucrative form of full-time self-employment. In many trading schemes, it is also possible to earn by recruiting others and from commission on sales made by those recruits.

These trading schemes provide opportunities for thousands of individuals to become entrepreneurs and perhaps 300,000 men and women supplement their income in this way. Their sales can vary from a few hundred pounds a year to tens of thousands of pounds a year, and hon. Members may be surprised to learn that total annual turnover is estimated to exceed some £300 million. Members of such trading schemes are, in practice, retailers. They are not acting as consumers, so they do not benefit from measures designed to protect consumers. As entrepreneurs, manifestly they take risks. The Fair Trading Act 1973 is designed to provide protection from the greatest risks. Under that Act, it is an offence to persuade someone to make a payment with the promise of rewards for getting others to join the scheme. That is central to what I am talking about and should ensure that trading schemes are primarily retailing arrangements.

The Act also provides for regulations to ensure that every member of a trading scheme has a fair contract with the scheme's promoter. There can also be regulations about the sort of promotional material that is used to recruit new members. Unfortunately, as we have discovered in recent years, the protection of the Fair Trading Act is not available to members and potential members of all trading schemes. The Bill seeks to extend that scope, but it cannot do everything and some schemes will fall outside its scope.

The greatest risk comes from the expectation of riches from recruiting others. That expectation is created and inflated to persuade gullible people to put money into what I can only call a pyramid scam. If the scheme were subject to the Fair Trading Act, it would be unlawful to accept any payment induced by the prospect of substantial rewards from recruiting others, or even to try to persuade someone to make such a payment.

The basis of pyramid scams is geometric progression. Some of us may remember the story of the Egyptian slave who persuaded his master to agree to give him one grain of rice for the first square of the chessboard, two grains for the second, four for the third, eight for the fourth, and so on. The slave's master was bankrupt before half the chessboard had been covered and accounted for. The slave, like the promoters of modern pyramid selling scams, understood the power of geometric progression.

Promoters of modern scams are greedier even than the Egyptian slave, whose scam involved mere doubling. Modern pyramid scams are more likely to use a higher power, say, of five. In a modern scam, each new member might be expected to recruit five people, who each recruit five people, and so on. There would in theory be 19,530 people in a six-level pyramid of recruits below each member.

If the member paid £50 to join the scam on the basis of £10 for each of the five persons recruited to the next level down, £1 for each person at the next four levels down, and £10 for each person at the sixth level down, in theory he could expect to get more than £160,000. Turn that into a monthly scheme, as is frequently the case—with payments by standing order, of course—and he might expect an annual income of £1,922,560 for every £600 that he pays, although it seems that he would have a fat chance of receiving anything like that.

At first glance, of course, for many people it seems only too easy to earn great sums, and the risks seem remarkably low for the possible returns. In my example, the punter would have covered his stake by recruiting only five others, but only the first to join such schemes receive substantial rewards. Most—in fact, the great majority—of those who join such schemes lose all that they put in. Some people are seduced by the idea of great riches into paying considerable sums—thousands or even tens of thousands of pounds—into such schemes. Many of them, as I said, may have had significant redundancy payments and lost them as a result. Sadly, most have lost virtually all that they paid in. Many have lost hundreds, even thousands of pounds, and some have lost tens of thousands of pounds.

The schemes are nothing less than a swindle of the public. The promoters know full well that the schemes are not subject to the Fair Trading Act controls.

*[Sir Nicholas Scott]*

Nevertheless, they often assure potential members that the scheme meets all the requirements of the Act. Indeed, the promotional material and contracts for such schemes often appear fully to meet the requirements of the regulations, even to the extent of including statutory warnings. That appearance of legality—it is just an appearance—is part and parcel of the swindle. The schemes do untold commercial damage to law-abiding schemes and their members. The promoters and members of those schemes say that the law-abiding schemes welcome the existing controls under the Fair Trading Act 1973. As I have explained, the purpose of the Bill is to ensure that members of all trading schemes have similar protection.

As I said at the outset, the Bill is simple in concept. It is designed to widen the coverage of the existing controls under the Fair Trading Act 1973. I shall run briefly through the clauses. Clause 1 would replace section 118 of part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973, which determines which schemes are subject to the controls specified elsewhere in that part of the Act.

Section 118 limits the controls to schemes in which goods or services or both are provided by a promoter, and—I emphasise the word "and"—the goods and services are supplied by members, and most of the sales do not take place on premises where the promoter or member carries on business, and members expect benefits from the recruitment of other members, whether by themselves or others, from their own or any other member's change of status within a scheme, from supplying goods, training or other services to other participants and from commission on sales by other members. Under existing legislation, the controls apply only to schemes that satisfy all four criteria. However, many schemes, including reputable ones, do not satisfy one or another of the first three criteria. Indeed, almost any scheme could be restructured so that it did not satisfy all the criteria and thus the present controls are effectively voluntary.

Clause 1 would replace the four criteria. Proposed subsection (1) contains two criteria. The first is that the participants expect to benefit from any of the matters specified in proposed subsection (2). The second criterion contains conditions relating to the goods and services sold through the scheme. I shall come later to the definition of "goods" in this context. The conditions for the second criterion are set out in subsections (3) and (4). One or other of the conditions must be met unless the powers provided in proposed subsection (7)(a) are used to disapply the second criterion. That sounds complicated, but if hon. Members look at the Bill, they will see that it is relatively straightforward. The proposed section 118 lists all the ways in which members of trading schemes may earn income. The main ways are introducing others to the scheme and selling goods and services. Other ways are also covered by the Bill. They include commission on sales made by other members, and payments related to the continued participation or promotion, or other change in status, of members. I could go on, but as most of the provisions, if the House passes the Bill this morning, will be set out in greater detail in regulations for which the Bill provides, I hope that the House will look favourably on the legislation.

It is essential that the controls apply to any trading scheme and not only to the very limited number covered by existing provisions. The proposed controls would apply to any trading scheme devised in which the public may be in danger from inducements to make payments based on the prospect of rewards from recruiting others. Clause 1 has been drafted to go as wide as necessary but no wider. As I have explained, proposed section 118(6) makes it possible to narrow the coverage and there are other powers to fine-tune the provisions in the Bill as a whole. Proposed subsection (8) would widen the definition of goods and proposed subsection (9) would define "provision or supply".

Clause 2 is a technical adjustment to the existing legislation. These days, when we pass legislation, we need increasingly to take account of developments in technology and commercial practice. It provides for the regulation of promotional material aimed at potential members. Such material may be advertisements, prospectuses, circulars or notices. The existing regulations apply only to documents, and clause 2 would widen the coverage to all forms of promotional material, such as videos, recorded messages and the use of the Internet, which is now commonly used to reach potential members.

Clause 2 also removes the distinction in section 119 between invitations to people to become participants, and information calculated to lead directly or indirectly to people becoming participants. The present distinction serves no practical purpose.

Clause 3 provides transitional protection, ensuring that nobody can be prosecuted as a result of the wider coverage in the new arrangements unless he has consented to or connived in the act that constitutes the offence.

Clause 4 ensures financial provision for the Bill. However, I understand that the Bill is expected to result in a reduction rather than an increase in public expenditure, which will come as a surprise to hon. Members. Without the Bill, the enforcement authorities have had to use other legislation to protect the public from scams that the Bill, will make subject to the Fair Trading Act controls. Those are expected to be more cost-effective, and thus to result in a reduction in public expenditure.

Clause 5 contains the short title and provides for the Bill's application to Northern Ireland. It also provides for a commencement order, which will make it possible for the Act to be brought into force at the same time as any regulations made under it.

I finish on the note on which I began. The Bill will not solve all the problems in a difficult, complicated and sensitive area, but I believe that it will stop the exploitation of vulnerable people by those who peddle promises of instant riches. It is time for Parliament to halt those practices. I therefore commend the Bill to the House and ask hon. Members to give it a Second Reading.

1.11 pm

**Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva** (Brentford and Isleworth): Pyramid selling and multi-level marketing have become great and expanding businesses. Such marketing exercises involve more than people trading from their own homes; it has come to my notice that professional people such as doctors, surgeons and others who see and relate to people at different levels are also now encouraging and indulging in multi-level marketing and pyramid selling.

Patients come to see doctors to get fitter and healthier, and in that relationship they may be encouraged to buy water filters, air cleaners or filters and other things, in the surgery. That is a remarkable development. I have come across cases in which people were encouraged to buy in that way, and the professionally qualified doctors and accountants—I suppose even lawyers—who sell various goods on a part-time basis to their clients are earning large amounts of money.

That is a complicated matter, and the Bill proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) is an attempt to put certain matters right. In the late 1960s, when such trading schemes came into being, there was a great deal of demand. There were many abuses, and successive Governments have made attempts to correct those, as the schemes have expanded to include many millions of people.

The abuses current at that time included demands that participants pay to participate in a scheme, coupled with the promise of bonuses when they recruited others into the scheme; the absence of any written contract setting out a participant's rights; the absence of a cooling-off period for new recruits, or of a right for participants to claim refunds for unsold goods on withdrawal from the scheme; and inadequate or misleading information about the nature of the scheme and the rewards available to participants. These aspects were regulated under the Fair Trading Act 1973 and the pyramid selling regulations contained in section 119 of that Act.

The main aim of part XI of the 1973 Act and the regulations was to ban the taking of certain payments by a scheme's promoters. The receipt of participation fees from recruits, payments for trading, non-returnable deposits and payments of more than £25 for goods obtained during the first seven days of participation in a scheme were outlawed. That went a long way at the time towards making things better, but not much better. My right hon. Friend's Bill will go further to make the current situation more effective.

Section 120 of part XI of the 1973 Act identified two specific criminal offences—receiving payment from a potential participant who was persuaded by the prospect of benefits from introducing others to a scheme, and using the prospect of benefits from introducing others to a scheme to try to persuade someone to make a payment. The Bill is designed to amend the scope of the definition of trading schemes under part XI of the 1973 Act, and applies controls to a wider range of schemes. Its purpose is to protect vulnerable people from financial loss by ensuring that all trading schemes whose members recruit other people are subject to controls under the Financial Services Act 1986 and under part XI of the 1973 Act.

My right hon. Friend spoke in detail about some aspects of the scheme. In particular, section 118 of the 1973 Act defines the trading schemes to which part XI applies. The Bill introduces two new clauses—clause 1 proposes to substitute section 118 of the 1973 Act with a new clause designed to widen the definition of trading schemes. Clause 1 states:

"For section 118 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 (trading schemes to which Part XI applies) there is substituted—

118.—(1) This Part of this Act applies to any trading scheme if—

(a) the prospect is held out to participants of receiving payments or other benefits in respect of any of the matters specified in subsection (2) of this section; and

(b) (subject to subsection (7) of this section) either or both of the conditions in subsections (3) and (4) of this section are fulfilled in relation to the scheme."

The Bill refers to

"the introduction by any person of other persons who become participants in a trading scheme"

and proposes controls on

"the continued participation of participants in a trading scheme . . . the promotion, transfer or other change of status of participants in a trading scheme."

The Bill will also regulate

"the supply of goods or services by any person to or for other persons . . . the acquisition of goods or services by any person."

All in all, this is a timely Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister has said that the legislation governing pyramid and other similar trading schemes is more than 20 years old. The controls provide essential protection to members of such schemes. While many trading schemes provide opportunities for thousands of individuals to become entrepreneurs, there has been a proliferation of schemes outside those controls. Because of the risk to members of such schemes, the Government published a consultation document on the matter last year. My right hon. Friend's Bill, which would implement the main proposals in the Government's consultation document, would give protection to thousands of small entrepreneurs and protect sometimes people who are innocent in that group. It aims to widen existing controls to apply to all trading schemes the members of which recruit others. Therefore, I commend my right hon. Friend's Bill to the House.

1.19 pm

**Mr. Piers Merchant** (Beckenham): My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) has characteristically most eloquently run through the problems that exist in part of the pyramid selling industry and has suggested some sensible remedies. I congratulate him on that, and on introducing the Bill.

My right hon. Friend referred, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), to the 1960s. I just about remember the scandal that hit the press and media then involving pyramid selling—the scams, the blatant exploitation, indeed, the criminal links of some of the organisations. As a result, the Fair Trading Act 1973 took steps to control the industry. That was much welcomed, not least by a large section of the industry. The greatest proportion of the industry had never involved itself in the dubious practices of the 1960s, but its reputation was badly damaged by the dubious fringe and it wanted proper regulation to restore its respectability. Perhaps the only sad thing about the 1973 legislation was that it did not entirely achieve that. To an extent, the phrase "pyramid selling" still has somewhat dubious connotations. That is a shame because there is a legitimate industry which deserves protection and proper credibility.

There is always a tendency when new legislation is introduced for people to quote the bad examples in support of the need for change—a need that I do not challenge. It is important to remember that the majority of the direct selling industry, of which trading schemes are part, is legitimate, respectable and beneficial. It contributes a great deal to the economy. It is estimated that the size of the industry is in excess of £1 billion a year, of which trading schemes take up £200 million to £300 million. It is beneficial for consumers because it provides them with an often low-priced source of goods. It is beneficial for entrepreneurs and the small traders who

*[Mr. Piers Merchant]*

become involved. It generates employment. It exists as a low-cost pressure on the retail market, which is beneficial for other consumers as well as the economy as a whole.

I should like to give two examples of very different schemes which illustrate the healthy side of the industry and the reason why there are problems that need to be dealt with. On the positive side, some years ago a cousin of mine became involved with an organisation called Amway, which markets a wide range of goods for kitchen and household cleaning. A little while after joining the scheme, he sold me some of the products, which turned out to be of extremely high quality and competitively priced. I have no doubt from my experience as a consumer and my knowledge of his experience as a participant in such a scheme that the organisation was entirely benevolent and operated absolutely properly.

It did not surprise me when, a few years later, my cousin sent me a note originating from Amway which called for extra regulation and an improvement in the law to protect consumers. The company was actually campaigning for greater regulation. I understand that the Government later considered Amway's suggestions and some of what it wanted is incorporated in the changes proposed in the Bill, although it also suggested various other remedies.

I wish to contrast that story with the unfortunate experience of a constituent of mine. He was persuaded—perhaps I should say "conned"—to part with his newly received redundancy money. It was not a large sum and he was not a wealthy man. He was persuaded by an organisation that purported to be involved in some form of multi-level marketing, which was supposed to have some connection with insurance. The scheme was not quite clear, but its purpose was simply cash generation. My constituent was persuaded to hand over his money on the promise that he would be able to recruit more members to the scheme, who would hand over money to him. He would receive money from both directions. That sounds most implausible, but such schemes can seem very persuasive, especially to those who do not have much background or skill in marketing or business. My constituent believed that he would receive money from the person who recruited him as well as from those he would recruit.

Not surprisingly, my constituent did not hear much from the promoter of the scheme. After he had been relatively unsuccessful in tracking the promoter down, he found out, six months later, that the promoter had gone into liquidation and had set up in another similar business under a different company name. My constituent had lost all his money, but had no legal remedy. He looked into various methods to try to retrieve some of the money, to obtain compensation or to bring some criminal prosecution or civil action against the promoter of the scheme. However, there was no way in which he could effectively pursue his money. That story illustrates the unacceptable side of the multi-level marketing industry.

The proposals in the Bill would do much to stamp out that sort of practice. It would be overly optimistic to say that we could end all such criminal activity and all forms of swindle simply by passing an Act of Parliament. Clearly, people will still find ways to continue such frauds, especially if they involve a breach of the law, but the Bill would extend the protection of the law.

The Bill would redefine section 118 of the Fair Trading Act 1973, which defines those schemes that come under the other sections of the Act. The Bill would successfully broaden the scope of that Act to give protection to those people who are being caught out by some of the clever schemes that have been developed since 1973 and that revisit the abuses that existed in the 1960s.

Clause 2 is a fairly technical amendment to the Fair Trading Act 1973 and it would extend the definition of documentary advertising to include the more recently developed means of marketing and advertising—videos and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea said, computers. My right hon. Friend referred to the Internet, but another common way to advertise is to give away small floppy disks. Those are then inserted in millions of computers and quickly bring up the advertising message, often in colour with graphics, sound and music. They are most effective and it is absolutely right that they should be covered by the Bill.

The Government published a consultation paper in 1995, called "Pyramid Selling and Similar Trading Schemes". That included a suggestion that the regulation of advertising of pyramid schemes should be extended. Is it possible, as we consider the Bill, to examine that suggestion in more detail? Perhaps the Government could consider whether that should be pursued and, if so, in what way.

I speak as someone who was connected with the advertising industry and who maintains an interest in it—not a financial interest, I hasten to add, but an interest in the operation of the industry. It is fair to say that it is well regulated and that it is a successful example of self-regulation, but I do not rule out the necessity of introducing statutory regulation as well from time to time. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that most of what is required in the 1973 Act, as extended by the Bill, could be done under the self-regulatory system. Indeed, the consultation paper accepted that because it suggested that, where financial benefits were not mentioned, the schemes could be regulated through the British code of advertising practice, which is ultimately administered by the Advertising Standards Authority—a self-regulatory body.

The consultation paper also suggested that there might be merit in extending statutory protection where financial benefits were included in the advertisement. The suggestion was that the advertisement should contain the name and address of the promoter, full details of the goods being marketed and a statutory warning. I have no difficulty with that suggestion, which could be incorporated in the British code of advertising practice and possibly also in statute, but it might be of merit for the two options—directly by statute or regulation, or by agreement with the industry—to be pursued in more detail and, perhaps, incorporated in the Bill at some stage during its passage.

I end by wishing my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and the Bill every success.

1.32 pm

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton): As a result of the Bill, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) can from now on be properly described as the nation's chief scam buster, as that is what he is attacking. The proper title is the Trading Schemes Bill,

and schemes are what it tackles—scheming schemes, wicked schemes and schemes devised to deceive. They are nothing to do with genuine trade; the trade that the Bill rightly attacks is trade in false hopes, false promises and on a false prospectus.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea is dealing with what might be termed chain-letter trading. The schemes are not devised properly, to trade on margins for profit in a reasonable way, but by what he described as a geometric progression, to generate cash along lines that are bound eventually to collapse and deprive investors of the money that they put in.

It is a sad fact of commercial life that people are all too often tempted by the promise of easy riches. Some do not realise when they are being taken for suckers. That is what the Bill will tackle.

The Bill will introduce into the area that my right hon. Friend identified the safeguards that apply in other areas. From now on, there will be proper contracts and rights of redress and, as much as it is possible to put it into law, provisions to prevent people parting with their money in a scheme that is bound to go into liquidation. I urge the House to give the Bill its full support.

As so often happens when I scrutinise legislation, however, I found the language of the Bill almost unintelligible. To understand the Bill, one must use the brief in the Library. The Bill's language refers, as it must, to how bits of the Fair Trading Act 1973 are to be amended. There is no way in which the Trading Schemes Bill could be described as self-contained. Without reference to existing legislation, it is not a comprehensible document. We must eventually move to being able to draft our legislation in plain language—to self-contained Acts and Bills that can stand up on their own and be understood by the layman and even by me.

1.35 pm

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) is self-deprecating in an unjustified but, as always, engaging and rather charming way. I accept his remarks about simpler language and self-contained Bills, but if I were to hold up in evidence the Act of Parliament that the Bill seeks to amend, he would understand how difficult an exercise in self-containment would have been. I am not complacent about the matters that he raised. He is basically right and the public are on his side.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) for his thoughtful and informed comments. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) described what I can only call a horror story about a scheme whose operating methods will be made unlawful by the Bill. We might both well say thank goodness. He also asked me to consider some variations on the Bill as it progresses, as we all hope that it will. Subject to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) may say—it is his Bill—I am prepared to be as helpful as I can.

I must repair an omission by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea on introducing the Bill. I am grateful to him for seeking to repair legislation in an area in which the public are vulnerable.

The Government, as hon. Members will have gathered, welcome the Bill, which will make it possible for all trading schemes whose members recruit others to be subject to control under either the Financial Services Act 1986 or part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

At present, the coverage of the Fair Trading Act's controls is narrow. I am pleased to report that, where those controls apply, they have been extremely effective in protecting members and potential members of trading schemes from being persuaded to take excessive risks. These controls, both the offences and the regulations, have the widespread support of the direct selling industry, but the Fair Trading Act cannot protect members and potential members of schemes that are not subject to its controls. We need to widen the coverage of those controls.

The Government, the industry and consumer organisations are as one in wanting the protection of the controls to extend to the members and potential members of all trading schemes whose members recruit others.

I understand that the total sales of schemes that currently comply with the Act's requirements probably exceed £300 million. All those sales are made by self-employed members of the schemes. There are probably some 300,000 such enterprising individuals, who sell a wide range of consumer goods, mostly in the customers' or their own homes. Some sell home cleaning and other household products; others cosmetics, jewellery, clothes, diet supplements, water filters, books, toys, and much else.

The Fair Trading Act's controls ensure that those individuals were not misled when recruited, and that each has a contract with the scheme's promoter that is fair, both in that the potential member is fully informed of the details of the scheme to which he is considering committing himself and in that the risks inherent in any sales operation are not loaded on to the member but shared with the promoter. The contractual rights of every member of a regulated scheme are protected by civil law.

We have consulted widely over possible amendments to part XI of the Fair Trading Act. Promoters of schemes that meet the Act's requirements generally agree that the Fair Trading Act 1973 provides much-needed protection. They are concerned—rightly concerned—that that protection is not available to members of all trading schemes.

At present, the protection is offered only for members and potential members of schemes according to two qualifying conditions. First, protection exists where the goods or services are provided by the promoter and sold to third parties under transactions effected by the members of the scheme. Secondly, protection exists where most of those transactions do not take place on premises where the promoter or the participant carries on other business.

Not all trading schemes follow that pattern. That results in part from changes in commercial arrangements in the past 20 years. There are reputable schemes that are not subject to the controls. I was pleased to learn that many such schemes nevertheless meet the 1973 Act's requirements in full.

It is clear that some schemes have been devised deliberately to avoid the controls. Recently there has been a proliferation of schemes in which members make payments, and in which their financial reward depends on them and other participants recruiting new members to the

*[Mr. John M. Taylor]*

scheme. Such schemes are essentially unsound because it is absolutely certain that there are not enough people in the world to ensure that all who join can get the promised rewards. Some of those schemes may also involve members in selling something or other—such as a scheme for personal self-improvement or a decorator's paint-brush rest. But essentially those pyramid scams serve no real purpose other than the enrichment of their promoters. They are no more than money circulation schemes. They are a swindle.

Too many people have been taken in by such schemes' promises of riches. As my right hon. Friend said, too many people have lost their savings through those money circulation schemes. Members and potential members of too many types of trading scheme do not have the protection that the Fair Trading Act already provides for traditional schemes.

Pyramid scams are not new; nor are they confined to this country. Across much of Europe they are called "snowball schemes", and are outlawed in many countries.

In 1920, the United States was host to a pyramid scam operated by Charles Ponzi. Members of his scheme expected to double their money in three months. But all the payments out to those who joined early were made from the payments in by those who joined late. Eventually the scheme foundered, and Ponzi was sent to prison. Since then, Americans have called such pyramid scams Ponzi schemes.

Members of the House may recall publicity about recent pyramid scams in Russia and Romania. A Russian scam called three M was reported by the *Financial Times* to have lured 10 million investors into a company in which the only business was selling shares in itself, while the Romanian scheme, Caritas, was reported to have had 4 million members who paid in £690 million. Its members were promised a sevenfold return on their money in a hundred days. It foundered, after nearly two years, when new money stopped flowing in.

What is perhaps new is the sophistication of recent pyramid scams, which is why we have to return to the statute book and why we are grateful to my right hon. Friend. What is, sadly, old is how many people are taken in. Last year, 17,000 people lost £10 million in just three money circulation schemes. One person lost £78,000. My Department receives a large postbag and many telephone inquiries from anxious people who have been persuaded to join those scams.

It has been a matter of considerable frustration that it has not been possible to prosecute the promoters of those schemes under the Fair Trading Act 1973. If those scams were subject to the 1973 Act, its controls would outlaw their operating methods. As I have explained, we have used such powers as we have to protect the public from such schemes, but those are limited in their application, cumbersome and not totally effective.

The Department has used such measures as are available to wind up companies operating such schemes. The Bill will make it possible to prosecute the promoters, whatever their identity, if they try to persuade people to give money—by promising riches if others are persuaded to do the same. The Bill will also make it possible to act quickly—it does not require a pattern of trading to be established before action can be taken.

It may help hon. Members to appreciate the problem if I quote from the promotional material for some of the schemes that were operated by companies recently wound up by the courts.

Global Pioneers Ltd. had a brochure that opens with a letter from John Lisgo:

"Dear Reader, Over the past few years I have developed a system that has virtually guaranteed instant profits, and with the right guidance I know anyone can be just as successful. My journey begun with just £200, yet within less than 36 months, I had turned it into half a million pounds annual turnover and today I now enjoy personal incomes exceeding £20,000 per month."

In his judgment on the petition to wind up Global Pioneers Ltd., Mr. Justice Harman said:

"I am satisfied that the company inevitably would fail to make the returns it promised to its subscribers because the growth of these schemes cannot be exponential—there must come an end in time. Alternatively, if in the real world nobody expects them to be exponential, the representations that the rewards were available must have been untrue and untrue in the knowledge of the people who made them. On either footing they are a swindle on the public".

Frequency Programming World—or FPW as it was known—operated what it described as a "computer-generated money pay-out plan" which it said had

"proved so incredibly successful that the club has decided to expand its membership, so now you too can benefit from its amazing returns and—what is more—there are no limits!

You are not required to do anything at all to profit from it—no sending mailshots or any other work! All you do is simply enter as much as you want, and bank your profit. £460 clear for every £140 entered. It really is that simple—no strings, no catch, no limits!"

Madam Deputy Speaker, you may find it hard to believe, but another scheme, operated by Alchemy UK plc, included what it described as testimonials from Sir Isaac Newton, William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Leonardo da Vinci and Marie Curie. It claimed that its scheme was based on

"the mathematical matrix formulae that for decades have been used by western Governments to fund their economies. The very same formulae that are guarded so secretly and only until now disclosed to those who obtain the highest Government office."

Clearly, I have not reached high enough Government office. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea, who is a Privy Councillor, which is a fairly high attainment in our political affairs, ever became privy to the formula recommended by Sir Isaac Newton or whether it was withheld from him. Clearly, as an Under-Secretary of State, I am not supposed to know the model, so I shall never become rich.

When the wonderful scheme, Alchemy UK plc, was wound up by the courts—they all seem to end up in the courts—its directors informed its members that

"yet again they have run circles around the DTI and will continue to trade unaffected".

The Government believe that money circulation schemes should be subject to the controls of the Fair Trading Act. The recruitment offences under the Act would then effectively outlaw the operating methods of the pyramid scams.

There have been trading schemes that fall within the definition of investment business in the Financial Services Act 1986. To ensure that no scheme is subject to control under both the Financial Services Act and the Fair Trading Act, the Bill excludes from control under the

Fair Trading Act trading schemes under which the promoters or participants carry on investment business in the United Kingdom. I emphasise "investment business" because it is a term of art referred to in the Bill at clause 1(6)(a). It is a specific term of art that is necessary to ensure that there is no gap between the Financial Services Act and the Fair Trading Act, and to ensure that they do not overlap.

Some money circulation schemes have also fallen within the definition of investment business for largely technical reasons. But the nature of those schemes makes them unfitted for regulation as investment business. The Government therefore intend to make an order under section 2 of the Financial Services Act to take the schemes out of the scope of that Act. We intend the order to come into effect at the same time as the Bill comes into force. In that way, those money circulation schemes will not benefit from the exclusion of investment business. They will be subject to the controls of the Fair Trading Act.

The Trading Schemes Bill provides powers to exclude prescribed schemes from all the Fair Trading Act controls. We intend to use that power to exclude two types of scheme: first, franchise schemes in which only one UK participant can benefit from the activities of other participants; and secondly, simple chain letters.

Franchise schemes are generally trading schemes that operate on a larger scale than the typical direct selling scheme. Typically, the participants or franchisees make a substantial investment in the business. There is much confusion about their position. At present, the only franchise schemes that are not subject to any of the Act's controls are: those where the franchisees do not sell goods or services provided by the franchisor; or if most of the sales are made on premises where either the franchisor or franchisee carries on other business. Therefore, most franchise schemes are already subject to control under the Fair Trading Act. But most are exempt from the pyramid selling schemes regulations, which exempt schemes where only one UK participant can expect to benefit from the activities of other members of the scheme.

I am pleased to note that the Direct Selling Association has expressed support for the Bill. It is the main trade association for businesses whose sales personnel are self-employed. I understand that its members have nearly 500,000 independent sales people. The majority of those businesses are subject to the current controls. In addition, they comply with the code, which demands higher standards than are statutorily required.

The vast majority of people who are involved in direct sales operate lawfully and legitimately: they go about their proper business. It is the few who damage the rest. The Government are pleased to support the Bill, which would bring the protection of the criminal courts to potential members of all trading schemes and ensure that all those who join a scheme have contractual rights that are protected by civil courts. Many hon. Members have pressed for some such action and the proposal to introduce protection has been widely welcomed. I, too, welcome the Bill and I hope that it soon becomes law.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).*

## Gender Identity (Registration and Civil Status) Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

1.55 pm

**Mr. Alex Carlile** (Montgomery): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is about transsexuals—a significant group of people in our society who, in a phrase, are deprived of the ordinary protections of law that we take for granted. I am grateful for the support that I received in the preparation of the Bill from transsexuals and others all over the country who have effectively lobbied not only me but hon. Members in all parts of the House on this issue. I am also grateful for the support of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. I have yet to hear from a right hon. or hon. Member who does not support the principle of the Bill, and only one significant misgiving has been expressed about part of it.

I should like to express my gratitude to Mr. Terence Walton from the firm of Fallon, solicitors in London, for his assistance in the drafting of the Bill. Mr. Walton was the solicitor for April Ashley in the well-known and leading case of Corbett *v.* Corbett, in which judgment was given 26 years ago to this very day. The issue has been in the public domain for more than a quarter of a century. The problem remains unresolved and is becoming increasingly acute.

It gives me special pleasure to note that the Minister who is to respond to the debate is the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam). I can think of no one in the House better qualified to understand the issue. The hon. Gentleman started his active political life as a Labour Member, later going into limbo as an early member of the Social Democrat party, and has emerged as a Conservative Minister. No doubt he would say that his brain has always been Conservative really. An interesting analogy can be drawn between the Minister's political position and the rather more unfortunate situation faced by transsexuals. The Minister, from his august and influential position, is able to claim many rights for himself. I hope that when he replies to the debate he will not seek to deprive others of rights.

It used to be thought that transsexualism was a florid psychological state enjoyed—I use the word advisedly—by hysterical individuals who wished to draw attention to themselves, and who were the object of a good deal of laughter and risible printed comment. I am glad to say that the situation has changed. Since I have been involved in this issue, for some 10 years or so, press comment has moved away from the jokey, freak-of-the-week-type comment to a serious discussion in newspapers and journals about the issue of transsexualism, why it arises and what should be done about it.

Perhaps one of the main reasons why the flavour of the argument has changed is that science has at last begun to play a real part in our understanding of what transsexualism is and how it arises. In November last year, neurobiologist Dr. D. F. Swaab of the Netherlands and his international colleagues at the Netherlands Institute for Brain Research in Amsterdam announced and published their post mortem study of a tiny region of the brain known as the BSTc—the central subdivision of the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis.

*[Mr. Alex Carlile]*

The study showed that, on average, the stria terminalis was 44 per cent. larger in heterosexual men than in heterosexual women. More remarkably, the BSTcs of six male-to-female transsexuals, whose post mortem brains the researchers had painstakingly collected during the course of 11 years, were 52 per cent. smaller than those of the average man in the study and were in fact about the same size as those of the females-from-birth. The researchers had chosen to study the BSTc because previous research in rodents had shown that it plays a pivotal role in sexual behaviour. Remove the BSTc from a rat, and the animal will show no interest whatsoever in sex. The findings led very distinguished scientists to conclude that in humans, too, BSTc size is programmed during foetal and neonatal development—perhaps as a result of an interaction between sex hormones and the developing brain—and is probably not the result of parental, social or psychological pressures after birth.

Dr. Swaab and others concluded that transsexuals are right in their belief that their sex was wrongly judged at the moment of birth, and can understand why it was so judged. At the moment of birth, it is possible to look at the sex organs, but it is not possible to look at the BSTc in the brain. However, the research seems to demonstrate that in terms of their brain BSTc, transsexuals are in fact of the gender that they later come to acquire after gender reassignment therapy.

In a paper given to the Council of Europe's 23rd colloquy on European law, Professor Gooren suggested that there is now evidence that the sexual differentiation process of the brain in transsexuals has not followed the ordinary course. Although sex assignment at birth by the criterion of the external sex organs is statistically reliable, in people who experience transsexualism it is not. Those people are exceptions to the statistical rule, and perhaps therein lie the roots of their difficulty: we all know how easy it is to rely on statistics and to ignore reality.

What are the consequences in human terms? Transsexuals in this country have told me and other hon. Members of those consequences. I pay tribute, in particular, to the work done in this sphere by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), who has established the Forum on Transsexualism. We worked as a partnership to try to improve the situation of transsexuals, and I suspect that I am presenting the Bill rather than she only because I was successful in the ballot and she was not.

**Dr. Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I thank my hon. and learned Friend—I will call him that at least for the purposes of today's debate. Tribute should also be paid to those individuals who have been brave enough to allow hon. Members and the public to know about their personal experiences. That has contributed a great deal to the changed atmosphere and the way in which society at large regards those people. We should pay tribute to their bravery because they risk discrimination and suffering as a result of their willingness to reveal their experiences.

**Mr. Carlile:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and I recommend that hon. Members and others read some of the recent serious and useful short autobiographies produced by transsexuals. The most recent is that by Mark Rees. Having written the forewords to, I believe, two of the most recent three, I have been able to enjoy reading them before they were published and understand what a clear picture they give of the condition.

I wish to say a little more about the human consequences and the discrimination that transsexuals face. In employment terms, it is apparently possible—at present, at least—for transsexuals to be dismissed solely because they are transsexuals. They also face discrimination in educational institutions, and in Department of Social Security offices where, although the staff may be extremely polite and helpful, the computer does not tell the real truth about the person before it. There are many other examples, but I do not have time to cite them as we have only half an hour or so available.

What type of people face discrimination? I received perhaps 200 letters from transsexuals during the preparation of the Bill. That is a remarkable number because, as my colleague implied a moment ago, it is more convenient for transsexuals to remain in the closet, keep themselves to themselves and function quietly in their acquired gender. Nevertheless, some very brave people have come forward.

Hon. Members should not get the idea that transsexuals are not playing their full part in society. I have had letters from at least two dons at Oxford university who are transsexuals and involved in distinguished scientific and other work. Other transsexuals are lawyers, doctors, company owners and executives, civil servants, teachers and nurses. In one case, a nurse is obtaining support from other members of the medical staff at the hospital where they work. Transsexuals are to be found across the spectrum of society and represent a cross-section of the population.

I shall say a word about a group of people who are not covered by the Bill but of whom I hope that the Government will take account. Very occasionally, genuine physical hermaphroditism arises at birth. I have received two moving letters from midwives who have been involved professionally in such cases. It is extremely difficult to judge what should appear on the birth certificate at that stage, and a wrong judgment has been made in one or two cases when viewed in light of the feelings, activities and behaviour of the people involved, but there is no mechanism to correct misrecording at birth. I raise that point simply so that it is not overlooked. Such cases have produced moving submissions.

Let us compare the situation in this country with that in other countries. In Germany, perhaps as one would expect, there is an efficient tribunal system to deal with transsexuals. Once they have gone through the system, they can live with full rights in their acquired gender. In the United States, it is permissible in certain states for a transsexual to marry after treatment. In Australia, there is a limited right to marry, although problems have arisen in connection with female-to-male transsexuals.

If a person who is a transsexual marries in their acquired role in one of those countries and comes to live with their spouse in the United Kingdom, they face an extraordinary situation. They would not have been allowed to marry here and yet, as I understand private international law, they are entitled to have their marriage recognised as lawful. It is a confusing international legal situation which needs to be sorted out. Transsexuals can

also marry in this country, but only in the most bizarre circumstances: one transsexual can marry another transsexual provided that, in law, the bride is the groom and the groom is the bride. We surely do not want our law to support such an asinine situation.

Is the transsexual community simply sitting back and waiting for the Government to take half a century to reach a conclusion, on the basis that the matter has taken a quarter of a century already, so it may as well take another quarter of a century? Not a bit of it—if the Government do not take some action, it will cost them a great deal of money because they will lose case after case in the international and possibly also the domestic courts.

In a case going through the European Court of Justice, P *v.* Cornwall county council, Advocate-General Tesauro has given an unfavourable opinion, which I suspect is likely to be upheld. If that is so, it will be held that the United Kingdom should have anti-discrimination legislation relating to the employment of transsexuals. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg—the difference between the two courts is not often well understood, but they are very different—has before it, with leave to proceed to full judgment, the cases of Kristina Sheffield and Rachel Horsham, which relate to birth certificates and their consequences. Reading the preliminary documents from the court, it seems very likely that the Government will lose.

Leave to move for judicial review was given by Mr. Justice Brooke—the recently retired chairman of the Law Commission who has now returned full time to the Bench—in a case heard on 29 January. Other cases are before the Queen's Bench division of the High Court in relation to transsexuals, and there are many more to come. We should not be looking for piecemeal reform of the law through reaction to the Government's loss of case after case. We know that there is a problem and a solution must be found. My Bill seeks to provide that solution by a procedure which does not command universal support, but which seems to be as good a mechanism as can be found without offending certain assumptions.

One of the assumptions that I have accepted for the purposes of the Bill, although I am not sure that I accept it fully intellectually, is that a birth certificate can never be amended. It ought to be possible to amend a public document that is proved to have been scientifically wrong when it was prepared. For present purposes, however, let us say that that is not appropriate.

We seek to allow transsexuals who have completed appropriate treatment in each case to go to the High Court family division and obtain a recognition certificate. From that, it is my intention and that of the other sponsors of the Bill that the Registrar-General would issue a new certificate from a new register—not involving alteration to the birth certificate, but resulting in a birth certificate that is physically indistinguishable from the original. Following the issue of that certificate, the rights to which I have referred would follow. Transsexuals would be able to live in their acquired role, particularly as their achievement of gender reassignment would have been proved by applying to the High Court and producing medical evidence. That being so, why should they not have employment protection? Why should they not be entitled to marry? Why should they not be entitled to adopt children if the court is satisfied that it is an appropriate case for adoption? I know of stable families in which one person has undergone gender reassignment therapy. There are several examples and there would be many more if transsexuals were not forced to hide what has happened to them and to pretend, in the face of bureaucracy, that they are what the law says that they are not.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and I hope that it will be a positive one. I hope that the Government will say that in view of the plethora of Government Departments involved in the issue—that is a pretty lame excuse for taking no action—someone will co-ordinate the Government's views on the issue. I would like the matter to go immediately to the Law Commission for a quick report. I would like the commission to produce legislation which would be an ideal vehicle for a further private Member's Bill.

2.15 pm

**Mr. Roger Sims** (Chislehurst): In 21 years as a Member of Parliament, I had not encountered the issues raised in the Bill. Last year, however, I had two constituency cases of people in this condition whom I tried to help. When I went to the Conservative party conference this year, I noticed that one of the fringe meetings, arranged by an organisation called Press for Change, was about the medical and legal implications of transsexuality.

I admit that I went to the meeting with a mixture of curiosity and scepticism. My views on homosexuality, for example, might be described as conventional and I find the expression "gay priests" a contradiction in terms. However, I soon learned that transsexuality was something very different. We are talking about people where nature did not get it quite right—where nature made a mistake.

A transsexual is defined as a person

"having the physical characteristics of one sex and the psychological characteristics of the other."

One of the doctors at the meeting said that we were talking about a man in a woman's body, or vice versa. It is a condition that is capable of medical treatment, although not in every case. I was impressed by the extent and the detail of the treatment that can be given. Transsexuality is a recognised medical condition which can be treated successfully through gender reassignment, enabling the individual to lead a full and normal life.

The meeting was organised by a lady who was attending the Conservative party conference as a representative. She represented her constituency, where she is active in the party. She is a branch secretary, chairman of her supper club and typical of the ladies whom many of my hon. Friends know in their constituencies. Yet her birth certificate shows her as a man and she cannot legally marry. If she applies for a job, her birth certificate will have to be produced and the House will appreciate what might follow from that.

I well understand the difficulties that surround the proposition that a legal document should be changed, but I believe that the Bill contains an ingenious solution which would make life better for the people whom I have described. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will feel that he can give the Bill sympathetic consideration.

2.19 pm

**Mr. Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley): I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on his good fortune in the ballot for private Members'

*[Mr. Kevin Barron]*

Bills. Unfortunately, speaking from experience—I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman knows this better than most—without Government support the likelihood of such Bills being enacted is nil.

There is much debate within parts of the medical and legal communities about the status of transsexuals, and the issue should be addressed. I have been in the House longer than the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), and over the past few years, I have often had dealings with a transsexual in my constituency.

Medical knowledge about the condition, which is known as gender identity dysphoria, has changed dramatically over the years. Much more is known today about both the syndrome and the methods of diagnosis and treatment, which are far in advance of those available when it was first identified in the 1950s.

Biological evidence and indicators can be examined to assist in determining cases of gender dysphoria, and hormonal treatments and surgical techniques, together with therapy and counselling, can help an individual to cope with the physical and psychological effects of having an incongruent body. Studies of the effects of adopting that approach suggest that success rates for individuals who have undergone appropriate treatment are better than 90 per cent.

Although medical advances have helped individuals to come to terms with the syndrome, the law has not kept up with those developments. British law is now out of step with that of many of our European neighbours, and in law those who have undergone reassignment treatment are still identified as their previous sex, not their present sex. The law takes no account of their lives in permanently changed gender roles.

Clearly, that leads to problems. The case has been made in the debate that the law on the status of transsexuals is too inflexible. In Europe, recognition has already been given. The European Court of Justice said:

"The law cannot cut itself off from society as it actually is".

Legislators, too, must recognise that.

The European Court has also ruled that discrimination against transsexuals in employment is contrary to European law, so the United Kingdom Government may soon have to introduce legislation to correct that failure. That being the case, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery has suggested that other parts of the law should be brought into line too. Such a change would put this country on a par with many of our European counterparts. Even if that change is not brought about through the Bill, it will still have to be made some time, if we are to return to a coherent law on discrimination.

I echo the hon. and learned Gentleman's final words. If we need a Law Commission report on the subject, that should be arranged quickly. It is wrong that such discrimination should exist in our midst, and we should take action now, instead of taking the piecemeal path that the hon. and learned Gentleman described, whereby we deal with issues only when a confrontation arises because we are outside European law. I hope that the Minister will look sympathetically at the idea of doing something further, because it is obvious that the Bill will not have time to progress in this Session of Parliament.

2.23 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam):** In introducing the Bill, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) drew an analogy between my political progress and the situation of transsexuals. I am flattered by being associated with what he clearly regards as a noble cause, but it is a little dangerous for him to make such comparisons, because those of us who are firmly on one side of the House or another have always regarded the Liberal Democrats as thoroughly confused, unable to make up their minds whether they are on the left or the right. If one is in a glass house, it is a little dangerous to throw stones.

None the less, I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman on his success in the ballot, and on bringing forward for debate a Bill that attempts to tackle such fundamental and important issues. I am sorry that it is now 2.23 pm on a Friday; perhaps it would have been better to have debated the measure earlier in the day—but such was not his luck.

The purpose of the Bill is to grant recognition of change of sex for all purposes to anyone who, under the terms of the Bill, has undergone gender reassignment treatment and has obtained a recognition certificate from the High Court, provision for which the hon. and learned Gentleman makes in the Bill. The Bill makes provision for medical, judicial and administrative procedures to facilitate the change, culminating in the issue by the Registrar-General of a birth certificate in the new sexual identity.

People who undergo gender reassignment treatment are commonly referred to as transsexuals, although I am aware that many prefer the term gender dysphoria. They are biologically of one sex, but feel themselves to be of the other. Transsexuals may undergo hormone treatment and, in many cases, gender reassignment surgery.

The Government are sympathetic to the distress felt by transsexuals, and we have tried to smooth the transition from one gender identity to the other. Gender reassignment operations are permitted without any kind of legal formalities. The surgery and treatment may be carried out under the NHS—*[Interruption.]* That is the case.

The law entitles any person to adopt such first names and surnames as he or she wishes without any restrictions or formalities, except in connection with the practice of some professions where the use of the new names may be subject to certain formalities. The new names are valid for the purposes of legal identification, and Government Departments and the agencies concerned will issue documents such as passports, driving licences, car registration books, national insurance cards and medical cards in the new name.

That has helped the progress of transsexuals and mitigates the obvious problems and distress associated with their position. The Bill would move the recognition process a further step on to relate it to the change of sex, rather than to the personal and legal identification that has been the focus of the present position.

The hon. and learned Gentleman is aware from our discussions that his Bill, sadly, is defective in a number of respects. None the less, I can assure him that the Government recognise the importance of the issues that he has raised. We take them seriously, and we shall carefully

consider the issues raised by the Bill. To that extent, I believe that, even though the Bill has had a relatively short time to be debated today, it has fulfilled a useful purpose in taking the argument on to a further stage.

**Mrs. Edwina Currie** (South Derbyshire): Does my hon. Friend realise that, despite his litany of permitted changes in documentation, he has not yet set out a good argument as to why that should not include birth certificates?

**Mr. Horam:** That is one of the points that I want to come to. The changing of a birth certificate is one of the problems that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery recognised during our discussions. I am sorry to say that, while the Bill makes a credible effort, it does not overcome something that the Registrar-General sees as a real problem.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** I do not understand why there is a difficulty. In a letter to me, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys said that, on average over the past 10 years, there have been 30 applications for corrections to the sex recorded at birth, and added that most have been granted. Furthermore, before the Corbett *v.* Corbett case, it was normal for birth certificates to be changed.

**Mr. Horam:** A number of changes have been made, but only after it has been recognised that a mistake was made at birth. Indeed, it is normal to wait until after the sex is clear before a birth certificate is issued as a safeguard. Occasionally, errors have occurred despite those precautions and a subsequent correction has been made. There has never been a case where a correction has been made because someone's sex has changed during his or her life—a point to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) referred. There are real problems in making the change perhaps 20 or 30 years after the birth, but there have been instances when it has happened very shortly after the birth. I shall skip some of the points that I intended to make to deal with this particular point, which is obviously a matter of concern to hon. Members. Apart from the complex policy and legal implications, which are manifold, there is also the problem of how to provide tangible public recognition of the new civil status of a transsexual.

To date, the campaign by transsexuals has focused heavily on birth certification. Many transsexuals appear to believe, in my view wrongly, that if the Registrar-General would only agree to amend their birth certificates, that would suffice to change their legal sex. I acknowledge that the Bill does not entirely take that line. The hon. and learned Gentleman attempts to go further. He proposes to change birth registrations as one means of giving effect to a wider objective. However, sadly, his method of doing so would undermine the basis of birth registration in Britain. I shall explain that.

The entry in the birth register is a record of the facts as they were at the time of birth. It may be changed by annotation of the original record if the facts—

*It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.*

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 9 February.*

## Remaining Private Members' Bills

### WATER CHARGES (AMENDMENT) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Second Reading deferred till Friday 16 February.*

### BRITISH TIME (EXTRA DAYLIGHT) BILL

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question—[26 January]*—That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 9 February.*

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Ordered,*

That the Speaker shall—

(1) at the sitting on Tuesday 6th February—

(i) put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to General Practitioner Fundholding not later than Seven o'clock, and

(ii) notwithstanding Standing Orders Nos. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents) and 15 (Delegated Legislation (negative procedure)), put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Blair relating to the Collective Redundancies and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations 1995 not later than Ten o'clock; and

(2) at the sitting on Thursday 8th February, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents), put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Hague relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) not later than Seven o'clock.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

## Medway Towns (Relief Road)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

2.30 pm

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): May I first say how pleased I am to have been granted a debate, at the first time of asking, on a subject that is of crucial importance to the future prosperity of my constituency and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) and for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Medway is in her place today and will wish to speak later in this debate. Had he been able to rearrange his day, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent would have sought to reinforce the dismay that I intend to express at the deferment of the Gillingham northern link and the Wainscott northern bypass, two legs of the Medway towns northern relief road.

The Royal Navy withdrew from the royal naval base and dockyard, Chatham in March 1984. A part of the closed dockyard was almost immediately disposed of to the then Medway Ports Authority, which formed a subsidiary, Chatham Dock Company, to operate a commercial port with roll on/roll off ferries. One of the port's first tenants was the Norfolk Line/Kent Line and we were immediately faced with some 300 large lorry movements each day and through the night through narrow residential roads and streets in Gillingham more suited to traffic of an era pre-dating the motor car.

The result was a nightmare for my constituents and those of my hon. Friends. The deep bitterness at the Government's closure of Chatham dockyard was compounded by the realisation that any redevelopment of the 500 acres of the dockyard site was likely to involve a replacement of the Navy's previous mainly waterborne servicing of the naval base with road transport, including large lorries. There was a substantial outcry from those affected and from Gillingham borough council.

There was at that time an embryonic plan to build a northern relief road, but to say that it had not even reached the back burner, let alone been accorded any priority by Kent county council, would be to understate its then insignificance. I became something of a lone voice crying in the wilderness for Kent county council to start working up the scheme and to accord it some priority in seeking funding approval, but there was little enthusiasm at county hall, as was evidenced at a meeting in December 1983.

By the time the Navy left, English Industrial Estates, later English Estates, and now English Partnerships, had been engaged to prepare a strategic plan for the redevelopment, management and re-use of the large part of this vital site which had been in the Royal Navy's hands for more than 450 years. Excluded from the land handed over to English Partnerships were the area taken by the dock company and the largest concentration of ancient monuments in Europe collectively known as the Chatham historic dockyard, the management and exploitation of which was entrusted to a distinguished trust.

Early in English Partnerships' tenure, it became evident that good road communications would be crucial to the successful redevelopment of what would become known as Chatham Maritime. The Medway towns northern relief road gradually became, with much prompting from me and my hon. Friends, a more and more desirable project.

The dockyard closure, with the loss of several other major employers during the early 1980s recession, raised unemployment to nearly 20 per cent. The designation of 60 acres of Chatham Maritime as an addition to the north-west Kent enterprise zone in February 1986 helped to increase interest in the development, but still the poor road communications hampered English Partnerships in its efforts to market the site.

At about that time, in January 1986, the county council issued a feasibility study for the third element of the relief road—the new third crossing of the Medway. Out of three options, an immersed tube tunnel was preferred, after consultation, to a high or low-level bridge, notwithstanding the additional cost. By July 1987, the county had issued a consultation paper for all three elements with an estimated total cost, including the tunnel option, of about £70 million.

By August 1988, so urgent was it considered to make a start on that vital scheme that the ancient and perhaps unique Rochester Bridge Trust sought to promote a private Bill to construct a new road tunnel under the Medway using novel funding from English Estates—as it then was—Kent county council, Rochester-upon-Medway city council, Gillingham borough council and the trust itself. The trust was ultimately to own the new crossing as it has owned crossings since mediaeval times.

The Bill made slow progress through the House and, although lodged in November 1988, did not achieve Royal Assent until July 1990. In the event, the mixture of public and private funding for the tunnel fell in May 1991 as an unintended victim of section 48 of the Local Government Act 1989, which had been designed to prevent creative accounting by spendthrift councils.

Good news, however, arrived at Christmas 1991 when Kent county council achieved transport supplementary grant—TSG—for the tunnel. Tenders had been received pending the outcome of the failed exotic funding proposal. It is worth noting that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, then the Secretary of State for Transport, expressed the hope, in a letter dated 5 May 1991, that the northern relief road would come about, although he was less than forthcoming about where the money—by now more than £100 million—would come from. However, as I said, Kent county council included the scheme as top priority in the transport policies and programme—TPP—bid for 1992-93 and the tunnel element of the scheme achieved TSG. The feeder roads, as they were called by my right hon. and learned Friend, were given credit approvals, but without TSG. Kent received—for the first time—a huge settlement in that year and the Medway towns northern relief road appeared to be on its way.

There was token expenditure on the tunnel in 1992-93, but by 1993-94 the major construction had begun in earnest and proceeded apace. Three enormous concrete sections of the tube were cast. The 1993-94 settlement, however, had not brought TSG for the Gillingham link road and the Wainscott northern bypass and, between March and July 1993, the Secretary of State's inspector conducted public inquiries into the two roads and the orders attaching thereto. Those inquiries were to prove fateful and may be the reason why we are here today.

I shall have more to say later on the way in which the inquiries were conducted, and especially about the reporting.

By mid-1993, English Partnerships was becoming anxious about progress on the two roads and was hopeful that the decisions from the two inquiries might be made by the end of that year. It pressed very hard. By now, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) had become Secretary of State for Transport and I was urged to try to progress TSG for the following year, 1994-95, in the confident expectation that construction would start in that year. Kent county council duly submitted the two schemes in its TPP submission as a

"resubmission for future commitment and TSG".

On 15 December 1993, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key)—then a Minister—wrote to me with the details of the TSG and supplementary credit approval settlement for 1994-95. In another huge settlement for Kent, both Gillingham northern link and Wainscott northern bypass had been approved for TSG in the sums of almost £40 million and nearly £56 million respectively, with substantial tranches for a start on both in 1994-95. With the Medway tunnel—now estimated at £57 million—the Medway towns northern relief road, with a price tag of £152 million, was the largest non-trunk road scheme in the country.

A start for both roads in the summer of 1994 was confidently expected by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury. My hon. Friends the Members for Medway and for Mid-Kent and I, with the various councils, the Rochester Bridge Trust and English Partnerships, enjoyed our Christmas turkey for 1993, quietly confident that it had all been worth while. All the pain and frustration was at an end.

Or was it? We had all forgotten what I might call the buggeration factor—1994 came and went, but answer came there none from the inspector. Rumours abounded that he had gone sick, or worse. At the urging of English Partnerships, my hon. Friends and I were in regular contact with Ministers. One major relief came at Christmas 1994, when the schemes—by now totalling £157 million—were still included in the TSG settlement for 1995-96 in view of the expectation of substantial expenditure in that year. That was just as well, for by now the Medway tunnel was beginning to take shape and the prospect of its opening before the bypass roads was viewed with mixed feelings. It was realised that traffic might use the tunnel as an alternative route to London, causing worse problems than we already had.

Finally, the Secretary of State's decision on the Gillingham northern link was received on 12 April 1995. With minor adjustments, the county council could proceed with that element. Preliminary works were started, but still there was no word on Wainscott, despite my hon. Friends and my constant badgering of our hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who is to answer today's debate.

There was some correspondence between the county council and the Department on the side road orders and other minor issues and at least some of the delay seems to accrue from tardiness in the council's providing information, but there also appears to have been a process of "decelerated progress" at a technical level in the Department.

It was not until 8 January 1996—three weeks ago—that the affirmative decision on the side road order and compulsory purchase for Wainscott northern bypass was announced, 34 months after the public inquiry began. By now, however, catastrophe had struck. Christmas 1995 had brought a much less generous TSG settlement nationally and, although Kent received by far the largest settlement of £36 million and a £81 million total spending allocation, it was about £30 million short of its needs.

Worse though, was the news that, having been embarrassed by its inability to spend its previous allocation because of the interminable delays in the Secretary of State's decision on the Gillingham northern link and Wainscott northern bypass, the county had taken the decision during 1995 to proceed with the provision of dual carriageway for the Thanet way, A299, and a scheme on the A256 at Whitfield.

Furthermore, the 1996-97 TSG settlement—unusually given to Kent as a block grant, as opposed to being scheme specific—was so much less than needed that it would barely cover the contractual commitments on the two alternative schemes. I am told that only £8 million of the block grant of TSG is uncommitted and, although that might allow letting of the contracts on Wainscott and/or the Gillingham northern link and a token start being made on site during 1996-97, without the assurance that a sufficient TSG settlement for subsequent years will be available the county is unenthusiastic about putting itself at risk of having to abort contracts once committed.

What is more, the county has three other approved smaller schemes on which it could commit the uncommitted £8 million. It is holding its decisions, pending the outcome of discussions of what might be done to progress with confidence the Medway towns relief road; this debate is a part of that exploration.

So what is to be done? English Partnerships has committed £150 million—including its contribution to the tunnel—to the development and attracted a similar sum from the private sector; if one includes the remaining cost of the tunnel, about £300 million or more has been invested in the redevelopment of the former dockyard.

Despite some notable coups, such as the letting to the Overseas Development Natural Resources Institute of the former naval barracks and the letting of a superb headquarters building to the Colonial and Mutual insurance company, the marketing of some splendid new buildings is still bedevilled by the uncertainty about road communications.

The proposed widening of the poorly built M2 between junctions 1 and 4 raises the spectre of more traffic being diverted through the towns over Rochester bridge, which already carries some 50,000 vehicle movements a day. Memories of the legendary solid traffic jams from Strood to Rainham on the old A2—Watling street in the charabanc days before the M2 was built—come flooding back. We are regularly reminded of such horrors when the two-lane M2 is blocked by an accident. The historic dockyard is not receiving a just number of potential visitors because of poor access.

I am told that the county council remains committed to this important road scheme, and I believe that. It is investigating the possibility of obtaining alternative loan finance, but loans mean repayment and repayment ultimately means transport supplementary grant. Thus it is that I must ask my hon. Friend the Minister to seek

*[Mr. James Couchman]*

most urgently a way forward to give Kent county council the necessary confidence to let the contracts for Gillingham northern link and Wainscott northern bypass this year, sure in the knowledge that the TSG income stream will continue to the successful conclusion of the contracts. The hopes and fears for a prosperous future for 250,000 people in Gillingham, Rochester and Chatham rest with him.

2.45 pm

**Dame Peggy Fenner** (Medway): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) for letting me have a short time to speak, after his comprehensive history of this notorious and disappointing transport matter. He explained how important the road is to our constituents in the Medway towns. That shows how interdependent we are in our road structure, which is vital industrially.

My hon. Friend mentioned what is happening in Chatham Maritime, where we hope to use dockyard land to bring back more prosperity to the Medway towns. We lost so many job opportunities when the Government closed the naval dockyard and base that the bypass is essential for redevelopment. He described at length the indefensible delay of the public inquiry and the issue of the final report. I do not want to repeat the elegant and eloquent words with which he regaled the House.

I have three questions and my constituents want answers. I want to give my hon. Friend the Minister plenty of time to answer, but I know, being the good friend that he is, that he will ensure that I receive answers by letter if he does not have time to answer my questions now.

The orders have been signed, albeit only on 18 January. The annexe describing transport supplementary grant issue for this year has been produced. Halfway down the list is the project that is numbered 5533 and named Wainscott northern bypass. The document, with immense optimism, gives the start year as 1994-95. My hon. Friend the Minister will learn what a miserable start we have had. The project is marked with an asterisk, of which the document states:

"An asterisk after a reference number denotes a scheme accepted for TSG in this settlement".

To my constituents, that means that the money has been allocated and will start in 1996-97. My hon. Friend the Minister has dedicated the public money to the scheme. It is named and identified in the list. With the help that my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham has sought, will my hon. Friend the Minister insist that the project starts this year, in 1996?

My second question is whether this is the first time that the Department of Transport has adopted the doctrine that the Highways Agency is responsible for deciding priority. If so, why? Surely it is rotten, bad housekeeping to give an allocation of public funds with no assurance of compliance with the projects listed.

My third question relates to my constituents, who are extremely worried because they believe that the planning consents that cover the northern Wainscott bypass will expire early in 1997. Will the Minister tell them what, hypothetically, would be the problem?

I introduced my brief remarks by commenting on the importance of the road, industrially and environmentally, to our quarter of a million constituents. May I ask the Minister to look seriously at the protection of the living environment for the thousands of people in my constituency whose houses are pounded night and day by heavy lorries and other traffic through Brompton Farm road, Rede Court road, Hollywood lane and countless other areas in my constituency? That will continue until the new tunnel is in use. Will my hon. Friend reassure my constituents that the procedures are completed, ensure that money is provided, and instruct that the road shall be built?

2.50 pm

**The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris):** I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) for raising the topic of the Medway towns northern relief road. It is a road scheme that has particular importance for my Department, even though it has been built by Kent county council, and when completed, will be part of its road network.

The scheme has three sections—Wainscott northern, the Medway tunnel and the Gillingham northern link. I shall say a brief word about each and how they interrelate.

Following on from the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, the key objective of the Wainscott scheme is to provide greatly improved access to the Isle of Grain, and to allow for the expansion and development of that area, while at the same time taking heavy goods traffic away from unsuitable residential roads in the Wainscott area. As my hon. Friend said, it is valuable piece of infrastructure.

The Medway towns northern relief road heads south from the junction with the A228 to the western end of the new tunnel under the River Medway. The tunnel is, of course, a considerable engineering feat. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham referred to my former boss, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). I recall him walking through the tunnel, and, if I remember correctly, my hon. Friends were with him. The tunnel is an extraordinary technical achievement. It is an immersed tube, 725 m long. The tunnel scheme also includes a link to a new roundabout on Anthonys way on the western side. To the east, the grade separated interchange at Pembroke road provides access to the Chatham Maritime development, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Medway referred. That is a key development, especially in the unfolding context of the Thames Gateway. That junction was financed by English Partnerships, the developer of Chatham Maritime. The developer contribution to the cost of the Medway tunnel is currently about £25 million.

Chatham Maritime is a flagship of the Government's Thames Gateway initiative, and it is starting to develop. Earlier this year, the Halifax building society took a 25-year lease on Royal Sovereign house, which will be its new administrative centre for the south-east. Time (Open Systems) Ltd., a financial software specialist, has decided to locate its new national headquarters at Chatham Maritime.

Moving further east, away from the tunnel, we reach the particular interest of my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, the Gillingham northern link. That will provide a dual carriageway connection from the tunnel to the A2. A short distance to the east of the A2 junction, the A278 runs south to join the M2 at junction 4.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham knows well, the Gillingham scheme is important in giving access to the new development at Chatham Maritime and to industrial areas along the B2004. It will provide environmental, road safety and community benefits by removing traffic from residential streets such as Woodlands road and Barnsole road and, like the rest of the Medway towns northern relief road, the Gillingham scheme will play an important role in congestion relief.

The junction with the A2 is at a roundabout that already serves the Gillingham business park, which is one of north Kent's success stories. Since development began at the old Army barracks, nearly 3,000 jobs have been created throughout the retail, office, warehouse and manufacturing sectors. Companies such as Lloyds bank, B and Q, Rover Fairways and Mercury Interactive have all moved to Gillingham business park. It has more Japanese companies as tenants than any United Kingdom business park.

Scope for modest expansion remains, however, and when the Gillingham northern link is completed, it will improve access to the business park for potential customers and for employees in the Medway towns conurbation. It will be an important link between Gillingham business park and the Chatham Maritime development.

The project is substantial, and my hon. Friends will understand when I emphasise that it is very expensive. The latest cost estimates that we have were provided in the county council's last transport policies and programme submission, dated July 1995. In addition to the £25 million that was provided by the developers, Wainscott northern bypass is currently estimated to cost £59.4 million, the Medway tunnel £59.9 million and Gillingham northern link £42.4 million—a total of £187 million, of which £162 million is being sought from the Department of Transport budget for capital expenditure by local authorities.

It may be helpful if I place that sum in context. When we reviewed the trunk road programme in November, the estimated cost of proposals to widen the M25 between the M3 and the M40—the busiest section of motorway in the country—was about £137 million, compared with the £162 million that I mentioned. In our entire main trunk road programme, only two schemes are more expensive than the Medway towns northern relief road, and the largest individual scheme that was accepted for transport supplementary grant this year was only £11 million.

The scheme is not cheap; it is a very large proportion of the budget that is available throughout the country for such schemes—but I shall now make a very positive statement. We remain committed to funding in full the Medway towns northern relief road, and to doing so in the shortest time that our resources allow.

I understand the disappointments that my hon. Friends have felt, and I pay a genuine tribute to their significant, sustained efforts to bring pressure to bear on myself and my colleagues, to ensure that there is no undue delay beyond that which is inevitable.

My hon. Friends know of the two problems. The problem with the statutory orders is as great as the problem with funding. We warn local authorities, when securing orders, that it can be a lengthy and complex process, and the Gillingham and Wainscott schemes have been among the most difficult that my Department has had to handle.

In the case of the Gillingham scheme, the public inquiry was held in June 1993 and the inspector's report was received by September 1994. An interim decision was made by April 1995, which required the county to make modifications to the proposed orders, and after that was done, the orders were confirmed in September 1995.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Medway knows, substantial modifications were required to the Wainscott scheme as a result of the February 1995 interim decision letter, and the decision letter finally confirming the orders was, as she said, issued as recently as January 1996.

Those difficulties are now history, and I understand why the tremendously long time during which the new road was held up by bureaucracy might have caused frustration, but my hon. Friends will understand that the Secretary of State acts in a quasi-judicial capacity when he decides on orders, and both he and the inspector must be able to show that they thoroughly examined all the technical issues. I am afraid that our legal advice, for example, on the reference to substantial modifications was that that was the position that the Secretary of State for Transport was obliged to make clear, and he did so simply because that was the obligation placed on him.

I have no time left to answer most of the questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Medway asked, but I undertake to answer them in writing as soon as possible. I confirm again that we are committed to the scheme going ahead, and to its being funded in full within our Department's resources.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.*

# Written Answers to Questions

*Monday 22 January 1996*

## TREASURY

### Incomes

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been *(a)* the percentage change in real personal disposable income and *(b)* the index of real personal disposable income, taking 1966=100 in each year since 1966. [9319]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Information on real personal disposable income and the index of real personal disposable income, both based on 1990, is published annually in the CSO Blue Book and quarterly in the CSO press notice "Quarterly National Accounts" and is held on the CSO database. All sources are available in the Library of the House. The figures are given in the table—the 1990 based index has been re-referenced to 1966=100.

| | *Percentage change in real personal disposable income* | *Index of real personal disposable income* |
|---|---|---|
| 1966 | 2.1 | 100.0 |
| 1967 | 1.5 | 101.5 |
| 1968 | 1.8 | 103.3 |
| 1969 | 0.9 | 104.2 |
| 1970 | 3.8 | 108.5 |
| 1971 | 1.2 | 109.5 |
| 1972 | 8.4 | 118.7 |
| 1973 | 6.5 | 126.4 |
| 1974 | -0.8 | 125.4 |
| 1975 | 0.6 | 126.1 |
| 1976 | -0.3 | 125.7 |
| 1977 | -2.1 | 123.1 |
| 1978 | 7.4 | 132.2 |
| 1979 | 5.7 | 139.7 |
| 1980 | 1.5 | 141.8 |
| 1981 | -0.8 | 140.7 |
| 1982 | -0.5 | 140.0 |
| 1983 | 2.7 | 143.7 |
| 1984 | 3.6 | 149.0 |
| 1985 | 3.4 | 154.0 |
| 1986 | 4.5 | 160.8 |
| 1987 | 3.4 | 166.3 |
| 1988 | 6.0 | 176.2 |
| 1989 | 4.8 | 184.7 |
| 1990 | 1.8 | 188.0 |
| 1991 | -0.1 | 187.9 |
| 1992 | 2.3 | 192.2 |
| 1993 | 1.6 | 195.4 |
| 1994 | 0.7 | 196.7 |

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households have incomes *(a)* less than £5,000 a year, *(b)* £5,000 to £15,000 a year, *(c)* £15,000 to £20,000 a year, *(d)* £20,000 to £50,000 a year, *(e)* £50,000 to £100,000 a year and *(f)* more than £100,000 a year; and of each of these groups, how many and what percentage have incomes that are (i) wholly earned, (ii) wholly unearned and (iii) part earned and part unearned. [9324]

**Mrs. Knight:** The figures are not available in the form requested.

### Financial Services Act 1986

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when section 164 of the Financial Services Act 1986 was brought into force. [10638]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Section 164 of the Financial Services Act 1986 has not been brought into force and was repealed when the Public Offers of Securities Regulations 1995 came into force on 19 June 1995. Regulation 10 of those regulations contains an equivalent provision to section 164.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the enforcement of penalties for *(a)* carrying on, and *(b)* purporting to carry on, investment business without authorisation or exemption, under section 4 of the Financial Services Act 1986. [10434]

**Mrs. Knight:** Prosecutions for contraventions of section 3 of the Financial Services Act are brought before the courts where there is a realistic prospect of securing a conviction and the public interest is in favour of a prosecution. Enforcement of any penalty under section 4 of the Financial Services Act imposed by the court is a matter for the court concerned.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the penalties for *(a)* carrying on and *(b)* purporting to carry on, investment business without authorisation or exemption, under section 4 of the Financial Services Act 1986. [10435]

**Mrs. Knight:** I have no plans to do so.

### Tortoises

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what seizures of tortoises and tortoise products were made by Customs and Excise in 1995. [10153]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Statistics for Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species seizures made by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1995 are complete only for the first nine months to 30 September. In that period, there were two seizures of tortoise products imported in breach of CITES requirements together with 794 live specimens.

The latter figure includes one large seizure of 674 specimens found in the possession of crewmen on board an east European vessel which called temporarily in the United Kingdom.

### Banks (Overcharging)

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to provide that banks pay compensation to customers for the consequences of overcharging; and if he will make a statement. [9880]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* There are no plans to introduce such legislation. Arrangements already exist for customers' complaints to

be pursued, either through banks' internal procedures or, where they are exhausted, by involving the banking ombudsman.

### Banking Contracts

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consult the Governor of the Bank of England with a view to making changes in the standard inclusion in banking contracts of repayment on demand; and if he will make a statement. [9881]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* No. The precise form that a particular loan takes is a commercial matter to be agreed between a borrower and his bank. Since 1992 there has been a shift in small business lending away from overdrafts, which are repayable on demand, and towards a greater proportion of fixed-term loans.

### Bank Customers

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consult the Governor of the Bank of England with a view to establishing guidelines to ensure protection coverage for bank customers in cases of *(a)* bank malpractice, *(b)* overcharging and *(c)* breach of contract; and if he will make a statement. [9882]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The code of banking practice and the banking ombudsman scheme already provide guidance on these issues, and offer definitive and flexible methods of resolving disputes. Customers now have far more information than ever before about banking practices, fees and interest payments, and about what they should do if they wish to discuss, or complain about, the services they receive.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will implement the recommendations of the Government's 1989 review of banking services to provide for *(a)* the power of a bank to withdraw any complaint which has wide ramifications or raises important legal issue from the banking ombudsman's jurisdiction to be exercised only with the concurrence of the ombudsman, *( b)* compulsory production by a bank of any relevant documents of information and *(c)* publication of information about a complaint if a customer consents; and if he will make a statement. [10232]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Recommendations *(a)* and *(b)* are now reflected in the latest version of the banking ombudsman's terms of reference—paragraphs 20–22 and 5(b) respectively. The ombudsman does not publish details of customers' complaints but his annual report does quote figures on the types of complaints received by the ombudsman. The report also quotes examples of specific complaint, without revealing the identity of the complainant, to illustrate the circumstances of a particular case.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to require banks to establish bank customer councils; and if he will make a statement. [10234]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* No. This is a matter for banks and their customers.

### Channel Tunnel

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to provide financial support or guarantees to Eurotunnel in respect of the re-financing of the channel tunnel. [10114]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* No.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Exports

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were United Kingdom relative export unit values at current rates of exchange *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* at the time of United Kingdom entry into the exchange rate mechanism. [9786]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply of 16 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *526* given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the same question.

### Nuclear Power Stations

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent research has been initiated by his Department into early decommissioning of nuclear power stations; and if he will make a statement. [10089]

**Mr. Eggar:** My Department has not initiated any research into the early decommissioning of nuclear power stations. However, my Department together with Nuclear Electric, is providing funding for the early decommissioning of the prototype advanced gas-cooled reactor at Windscale.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent research the Government have initiated into the use of robotics in the decommissioning of nuclear power stations; and if he will make a statement. [10088]

**Mr. Eggar:** The Government have not initiated any research into the use of robotics in the decommissioning of nuclear power stations. However, I am advised that in 1993–94 the nuclear installations inspectorate identified the use of telerobotics as a nuclear safety research issue that the nuclear licensees should address. As a result, Scottish Nuclear, on behalf of the licensees, undertook research on telerobotics safety-related control and protection.

### Business Links

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to bring about a business link in East Lancashire. [10634]

**Mr. Richard Page:** The chairman of the business link national assessment panel had detailed discussions with the chairman of the East Lancashire training and enterprise council about its proposals for a business link in East Lancashire. Those proposals were considered by the assessment panel in December, which concluded that they needed to be developed further in conjunction with other partners.

The Government office for the north west has convened a series of meeting with ELTEC, the local chamber of commerce and the local authorities concerned. This has led to the establishment of a working group involving all partners and the Government Office, that is committed to developing an agreed bid for consideration by the assessment panel.

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the average number of clients held by personal business advisers in business links; and what is the largest and smallest number of clients. [10415]

**Mr. Page:** Our latest information indicates that the average case load of a personal business adviser is around 40 clients. Most have between 21 and 50; none are known to have more than 100.

### Resider and Rechar Programmes

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals to grant additional funds to the United Kingdom under the European Union Resider and Rechar 1994–1997 programmes were discussed at the management committee meeting of member states in December 1995; and if he will make a statement. [10422]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** The committee's agenda included a Commission proposal to allocate an additional 60 mecu to the United Kingdom for Resider, Rechar, Retex and Konver together, for 1998 and 1999. These are programmes of European structural funds grant for designated areas which have lost jobs in, respectively, steel, coal, textiles and defence.

The UK asked for a larger allocation. Before a decision is taken, the committee will meet again; the European Parliament is also being consulted.

I plan to make a statement after the allocations for these and certain other similar programmes have been settled.

### British Coal

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list opencast deposits identified by British Coal on land in its ownership in north Wales; [10927]

(2) if he will list the landholdings of British Coal in north Wales which are subject to sale currently; if he will list those land holdings of British Coal in north Wales which will be considered for sale in the future; and if he will give the current land use of all of these land holdings. [10926]

**Mr. Page:** These are matters for British Coal.

### Official Gifts

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons details of official gifts received by Ministers in his Department are not available before 1994–95, as indicated in his answer of 4 July, *Official Report*, column *146*. [10178]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Information in respect of gifts received by Ministers before April 1994 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Systematic Biological Research

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his Department's letter of 12 September 1995, what progress has been reported to Her Majesty's Government by the United Kingdom systematics forum, on its identification of priorities for systematic biological research. [8411]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** The United Kingdom systematics forum published its "Review of 1994–95" on 6 October 1995 and produced a preliminary report, "Priorities in Systematic Research and Training" in September last year.

I am pleased to be able to announce today that the Office of Science and Technology will be providing a further three years' funding to the systematics forum from 1 April this year, amounting to a total of £86,000. Since it was established in 1994, the forum has done much to foster closer communications within the community it serves, This new commitment will enable it to focus on devising a national strategy on priorities for systematics research.

OST will explore integration of the forum into an existing learned society during this new funding period so that the links built within the systematics community are maintained.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10969]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative within my Department and its associated bodies since its introduction are as follows:

*£ thousand*

| | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Staff costs | Nil | Nil | [1]11.5 (11.5) | [1]163.4 (159.1) |
| IT | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| Other costs | Nil | Nil | [1]11.5 (11.5) | [1]22.4 (21.8) |

[1] Real costs in brackets.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10970]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** No money has yet been spent by my Department on external consultants in the tendering process for projects under the private finance initiative.

### Forte Hotels

**Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he intends to act under the Financial Services Act 1986 in respect of Granada group's decision to understate publicly its intention for the disposal of the Meridien and Exclusive hotels of Forte plc. [9808]

**Mr. John M. Taylor** *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* Section 47 of the Financial Services Act 1986 provides that it is an offence for any person to seek to manipulate the market in or the price or value of any investments by issuing a statement, promise or forecast which he knows to be false or misleading. If the hon. Member has evidence of improper conduct, he should write to me.

If the bid by Granada Group plc for Forte plc is successful, it is possible that any subsequent disposal or proposed disposal by Granada of assets acquired from Forte might be subject to examination under the merger control procedures of the Fair Trading Act 1973, depending on the nature of the particular disposal in question and of the acquirer.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry; and how much has been spent on legal advice and for whom. [10223]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The amount so far spent by my Department on external advice in relation to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry is £293,870. The names of individuals and their legal advisers are confidential to them.

### Competitiveness

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" was modified by the results of any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [8668]

(2) if "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"; and if he will publish the appraisal; [8666]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead"; [8669]

(4) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [8667]

**Mr. Page:** The 1994 White Paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win" was the first comprehensive audit of the UK's competitive position. The 1995 White Paper, "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" updated the analysis, and it will be reviewed and developed further in the competitiveness White Paper due to be published later this year.

The White Papers have analysed the main factors influencing competitiveness. They identified the primary responsibility of companies themselves to improve their competitive performance. They also outlined policies and initiatives across the whole of Government to help create the right framework and conditions to foster that improvement.

Against this background, the White Papers considered the relationship between environmental issues and competitiveness. The 1995 White Paper sets out the implications for business of the Government's commitment to sustainable development. It addresses the way that tax and regulatory policies are used to achieve environmental objectives and identifies the challenges and opportunities for business managers. There was no specific, separate written environmental appraisal of the White Papers themselves. It is a matter for each Government Department and individual company to consider and monitor the environmental implications of their activities in the normal way—including, where appropriate, the need for a written environmental appraisal.

Responsibility for managing the competitiveness agenda within the Government now lies with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Office of Public Service in the Cabinet Office.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Warrants and Process (Transfer)

**Mrs. Ann Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations his Department has received expressing concern over the proposed transfer of responsibility from the police to magistrates courts committees of the execution of warrants and the service of process; and how many of these have been received from members of police forces. [10985]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** My Department has been in consultation with representative bodies within the magistrates courts community and other interested parties, including the Association of Chief Police Officers, over the proposed transfer of responsibilities, which has now been postponed with a view to its taking effect on 1 April 1997. In addition to these consultations, my Department has received correspondence on the subject of the transfer from individual justices chief executives and clerks to magistrates courts committees, justices clerks, local authorities, the chairman of an area criminal justice liaison committee and interested private firms. I have also received representations from Members of Parliament for the Kirklees area, including the hon. Lady. My Department has received one letter from the Metropolitan police expressing concern over the progress of the transfer of responsibility.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10961]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** All expenditure on external consultancy has been incurred in the current financial year. Expenditure to date is (i) legal fees—nil, (ii) publicity costs—nil, (iii) accountancy fees—nil, (iv) management consultancy fees—£108,464.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's department what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10962]

**Mr. Evans:** All expenditure was incurred in the current financial year. Expenditure to date is (i) staff costs—£153,000, (ii) information technology—£1,500, (iii) other costs £3,000.

### Public Interest Immunity

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements are in place to ensure that justice is done on the basis of accurate information in a court case where public interest immunity is claimed to suppress certain evidence; and if he will make a statement. [9498]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** In each individual case, the authority for deciding claims relating to public interest immunity rests with the courts.

### Disability Discrimination Act 1995

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arms-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9218]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** I refer to the answer given by my right Hon. Friend, the Minister for Disabled People on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *417*. I will ensure that my Department and any bodies for which it is responsible will be made fully aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Official Gifts

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will put on public display those gifts received by Ministers in his Department. [10161]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Gifts received by Ministers are not put on public display.

### Penguins (Falkland Islands)

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the population change in Gentoo and Magellanic penguins in the Falkland Islands over the last 10 years. [10160]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** There is insufficient recorded material from which to draw detailed conclusions on the state of the penguin populations in the Falkland Islands.

A recent survey of Gentoo penguins indicates that there are approximately 65,000 breeding pairs which suggest a decline of around 10 per cent. over the last 10 years.

An accurate estimate of the population of Magellanic penguins is more difficult. Figures based on recent study plots suggest a very approximate total of 300,000 breeding pairs, which could show a decrease of up to 30 per cent. over the past five years.

### Hong Kong and China

**Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Hong Kong and Beijing. [8570]

**Mr. Hanley** *[pursuant to his reply, 15 January 1996,* column *410]:* I regret that the last paragraphs of my answer of 15 January were inadvertently omitted. The full answer is as follows

My right hon. and learned Friend, the Foreign Secretary, visited Hong Kong and China from 6 to 11 January.

In Hong Kong he met the governor, members of the Legislative and Executive Councils, senior Hong Kong Government and British officials and business and community figures. This gave him an invaluable opportunity to hear at first hand the views and concerns of the people of Hong Kong about their future.

My right hon. and learned Friend was warmly received in Peking and held frank and constructive discussions with President Jiang Zemin, Premier Li Peng, Vice Premier Qian Qichen, and the Director of the State Council Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, Lu Ping. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary's discussions gave him an opportunity to describe to Chinese leaders the mood in Hong Kong and to discuss with them ways of maintaining confidence there. We made substantial progress on several specific issues. The Chinese assured my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary of their commitment to a successful transition and to the preservation of a high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong after 30 June 1997.

We also agreed to develop further our bilateral links in all areas: political, economic and commercial. As part of this dialogue my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary registered our concerns over reports of human rights abuses and urged china to address these issues quickly and openly.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Woodland Improvement Grant

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what role the woodland improvement grant will play in encouraging coppicing for the purpose

of reducing the decline in the numbers of woodland butterflies and moths. [9322]

**Mr. Boswell:** The first projects eligible for the woodland improvement grant are those which encourage informal public recreation in woodlands. Further projects, which may include coppicing to enhance the nature conservation value of woodlands, will be considered in due course.

## Fish Stocks

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of the treaty on straddling fish stocks; and highly migratory fish stocks; and what action has been taken to place limits on catches of *(a)* tuna and *(b)* swordfish which migrate through international waters and stocks of (i) flounder, (ii) halibut and (iii) other fish which straddle the territorial waters of different countries. [8246]

**Mr. Baldry:** The United Nations agreement for the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks was adopted by the conference on 4 August 1995. It opened for signature on 4 December 1995 and was signed on that date by 25 states, including the United Kingdom in respect of certain dependent territories. The EC and its member states have not yet completed the required internal procedures for signature.

Much of the content of the agreement has to do with the establishment of regional fisheries organisations and their activities. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, which the United Kingdom joined on 14 November 1995, adopted at its 1995 meeting further measures to limit the catches of bluefin tuna in the Atlantic and to allocate percentage national shares for the catch of north Atlantic swordfish. The North-West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation has adopted for 1996 a zero catch limit for yellowtail flounder and a total allowable catch of 27,000 tonnes for Greenland halibut on the Grand banks.

## Farm Incomes

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the latest estimate of farm income for *(a)* each standard region, *(b)* for England and *(c)* for the United Kingdom, together with the equivalent figures for the previous three years in constant prices, indicating the yearly percentage change and the cumulative percentage change in each case; and if he will make a statement; [9019]

(2) if he will list the latest estimate of farm income together with the equivalent figures for the previous three years in constant prices, indicating the yearly percentage change and cumulative percentage change in each case; and if he will make a statement. [9020]

**Mr. Boswell:** The latest available estimates of total income from farming, covering years from 1990, for the United Kingdom, the four countries and each standard statistical region within England are as follows. The figures are presented in real terms, first in £m at 1990 prices and then as indices—1990=100. The latter set thus show cumulative percentage changes from 1990 and both allow easy calculation of annual changes. The figures have been derived from those shown in table 6.5 of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1994" and tables 5.2 and 5.3 of issues of "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom".

A provisional estimate of total income from farming in 1995 for the United Kingdom will be issued by press release on 31 January and corresponding country data will be issued by the other agricultural departments. "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1995" and "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom [1]1994–95", both to be published on 19 March, will provide further details, including English regional data for 1994.

*Total income from farming in real terms (as deflated by RPI): £ million 1990 prices*

| | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *[1]1994* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| United Kingdom | 2,300 | 2,174 | 2,599 | 3,531 | 3,687 |
| England | 1,821 | 1,701 | 2,055 | 2,775 | 2,800 |
| Wales | 134 | 131 | 134 | 209 | 225 |
| Scotland | 212 | 176 | 218 | 326 | 398 |
| Northern Ireland | 134 | 167 | 194 | 223 | 265 |
| *England regions* | | | | | |
| North | 132 | 128 | 182 | 228 | n/a |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 240 | 202 | 230 | 285 | n/a |
| East Midlands | 336 | 332 | 317 | 452 | n/a |
| East Anglia | 397 | 345 | 363 | 415 | n/a |
| South East | 219 | 220 | 240 | 428 | n/a |
| South West | 164 | 136 | 299 | 432 | n/a |
| West Midlands | 171 | 194 | 253 | 333 | n/a |
| North West | 162 | 144 | 172 | 201 | n/a |

Totals may not add owing to rounding.
[1] Provisional.

*Total income from farming in real terms (as deflated by RPI): Indices 1990=100*

| | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *[1]1994* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| United Kingdom | 100.0 | 94.5 | 113.0 | 153.5 | 160.3 |
| England | 100.0 | 93.4 | 112.9 | 152.4 | 153.7 |
| Wales | 100.0 | 97.4 | 99.9 | 155.7 | 168.0 |
| Scotland | 100.0 | 82.8 | 103.0 | 153.9 | 187.9 |
| Norther Ireland | 100.0 | 124.3 | 144.1 | 165.8 | 197.6 |
| English regions | | | | | |
| North | 100.0 | 97.2 | 138.3 | 172.8 | n/a |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 100.0 | 84.4 | 95.9 | 118.9 | n/a |
| East Midlands | 100.0 | 98.9 | 94.4 | 134.6 | n/a |
| East Anglia | 100.0 | 86.9 | 91.3 | 104.5 | n/a |
| South-East | 100.0 | 100.3 | 109.4 | 195.4 | n/a |
| South-West | 100.0 | 82.8 | 182.0 | 263.0 | n/a |
| West Midlands | 100.0 | 113.2 | 147.7 | 194.9 | n/a |
| North-West | 100.0 | 88.6 | 106.0 | 124.0 | n/a |

[1] Provisional.

### Live Animal Imports

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to permit the importation of breeding cattle from North America through the port of Avonmouth. [9855]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The port of Avonmouth has applied for approval as a border inspection post—BIP—to handle imports of cattle from third countries including north America. EC inspectors have recently visited the port in order to assess its suitability as a BIP and their report is awaited.

## HEALTH

### Hospital Waiting Lists

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage of patients dying while on the waiting list for bypass surgery, *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by region. [10748]

**Mr. Malone:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Health (Dr. Mawhinney) gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 19 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *557*.

### Helplines

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the helplines, or schemes which include a helpline service, for which his Department provides any funding, stating which are *(a)* independent organisations, *(b)* run by his Department or agencies of his Department of *(c)* of another classification; how many calls each received in each of the last five years; and how much money each received from his Department in each of the last five years. [9800]

**Mr. Horam:** Information on the eight main information lines and one run by the Medicines Control Agency is listed.

| *Description* | *Run by* | *Number of calls* | *Cost £* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Blood Donor line | Managed by the Central Office of Information for the Department of Health | 78,516 (April to December 1995) | 33,074 |
| Drinkline | Drinkline (non-profit making limited company) | 44,000 (October 1993 to January 1996) | 516,000 (DH funding for 1993–94–1995–96) |
| Health Information Service | NHS—regionally provided service | 1,000,788 (April 1992 to December 1995) | 8,113,170 (April 1992 to March 1996 Includes all costs associated with establishing the service and in initially publicising its availability) |
| Health Literature line (including the Organ Donor line) | Managed by the Central Office of Information for the Department of Health | 255,885 (April to December 1995) | 108,026 |
| National AIDS Helpline and National Drugs Helpline | Network of Scotland Ltd. (independent company contracted by the Department of Health) | 386,953 (April to December 1995) | 1,569,000 (estimated total 1995–1996 cost) |
| National AIDS Helpline | Broadcasting Support Services and Network Scotland (contracted by the Department of Health) | 4,200,514 (January 1990 to December 1994) | 6,038,000 |
| Sexwise helpline | Managed by the Central Office of Information for the Department of Health | 784,016 (April to December 1995) | 366,854 |
| Committee safety medicines freephone | Medicines Control Agency | 1,977 (January 1994 to December 1995) | 7,510 (call costs only) |

Details of other helpline services could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Details of the helpline numbers are as listed:

Blood Donor line: 0345 711 711

Drinkline: 0345 32 02 02

Health Information Service: 0800 66 55 44

Health Literature line: 0800 555 777

National Drugs helpline: 0800 77 66 00

National AIDS helpline: 0800 567 123

Sexwise: 0800 28 29 30

Committee Safety Medicines: Dial the operator and ask for freephone CSM.

### Form AG1

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of his Department's form AG1. [9907]

**Mr. Malone:** Supplies of form AG1 are available from Her Majesty's Stationary Office in the normal way.

**Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus**

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to making MRSA a notifiable disease; what representations he has received, and from whom, on this matter: what assessment he has made of the effect of the non-notifiability of MRSA on its recorded incidence; and if he will make a statement. [10269]

**Mr. Alan W. Williams :** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the advantages of making MRSA a notifiable disease. [10594]

**Mr. Horam:** No representations that methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus—MRSA—should be made a notifiable disease have been received in recent years.

The statutory notification system requires doctors who are directly responsible for patient care—not laboratories—to notify diagnosed and suspected cases who are suffering from certain diseases. About 80 per cent. of people who acquire MRSA do not develop any infection and are not therefore suffering from a disease. When MRSA infection does occur, it can take the form of many different diseases, ranging from trivial skin infections to pneumonia or septicaemia, all of which are more commonly due to other causes. MRSA infection cannot be diagnosed clinically but only by laboratory tests. Notification of clinically suspected cases of all these diseases would be wholly impracticable. Appropriate control measures are taken in hospitals when MRSA is identified—such control action is not dependent on whether or not MRSA is notifiable.

Current data on the incidence of MRSA are compiled by the central public health laboratory of the Public Health Laboratory Service. The PHLS believes that its data on the incidence of MRSA are among the most complete of any country in the world.

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to social services departments on the treatment of patients with MRSA discharged from hospital; and if he will make a statement. [10268]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department held a seminar in December 1995 on methicillin—resistant staphylococcus aureus in the community which was attended by representatives from social services departments: a further seminar is being planned. The Department intends to issue guidance shortly to social services departments about MRSA and to provide them with leaflets, which are currently being prepared, for distribution to nursing and residential homes.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's annual expenditure on *(a)* research into MRSA and *(b)* developing new antibiotics. [10598]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department of Health is currently funding, through the regional research and development programme, two research projects totalling £46,000 per year into the detection and prevalence of methicillin—resistant staphylococcus aureus. It is also spending £2 million on studies on the surveillance and costs of hospital acquired infection including MRSA infections. The regional research and development programme includes many projects which involve antibiotics. Of these, two, totalling about £300,000 per year, are on research into antibiotics. There are also eight RHA-funded research projects relating to antibiotics totalling about £210,000 per year.

About 20 per cent. of the NHS drugs bill goes into research and development of new drugs by the pharmaceutical industry and the industry in the United Kingdom is currently spending in excess of £1.5 billion. This includes research into antibiotics, some of which are intended specifically for use against MRSA.

The Public Health Laboratory Service is conducting research into the genetics of MRSA and into the behaviour and virulence of different strains of MRSA, and is also co-operating with the pharmaceutical industry on testing new antibiotics.

The MRC, which receives its grant-in-aid from my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, is funding a research project costing £538,000 over five years into staphylococcus aureus, including MRSA.

**Mr. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the severity of the problem of MRSA in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* France, Germany, Italy and the United States of America. [10596]

**Mr. Horam:** Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus was a considerable problem in British hospitals in the mid-1980s, then receded, but has increased again in the last two to three years. Data on incidents of MRSA are compiled by the central public health laboratory of the Public Health Laboratory Services—PHLS, which defines an incident as three or more patients with the same strain of the organism. About 80 per cent. of patients with MRSA are only carrying the organism and have no infection from it. In 1994, the PHLS recorded 1,081 incidents of MRSA and in the first six months of 1995 there were 750 incidents. Most of these incidents were short lived.

Whilst it is clear from papers published in the medical literature that the other countries have problems with MRSA in some hospitals, the Department is not aware of any central collation of data on MRSA in any of these countries and we are unable to assess the severity of the problem there.

**Mr. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement outlining the department's policy on controlling the spread of MRSA. [10597]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department's policy on the control of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus in hospitals is contained in guidance published jointly by the Hospital Infection Society and the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy, circulated to the NHS in September 1994 under cover of EL(94)74 entitled "Improving the Effectiveness of the NHS".

The Department also published guidance on the control of infection in hospitals in March 1995 under cover of HSG(95)10 "Hospital Infection Control". This includes new advice on the surveillance of MRSA. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

### Intensive Care Beds

**Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his Department's guidelines to health authorities or NHS hospital trusts on the number of fully medically supported intensive care beds to be available at any one time. [10320]

**Mr. Horam:** It is for health authorities and national health service trusts to determine the level of intensive care provision that is needed by their local populations.

### Mental Health Services

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the response from health authorities to his letter sent in August 1995 requesting information on the state of mental health services in each health authority; [10738]

(2) if he will list the number of health authorities *(a)* providing a comprehensive mental health service, *(b)* who will be in a position to provide such a service if given sufficient investment by the end of 1995–96 and *(c)* who will not achieve it by the end of the current year. [10739]

**Mr. Bowis:** An announcement will be made shortly.

### North Mersey Community Health Trust

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the reduction in the management costs of the North Mersey community health trust will be redeployed into the trust's clinical services. [10712]

**Mr. Horam:** This is a matter for North Mersey community national health service trust to decide. The hon. Member may wish to approach Mr. R. James, chairman of the trust, for details.

### Prescription Charges

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in the year 1994–95, how many NHS prescriptions were dispensed for prescription-only medicines at the relevant standard charge which could have been purchased on private prescription at less than the relevant standard charge; [8620]

(2) in the year 1994–95, how many prescriptions were dispensed at the relevant standard charge. [8621]

**Mr. Malone:** When an item is dispensed privately, the pharmacist may add a private dispensing fee to the cost of the medicine. The amount of that fee is at the pharmacist's discretion. It is not therefore possible to calculate the number of prescription items which would, if purchased as private prescriptions, cost less than the NHS prescription charge.

In England in 1994–95, it is estimated that 50.7 million prescription items were charged at the point of dispensing.

### Quitline

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Quitline programme in combating teenage smoking. [9021]

**Mr. Horam:** The Quitline telephone helpline which provides advice on smoking cessation for all age groups was launched as a Freefone number on 7 November 1995. The performance of the service in its first year is being carefully evaluated.

### Patient Transfers

**Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in 1995 had to be transferred to other hospitals because they could not be treated at their local hospital; and if he will indicate the trust to which these belonged; how many of these transfers arose from *(a)* a lack of beds and *(b)* a lack of suitable staff; how many of the patients died; and if he will make a statement. [10464]

**Mr. Horam:** The information is not available centrally.

### Benzodiazepines

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what quantity of benzodiazepines was prescribed via community pharmacists in England and Wales in each of the last four years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9886]

**Mr. Malone:** The available information for England is shown in the table. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

*Number of prescription items dispensed for benzodiazepines: 1991 to 1994*

*England*

| *Year* | *Prescription Items (millions)* |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 15.7 |
| 1992 | 14.8 |
| 1993 | 14.3 |
| 1994 | 13.8 |

The data are from the "Prescription Costs Analysis" (PCA), are for England only and are based on the number of prescription items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors.

### Prescriptions

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the figures for disbursements by the Prescription Pricing Authority in England for each year since 1990 in respect of payments for drugs to dispensing doctors and drugs supplied by prescribing doctors in terms of *(a)* net ingredient cost, *(b)* discounted cost, *(c)* VAT, *(d)* container allowance, *(e)* dispensing fee, *(f)* on cost and *(g)* in total; and if he will make a statement. [9888]

**Mr. Malone:** Information on the actual payments, made direct by family health services authorities to doctors in England is shown in the table.

| Year | Net ingredient cost £ million | Net ingredient cost less discount £ million | On cost allowance £ million | Percentage to basic price | Fees £ million | Container allowance £ million | Total payment oxygen £ million | VAT £ million | Total cost £ million |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1990 | 163.4 | 153.8 | 17.2 | 0.0 | 30.4 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 23.1 | 225.8 |
| 1991 | 186.2 | 175.0 | 19.5 | 0.0 | 33.6 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 29.7 | 259.2 |
| 1992 | 219.3 | 206.2 | 23.0 | 0.0 | 35.1 | 1.5 | 0.1 | 36.0 | 301.9 |
| 1993 | 255.6 | 240.6 | 26.8 | 0.0 | 36.7 | 1.6 | 0.1 | 41.8 | 347.5 |
| 1994 | 288.7 | 271.9 | 30.3 | 0.0 | 38.6 | 1.6 | 0.1 | 46.7 | 389.2 |

1. The information was obtained from the Prescription Pricing Authority.
2. The total cost is the remuneration and reimbursement paid for prescriptions dispensed by doctors and for personally administered items. This is calculated from the net ingredient cost of drugs appliances and chemical reagents dispensed, less a discount calculated from the discount scale, plus an on-cost allowance, a dispensing fee per prescription, a container allowance per prescription, and a VAT allowance where applicable. Payments are made in accordance with Paragraph 44 of the General Medical Services Statement on Fees and Allowances.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated; [10054]

(2) what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10066]

**Mr. Horam:** My Department's policy is not to gold plate European Community directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is undertaken by his Department *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly by financing research elsewhere into combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder; and if he will indicate for *(b)* the organisations involved and the total funding provided. [10538]

**Mr. Bowis:** No such research is being undertaken by the Department of Health. The main agency through which the Government supports biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provision is made by his Department for the treatment of combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder; [10536]

(2) what provision is made by his Department for respite care for sufferers of combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder. [10539]

**Mr. Bowis:** It is the responsibility of health authorities to assess the needs of their population and to secure, through contracting, services to meet those needs.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of ex-service *(a)* men and *(b)* women suffering from combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder. [10537]

**Mr. Bowis:** No such estimate has been made.

### Antibiotics

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many courses of antibiotics were administered in Britain in 1970, 1980 and in each year from 1990 to 1995. [10595]

**Mr. Malone:** The available information for England is shown in the table. Information relating to Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

*Number of prescriptions dispensed for antibiotics*

*England*

| Year | Prescriptions (millions) |
|---|---|
| 1980 | 32.8 |
| 1990 | 39.8 |
| 1991 | 43.7 |
| 1992 | 43.4 |
| 1993 | 47.7 |
| 1994 | 45.8 |

*Notes:*

1. Antibiotics are those preparations in the British National Formulary [issue 26, September 1993] therapeutic group 5.1—antibacterial drugs.
2. The data for 1980 and 1990 are not consistent with data from 1991 onwards. Figures for 1980 and 1990 are based on fees and on a sample of 1 in 200 prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only. Figures from 1991 are based on items and cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.

### Treliske Hospital

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency referrals by general practitioners at Treliske hospital, Cornwall, the hospital was unable to admit on the weekend of 6 and 7 January. [10462]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact John Williams, chairman of Royal Cornwall Hospitals national health service trust for details.

### Dental Services

**Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue further regulations in respect of the crowning and capping of teeth on the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [10707]

**Mr. Malone:** I announced proposals for the reform of the general dental service on 5 April 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1214–15*. One of the measures proposed was the introduction of more rigorous prior approval procedures to ensure that the general dental service provides only those treatments which are clinically essential and for which there are no clinically acceptable, less costly, alternatives. We will implement the reforms in due course.

### Manchester Health Commission

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what submissions were made to the Under-Secretary at his meeting on 17 January with representatives of the Manchester Health Commission and the city's community health councils; what response he gave; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement. [10997]

**Mr. Horam:** Representatives of Manchester health authority and the three Manchester community health councils gave a verbal account of the problems affecting health services in the city, supporting their case with written evidence. I listened sympathetically to their views and undertook to consider any potential solutions.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10954]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 15 January at column *337*. Tenderers bear their own costs. Further information is not available centrally.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees,(ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10953]

**Mr. Horam:** The information requested is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 9 January at column *71*.

### Population Statistics

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number and percentage of the population of *(a)* men aged 65 years and over and *(b)* women aged 60 years and over in each of the past five years; and what are the expected figures in each of the next 20 years. [11095]

**Mr. Horam:** The latest available information is shown in the table.

*England and Wales*

| | *Men aged 65 and over* | | *Women aged 60 and over* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Thousands* | *As percentage of total male population* | *Thousands* | *As percentage of total female population* |
| *Estimates* | | | | |
| 1990 | 3,225 | 13.0 | 6,179 | 23.8 |
| 1991 | 3,257 | 13.0 | 6,189 | 23.7 |
| 1992 | 3,283 | 13.1 | 6,184 | 23.6 |
| 1993 | 3,306 | 13.1 | 6,173 | 23.5 |
| 1994 | 3,323 | 13.1 | 6,150 | 23.4 |
| *Projections (1992 based)* | | | | |
| 1995 | 3,355 | 13.2 | 6,144 | 23.3 |
| 1996 | 3,384 | 13.2 | 6,140 | 23.2 |
| 1997 | 3,409 | 13.3 | 6,141 | 23.1 |
| 1998 | 3,427 | 13.3 | 6,146 | 23.1 |
| 1999 | 3,445 | 13.3 | 6,155 | 23.1 |
| 2000 | 3,470 | 13.3 | 6,160 | 23.0 |
| 2001 | 3,499 | 13.4 | 6,150 | 22.9 |
| 2002 | 3,531 | 13.4 | 6,162 | 22.9 |
| 2003 | 3,567 | 13.5 | 6,199 | 23.0 |
| 2004 | 3,603 | 13.6 | 6,253 | 23.1 |
| 2005 | 3,637 | 13.7 | 6,306 | 23.3 |
| 2006 | 3,657 | 13.7 | 6,363 | 23.4 |
| 2007 | 3,696 | 13.8 | 6,507 | 23.9 |
| 2008 | 3,757 | 14.0 | 6,620 | 24.3 |
| 2009 | 3,832 | 14.2 | 6,709 | 24.5 |
| 2010 | 3,904 | 14.5 | 6,787 | 24.8 |
| 2011 | 3,977 | 14.7 | 6,855 | 25.0 |
| 2012 | 4,133 | 15.2 | 6,918 | 25.2 |
| 2013 | 4,253 | 15.6 | 6,986 | 25.4 |
| 2014 | 4,349 | 16.0 | 7,055 | 25.6 |
| 2015 | 4,431 | 16.2 | 7,119 | 25.8 |
| 2016 | 4,504 | 16.5 | 7,192 | 26.0 |

### Abortions

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions in total have now been performed in England and Wales under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; how many and what percentage of that total were performed in an emergency to save the life of the mother; and if he will give a breakdown by region of that total and the relevant figures and percentages. [6796]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The total number of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act in England and Wales on residents and non-residents from 1968 to 1994[1] was 4,054,340. During this period 140 abortions were performed in an emergency, certified by the operating practitioner as immediately necessary, so as to save the life of the woman. A breakdown by region of the total and the relevant figures and percentages, excluding data for 1968 and 1969, is in the table.

*Number of abortions 1970–1994*[1,2]

| *Health authority of usual residence*[3] | *Total number of abortions* | *Performed in emergency (F of 5)*[4] | *Percentage of total abortions* |
|---|---|---|---|
| England | 3,140,723 | 100 | 0.00 |
| Wales | 151,320 | 7 | 0.00 |
| Northern | 147,389 | 6 | 0.00 |
| Yorkshire | 189,160 | 6 | 0.00 |
| Trent | 245,489 | 9 | 0.00 |
| East Anglia | 97,728 | 6 | 0.01 |
| NW Thames | 379,451 | 8 | 0.00 |
| NE Thames | 373,285 | 11 | 0.00 |
| SE Thames | 294,696 | 7 | 0.00 |
| SW Thames | 234,336 | 3 | 0.00 |
| Wessex | 143,269 | 9 | 0.01 |
| Oxford | 144,154 | 4 | 0.00 |
| South Western | 160,792 | 9 | 0.01 |
| West Midlands | 351,747 | 9 | 0.00 |
| Mersey | 141,916 | 6 | 0.00 |
| North Western | 237,311 | 7 | 0.00 |
| Non-residents | 683,837 | 3 | 0.00 |
| Total | 3,975,880 | 110 | 0.00 |

[1] All data for 1994 are provisional.
[2] Figures for 1968–69 are not held on a comparable basis.
[3] 1994 figures based on 1993 RHA boundaries. Other boundary changes have not been reflected in the figures.
[4] Abortions performed under statutory grounds 5 (1970–April 1991) and F (April 1991–present)—i.e. where in the case of emergency it was necessary to save the life of a woman.

### Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning annually resulting in death and injury are the result of a work-related incident. [9709]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I have been asked to reply.

Statistics on incidents of carbon monoxide–CO–poisoning resulting from work-related incidents are not available.

## TRANSPORT

### London Underground (Accidents)

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* fatal, *(b)* serious and *(c)* minor injuries were suffered by (i) passengers and (ii) employees of London Underground in each of the last 10 years. [8111]

**Mr. Norris:** The information, which has been provided by London Underground Ltd. on the basis of accidents reported by them to HM railway inspectorate, is set out in the following tables. Figures are not available for 1986.

*Injuries on London Underground 1987–1995*

| *Year* | *Fatal* | *Serious* | *Minor* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *A. Passengers* | | | |
| 1987 | 82 | 25 | 2,597 |
| 1988 | 59 | 32 | 2,999 |
| 1989 | 53 | 32 | 2,839 |
| 1990 | 35 | 48 | 1,915 |
| 1991 | 37 | 45 | 1,198 |
| 1992 | 32 | 32 | 1,491 |
| 1993 | 58 | 89 | 2,004 |
| 1994 | 55 | 87 | 1,980 |
| 1995 | 42 | 82 | 2,262 |

*Injuries on London Underground 1987–1995*

| *Year* | *Fatal* | *Serious* | *Minor* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *B. LUL employees* | | | |
| 1987 | 2 | 13 | 369 |
| 1988 | 1 | 6 | 284 |
| 1989 | 0 | 6 | 348 |
| 1990 | 6 | 17 | 339 |
| 1991 | 2 | 26 | 474 |
| 1992 | 1 | 17 | 551 |
| 1993 | 0 | 46 | 506 |
| 1994 | 2 | 41 | 440 |
| 1995 | 1 | 86 | 354 |

*Notes:*
[1] Fatal injury figures cover (for passengers) all non-medical related incidents including suicides and accidents involving trespassers, and (for employees) include accidents involving contractors working for LUL. Minor injuries exclude cases involving only minor cuts and bruises.
[2] 1995 figures do not include data for December.

### Newbury Bypass

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are the costs per day of security staff and other security measures employed at the Newbury bypass site; [9345]

(2) what estimate he has made of the likely delay caused by action directed to prevent the building of the Newbury bypass; [9346]

(3) if Her Majesty's Government will now carry out a new cost benefit analysis of the Newbury bypass. [9344]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 22 January 1996:*

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what are the costs per day of security staff and other security measures employed at the Newbury Bypass; if the Government will now carry out a new cost benefit analysis of the bypass; and what estimate has he made of the likely delay caused by action directed to prevent the building of the bypass.

There are no figures available for security costs at this early stage; costs will in any event vary from day to day.

The economic evaluation shows the western bypass to be very good value for money. We will not be carrying out another COBA.

We do not expect the protest action to delay the scheme significantly. The target for completion is Summer 1998.

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *500-01*, on what date compensation was first paid under the Newbury bypass compulsory purchase order; how much compensation has been paid to date; what negotiations with landowners are expected to be concluded; and what is the estimated total amount of compensation to be paid under the order. [10650]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the A34 Newbury Bypass.

The first payment of compensation for land compulsorily acquired for the Newbury Bypass was made on 17 May 1994. To date the Agency has paid just over £1.2m compensation from an estimated total land expenditure figure of £8.25m.

It is impossible to predict with any certainty when all land compensation negotiations will be concluded. Many claimants prefer to wait until the road is built and operational before submitting their claims for disturbance and injurious affection.

### Road Scheme Protests (Cost)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to carry out a new cost-benefit analysis of the Newbury bypass to take account of increases in the costs of the road; [10439]

(2) what were the total security and legal costs that resulted from protests against the building of the M11 through residential areas; [10433]

(3) what assessment he has made of the effect of the additional security costs at the Newbury bypass site on the cost-benefit analysis calculations prepared for the road scheme; [10440]

(4) what were the total security and legal costs that resulted from protests against the building of the motorway through Twyford down. [10432]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr Graham Allen, dated 22 January 1996:*

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the costs of security at Twyford Down; the effects of the additional cost of security at Newbury on the cost benefit analysis for the scheme, the total security and legal costs resulting from protests against the M11, and what plans there are to carry out a new cost benefit analysis of the Newbury Bypass following the increase in the costs of the road.

The legal and security costs resulting from protests at Twyford Down amounted to £3.9M (including VAT).

Costs associated with the additional site security element required to complete the Newbury Bypass cannot be established at this early stage. The final outcome will depend on the level of protest action. But given that the present value benefits of the scheme are estimated as being between £83M and £150M, the additional cost would not have any significant effects on the cost benefits of the scheme.

The security and legal costs resulting from protests against the A12 Hackney to M11 Link Road were in the order of £10M.

We have no plans to carry out a new cost benefit analysis of the Newbury Bypass. Cost benefit analysis are carried out as part of the decision making process for the road schemes. In this case they showed that the scheme is very good value for money.

### Road Repairs

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Highways Agency to have completed its computerised road repair database. [9334]

**Mr. Watts:** The Highways Agency operates a number of computerised databases which contain information on road repairs. Further improvements to these systems are being developed.

### School Buses

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve safety measures on double-decker school buses. [9896]

**Mr. Norris:** None.

### Traffic and Transport Advice

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *48*, if he will list the advice on traffic and transport matters and its legal status issued by his Department in the last year. [9898]

**Mr. Norris:** Most of the advice the Department of Transport issues each year to local authorities on traffic and transport matters is not statutorily binding but is concerned with the dissemination of good practice.

The only binding advice issued to local authorities in 1995 originated from the Highways Agency, and concerned new or revised standards for trunk roads and motorways. The agency requires local authorities acting as its agents to comply with these standards. The following documents were published in this category:

THE DESIGN MANUAL FOR ROADS AND BRIDGES.

BD 41/94: Reinforced Clay Brickwork Retaining Walls of Pocket Type and Grouted Cavity Type.

BD 42/94: Design of Embedded Retaining Walls of Pocket Type and Grouted Cavity Type Construction.

BD 44/95: Assessment of Concrete Highway Bridges and Structures.

BD 53/95: Inspections and Records for Road Tunnels.

BD 57/95: Design for Durability.

BD 58/94: External and Unbonded Prestressing.

BD 62/94: As Built, Operational and Maintenance Records for Highway Structures.

BD 63/94: Inspection of Highway Structures.

HD 26/94 Amendment No.1: Flexible Composite Pavements.

HD 27/94 Amendment No. 1: Porous Asphalt on Heavily Trafficked Roads.

HD 31/94 Amendment No 1: Maintenance of Bituminous Roads.

HD 35/95: Technical Information (on the use of reclaimed materials).

SD 10/95: The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations: Requirements for Health and Safety File.

TD 41/95: Vehicular Access to All-Purpose Trunk Roads.

TD 42/95: The Geometric Design of Major/Minor Priority Junctions.

TD 45/94: Motorway Incident Detection Automatic Signalling (MIDAS).

TD 46/94: Motorway Signalling.

Volume 11 Amendments: Environmental Assessment.

THE MANUAL OF CONTRACT DOCUMENTS FOR HIGHWAY WORKS

Volume 0: Model Contract Document for Highway Works—England. 1994 Edition.

Volume 1: Specification for Highways Works—1994 Edition.

Volume 2: Notes for Guidance on the Specification for Highway Works—1994 Edition.

Volume 3: Highway Construction Details—1994 Edition.

Volume 4: Bill of Quantities for Highways Works—1994 Edition.

THE TRUNK ROAD MAINTENANCE MANUAL

Volume 1: Amendment number 5.

Volume 2: Amendment number 3.

Volume 3: Amendment number 1.

The following non-binding advice was issued by the Department of Transport to local authorities on traffic and transport matters in 1995:

Local Authority Circular 1/95—Guidance on Decriminalised Parking Enforcement outside London.

Local Authority Circular 2/95—Transport Policies and Programme

Submissions for 1996–97.

TPP Submissions for 1996–97—Guidance Notes.

TPP Submissions for 1996–97—Information Required on Individual Highway Structural Maintenance Schemes.

TPP Submissions for 1996–97—Supplementary Guidance Notes on the Package Approach.

TPP Submission for 1996–97—The Local Government Review.

The Local Government Review—Local Authority Transport Responsibilities.

PPG13 A Guide to Better Practice (joint with the Department of the Environment).

Circular Roads 1/95—Traffic Signal and Speed Camera Signing.

Circular Roads 2/95—Deregulation: The Control of Dogs on Roads Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1995; and Advice on Designating Roads. All Roads within Geographical Areas.

Circular Roads 3/95—Traffic Signs to Tourist Attractions and Facilities in England.

Local Transport Note 1/95—The Assessment of Pedestrian Crossings.

Local Transport Note 2/95—The Design of Pedestrian Crossings.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/95—Speed Limiter Signs—A Guide to Good Practice.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 2/95—Raised Rib markings.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 3/95—Cycle Routes.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 4/95—The "SCOOT" Urban Traffic Control System.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 5/95—Parking for Disabled People.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/95—Pedestrian Crossings—Assessment and Design.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 7/95—Traffic Islands for Speed Control.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 8/95—Traffic Models for Cycling.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 9/95—Cycling Bibliography.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 10/95—Traffic Calming Bibliography.

Better Places through Bypasses: Report of the Bypass Demonstration Project.

Working Drawings for Traffic Signs Vol. II and III.

Road Safety Education in Schools—Good Practice Guidelines.

Re-statement of Recommended Specification for Buses used to Operate Local Services.

The Design Manual for Roads and Bridges:

BA 43/94: Strengthening, Repair and Monitoring of Post Tensioned Concrete Bridge Decks.

BA 51/95: Assessment of Concrete Structures Affected by Steel Corrosion.

BA 53/94: Bracing Systems and the Use of U Frames in Steel Highway Bridges.

BA 57/95: Design for Durability

BA 58/94: External and Unbonded Prestressing.

BA 63/94: Inspection of Highway Structures.

HA 44/91 Amendment No.1: Earthworks—design and Preparation of Contract Documents.

HA 66/95: Environmental Barriers—Technical Requirements.

HA 70/94: Construction of Highway Earthworks.

HA 71/95: The Effects of Highway Construction on Flood Plains.

HA 72/94: Use and Limitations of Ground Penetrating Radar for Pavement Assessment.

HA 73/95: Site Investigations for Highway Works on Contaminated Land.

HA 74/95: Design and Construction of Lime Stabilised Capping.

HA 75/95: Trunk Roads and Archaeological Mitigation.

SA 4/95: The Introduction of the Manual of Contract Documents for Highway Works.

TA 66/95: Police Observation Platforms on Motorways.

TA 67/95: Providing for Cyclists.

## Rail Freight Services

**Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what due diligence processes his Department has undertaken in relation to the Wisconsin Central and Loadhaul/Omnitrax bids for the British Rail Freight businesses. [9916]

**Mr. Watts:** All bids were evaluated in detail by British Rail and its professional advisers, and then discussed with my Department before a preferred purchaser was selected.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many railway freight grants were granted in each year since 1987; and what was their total value in each year. [10865]

**Mr. Watts:** The Government have awarded 28 railway freight facilities grants since 1987. The value of the awards were as follows:

1987: £2,595,810

1988: £651,473

1989: £4,145,985

1990: £765,000

1991: £1,771,000

1992: £7,601,500

1993: £403,000

1994: £2,911,720

1995: £7,348,219

The full list of awards can be found in the House of Commons Library.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of freight grants in encouraging the transfer of goods from road to rail. [10880]

**Mr. Watts:** More than 200 schemes have benefited from these grants at a cost of £90 million, removing more than 3 million lorry journeys per year from the roads.

## Socially Necessary Rail Services

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many rail services in England and Wales he plans to designate as socially necessary; and if he will make a statement. [10085]

**Mr. Watts:** This is a matter for the Franchising Director. He considers the services to be specified in passenger service requirements on a franchise-by-franchise basis. When setting passenger service requirements he is required by his instructions and guidance from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider each service individually, taking account of all surrounding circumstances. Where services are essential but unprofitable to run, the Franchising Director will set the PSR close to or at the level of the British Rail timetable in operation at the time. Where a train is exceptionally lightly used and is not an essential service he may omit it from the PSR where he considers that its inclusion would not provide value for money. He has specified a number of socially necessary but uneconomic services in the PSRs that have so far been finalised.

### West Coast Main Line

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current estimated cost for the complete refurbishment of the west coast main line between London and Glasgow. [9926]

**Mr. Watts:** The overall cost of the west coast main line core investment programme has been estimated at about £1 billion.

**Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport where the signalling technology proposed for the modernisation of the west coast main line is currently installed; and what assessment he has made of its operational flability. [10309]

**Mr. Watts:** Railtrack informs me that in-cab signalling technology is currently employed in differing forms in various parts of the world, but is not identical to the system planned for the west coast main line. For this reason, Railtrack intends to let further development contracts for the signalling system during the first quarter of this year and expects that a reliable signalling system can be developed within the time necessary for the modernisation works.

### Rail Privatisation

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column 29, what is the budgeted expenditure for 1996–97 for the employment of consultants and other advisers in the Officer of Passenger Rail Franchising. [9942]

**Mr. Watts:** The budget has not been finalised. It will be published in the transport report in due course.

### A590, Cumbria

**Mr. Jopling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to start on the High and Low Newton improvements on the A590 in Cumbria; and how much has been spent to date in preparations, including land purchase. [10094]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my right hon. Friend.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Michael Jopling, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the High and Low Newton improvements on the A590 in Cumbria.

You will have seen from the Secretary of State's announcement on the Road Programme on 28 November that this scheme has been included in the main programme but against a background of continued pressure on public spending, I am unable to give you a firm start date. All I can say is that it will be brought forward as quickly as resources and statutory procedures allow.

To date preparation costs total £889,400 in addition to lands costs of £230,000.

### Motorway Noise

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to use porous asphalt on the areas of the M4, between junctions 5 and 8, which are being resurfaced. [10193]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr Graham Allen, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the use of porous asphalt for resurfacing a section of the M4 between junctions 5 and 8.

Resurfacing of the M4 between junctions 5 and 8 is being undertaken using a conventional hot rolled asphalt surface similar to that originally laid on this section of motorway,

There are statutory obligations which require the Highways Agency to provide noise attenuation measures but these relate only to new or substantially altered roads. Maintenance can only be undertaken in the most cost effective way. Although I recognise that porous asphalt surfacing does cut down the noise generated by vehicle tyres it is significantly more expensive to provide, requires special highway drainage, costs more to maintain and has a shorter life than hot rolled asphalt.

Porous asphalt was not therefore considered suitable as a replacement for the existing surface for the M4.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his policy to use major works on motorways to reduce the impact of motorway noise on nearby homes. [10183]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the use of major works on motorways to reduce the impact of motorway noise on nearby homes.

There is a statutory requirement to consider the impact of noise on nearby homes only in the case of works involving the construction of a new road or of improvements which alter the line or level of an existing road. It is Departmental policy to regard this as covering the widening of motorways. In such cases, the scheme will include appropriate measures designed to mitigate noise and other environmental impacts. In the case of other roadworks such as minor improvements and structural maintenance which have no subsequent effect on the position of traffic relative to adjacent properties there is no requirement for such impacts to be reviewed.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he encourages the use of porous asphalt to reduce noise pollution near motorways. [10184]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the use of porous asphalt to reduce noise near motorways.

The Highways Agency has developed with industry a general specification to permit the use of porous asphalt. Its adoption is encouraged where conditions are suitable and where the benefits can be shown to outweigh the higher costs associated with its use.

### Railway Stations

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new stations have been opened on the rail network in the last three years; and what estimate he has made of the number to be opened on the railway system during the next three years. [9946]

**Mr. Watts:** Twenty-two new stations have been opened on the rail network since January 1993. There are plans for 17 new stations to be opened over the period 1996 to 1998.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish for each British Rail region and for British Rail as a whole for each of the last available three years *(a)* the total number of railway stations and halls and *(b)* the total number of such stations and halls with ticket sales offices, indicating *(b)* as a percentage of *(a)* in each case. [8917]

**Mr. Watts:** The information requested is not available for each British Rail region. The information requested at *(a)* for BR as a whole is as follows:

1992–93: 2,482 stations

1993–94: 2,493 stations

1994–95: 2,506 stations

The information requested at *(b)* is available only for 1994–95. Of the 2,506 stations, 1,316 or 53 per cent. had ticket sales offices.

### Driving Standards Agency

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many chief executives there have been at the Driving Standards Agency in the last five years. [10485]

**Mr. Norris:** Prior to the current chief executive who joined DSA in April 1995 there have been two substantive DSA chief executives in the last five years.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the salary of the chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency is linked to the performance of the agency. [10486]

**Mr. Norris:** Yes

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the loss of the Driving Standards Agency's chartermark will affect the chief executive's salary. [10487]

**Mr. Norris:** The recent loss of the charter mark by DSA was mainly due to the fact that car driving test waiting times were exceeding the DSA service standard, and DSA was also failing to meet certain other customer service targets such as speed of telephone answering. The chief executive's salary partly depends on achievement of such standards and targets, and will be reduced as a result of their non-achievement.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what action he is taking to improve service levels at the Driving Standards Agency following the recent loss of the charter mark award; [10490]

(2) what plans he has to address service problems at the Driving Standards Agency; [10489]

(3) if he will instruct the Driving Standards Agency to improve its telephone system. [10694]

**Mr. Norris:** I have reviewed the situation at DSA and authorised the following actions to improve service levels.

The recruitment of 25 per cent. additional staff to increase staff numbers on the telephones and the installation of new technology phone systems which distribute calls to the booking clerks more efficiently.

Recruitment and training of additional contract examiners to reduce test waiting times. These are being taken on at an average of 10 per month.

Steps to reduce the number of short notice test cancellations, including measures to achieve reductions in staff sick absence. A new compensation code for candidates whose tests have been cancelled at short notice has been implemented.

Improvement in external communications with the introduction of an external newsletter and a range of other measures.

The implementation of customer satisfaction tracking later this year and other new systems to improve the handling of complaints.

### Heavy Vehicles (Testing)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many buses in the Greater Manchester area failed safety tests in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; [10318]

(2) how many heavy goods vehicles were tested in the north-west region on emission standards; and how many of them were *(a)* prohibited and *(b)* prosecuted. [10319]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions on the number of heavy goods vehicles tested on emission standards in the North West and how many were prohibited and prosecuted. Your other question asked how many buses in the Greater Manchester area failed safety tests in 1992, 1993, and 1994.

Heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) are tested for emissions standard as part of their annual test. Details of the number tested in the North West Region and the percentage of those which failed on smoke emission are shown in Table 1. Vehicles which fail this part of the test would not be prohibited but would be required to rectify the fault before a test certificate was awarded.

Emissions are also checked as part of the HGV spot checks for roadworthiness that are carried out throughout the year. The Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) has no single enforcement area comprising the North West "region", it is covered by 3 VI Enforcement Areas. Smoke emission checks were carried out on a total of 2,968 HGVs of which 73 (2.46%) were issued with prohibitions. Prohibitions can only be removed when the vehicle has been rectified and inspected again by VI to show that it is fit for service. Prosecution for emission offences is reserved for very serious neglect and for serial offenders. Details of the number of prosecutions for emissions as a result of

routine spot checks can only be provided at disproportionate cost. There were no prosecutions following last year's "blitz" checks on HGVs in the North West.

Details of the number of buses which failed their annual test in the Greater Manchester area are shown below.

| | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total number tested | 2,861 | 3,868 | 4,357 |
| Total number failed | 825 | 756 | 863 |

*Number of HGVs tested and percentage failed on smoke emission: North West*

| | *1994–95* | |
|---|---|---|
| *VI HGV testing station* | *Tested* | *Percentage failed* |
| Carlisle | 3,733 | 1.7 |
| Milnthorpe | 3,065 | 2.4 |
| Barrow | 529 | 1.7 |
| Kirkham | 8,325 | 1.8 |
| North Manchester | 10,604 | 1.6 |
| South Manchester | 12,317 | 2.0 |
| Simonswood | 12,828 | 0.52 |
| Bromborough | 2,651 | 0.9 |
| Wrexham | 5,416 | 1.9 |

### Mersey Docks and Harbour Company

**Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the profits of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company for the years from 1989 to 1995. [10330]

**Mr. Norris:** These are matters for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. Details can be found in its annual reports and accounts for the years concerned.

**Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representation Her Majesty's Government have on the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. [10331]

**Mr. Norris:** None.

### A1 Gateshead Western Bypass

**Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of properties compulsorily purchased by the Highways Agency in the Gateshead area from April 1994 to date in connection with the Agency's proposed A1 Gateshead western bypass; and what has been the total cost of the purchases. [10555]

**Mr. Watts:** Since April 1994, nine properties have been purchased at a cost of £1.6 million. They have been purchased under statutory blight provisions which enables affected owner-occupiers to require the Department to buy their property in advance. The question of compulsory purchase does not arise.

### Royal Train

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport where the royal train is kept when it is not in use; and how many times it was used by *(a)* the Queen, *(b)* the Prince of Wales and *(c)* other members of the royal family in the last 12 months. [10639]

**Mr. Watts:** The royal train is kept at a secure rail depot in Buckinghamshire when it is not in use. During 1995 the train was used eight times by Her Majesty the Queen, 14 times by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and on 10 other occasions by members of the royal family.

### Road Building

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy when road contractors are ahead of schedule and the new work required is dependent on the allocation from the next financial year. [10488]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the policy when road contractors are ahead of schedule and the new work required is dependent on the allocation from the new financial year.

Road building activity is governed by the terms of commercial contracts between the Highways Agency and road contractors. Within this framework, it is incumbent upon the Agency to manage its financial affairs in such a way that requirements arising from the annuality of Government accounting are met.

### M62 Relief Road

**Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new tenancies and on what terms have been granted by the Highways Agency or those acting on its behalf in the Bury, South constituency since the announcement of the cancellation of the M62 relief road. [10938]

**Mr. Watts:** No new tenancies have been granted by the Highways Agency's managing agents following my announcement of the withdrawal of the M62 relief road from the trunk roads programme. Twelve tenancies which had previously been secured by payment of deposits have come into effect since my announcement. In all these cases, the tenants have been granted one-year fixed-term agreements.

### Seat Belts and Child Seats

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answers of 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *752*, what progress he has made on seat belt regulations and child seat concessions. [10925]

**Mr. Norris:** I intend to lay the regulations before the House in early February.

### British Bus

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to investigate the activities of British Bus. [10937]

**Mr. Norris:** None, other than the normal monitoring of bus companies' operations by the Traffic Commissioners.

### Bicycles (Light Emitting Diode Lights)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ban the use of LED lights on bicycles. [11052]

**Mr. Norris:** We have no plans to ban the use of LED lights on bicycles. A recent public consultation exercise was carried out asking for views on prohibiting the use of non-approved lights on bicycles. We are currently analysing the responses.

### Heathrow Flight Paths

**Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what factors led to the change in the main easterly departure flight path from Heathrow via Dover in the early 1990s [10827]

(2) what inquiries about the main routing of Heathrow air traffic to the east were received by the Civil Aviation Authority prior to the change in the main easterly departure flight path from Heathrow towards Dover; [10829]

(3) what is his responsibility in respect of setting flight paths from Heathrow; [10826]

(4) if he will restore the main easterly departure flight path from Heathrow via Dover to its former line; and whether he will make a statement; [10830]

(5) what efforts were made to consult affected local communities about the change made in the early 1990s in the main easterly departure flight path from Heathrow towards Dover. [10828]

**Mr. Norris:** The main easterly departure route from Heathrow towards Dover has remained unchanged for over 25 years, apart from minor but essential adjustments from time to time to compensate for movement in the position of magnetic north. At the present time, the position of magnetic north is decreasing by about 7.2 minutes a year in relation to true north and points in south-east England. This departure route has used a track of 287 deg. to the relevant navigational beacon since 19 August 1993, when it was adjusted from a track of 288 deg. to compensate for magnetic drift since the previous such adjustment made in 1986.

The Secretary of State has taken responsibility for the routes taken by departing aircraft from Heathrow up to an altitude of 4000ft. Aircraft using this particular route must attain this altitude before reaching the area of Norbury in south London, but in practice most do so much nearer the airport. Once an aircraft has reached 4,000ft. it may be vectored off the route by air traffic control on to a more direct heading to its destination. This long standing practice is essential for the efficient management of air space.

### Car Ownership (Greater Manchester)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the projected increase in car ownership in the Greater Manchester area over the next five years. [11037]

**Mr. Norris:** Car ownership in Greater Manchester is predicted to increase by between 6.5 per cent. and 10.5 per cent. over the next five years, depending mainly on the growth in the local economy. This represents an additional 56,000 to 96,000 cars owned. The forecast is based on census data. The 1991 census showed that households in Greater Manchester owned 814,000 cars.

### Central Railways plc

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral statement of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *403*, what plans he has to ensure that, in the event of a proposal from Central Railways plc to re-develop the central railway being deemed of national significance, Parliament will be adequately informed of the relevant national issues. [10048]

**Mr. Watts:** The documents to be deposited with Parliament in this event include a briefing note by the Department. We would expect to deal with relevant national issues in that note and in opening the debate.

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that before any application from Central Railways plc to re-develop the central railway under the Transport and Works Act 1992 is submitted to Parliament *(a)* the application fully complies with the Act in relation to the funding of blight and *(b)* that Central Railways plc produces conclusive and irrefutable evidence that it can fully fund the inquiry process. [10049]

**Mr. Watts:** The Transport and Works Act rules require applicants to provide concise details of their proposals for funding the cost of acquiring blighted land within the meaning of section 149 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. If Central Railway plc were unable to meet its statutory obligations to acquire such land, the application would fail. Similarly, if it were unable to finance the inquiry it would be forced to withdraw the application.

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that any application made under the Transport and Works Act 1992 in regard to the central railway submitted by Central Railways plc complies with all the requirements of the Act with particular reference to the submission of adequate information including maps of the proposed route at a scale of not less than 1:2500 before the application may be placed before Parliament and that local authorities affected will be consulted in this process. [10046]

**Mr. Watts:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering applications by Central Railway plc for partial, conditional or absolute waivers from compliance with certain application requirements under the Transport and Works Act rules. If we judge that local authorities should be consulted before reaching a decision, we will do so.

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from local authorities along the route of the proposed central railway about the likely compliance of the proposals to be made by Central Railways plc with the requirements of the Transport and Works Act 1992. [10045]

**Mr. Watts:** We have received a number of representations. These will be taken into account in considering the applications by Central Railway plc for waivers from compliance with certain requirements of the Transport and Works Act rules.

### Transport and Works Act 1992

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions of the Transport and Works Act 1992 require the submission of a statement to justify a proposal made under the Act in relation to national planning or transport policy or economic or technical considerations. [10047]

**Mr. Watts:** There is no requirement for a statement in relation to national planning or transport policy, but Parliament has the opportunity to consider the case in principle for any application judged to be of national significance. Any applicant for a works order involving compulsory land acquisition would need to be able to demonstrate that the project is technically feasible and financially viable, and that the public benefits of the proposals outweigh any private disbenefits before the order is approved.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated; [10055]

(2) what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10065]

**Mr. Watts:** My Department's policy is not to gold plate EC directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the UK. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

### Bull Bars

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new proposals he has to ban the use of bull bars; and if he will make a statement. [11064]

**Mr. Norris:** I recently met Neil Kinnock of the European Commission. It was agreed that the best way forward was for the Commission to bring forward a proposal for an amendment to the existing external projections directive. This would specifically address bull bars and help remove obstacles to effective national action. The initiative now rests with the Commission and we will be urging them to announce their plans as soon as possible.

### Waste

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his letter G/PSO/26593/95 of 15 December, what response he has made to summary point 8 of the report by Dr. Martin Angel of Southampton in respect of the expedition of the provision and funding of waste facilities in ports. [8413]

**Mr. Norris:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 1 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *309*.

### MV Derbyshire

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that direct image transmission from site is installed on the MV Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement. [9912]

**Mr. Norris:** While we have not ruled out this possibility, we are advised that there would be considerable technical difficulties and that the cost would be significant in relation to the total resources available.

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will permit two MV Derbyshire Family Association nominated technical experts to be included in the expedition to the wreck of MV Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement. [10245]

**Mr. Norris:** The views of the Derbyshire Family Association are being taken into account in the development of the arrangements for the return expedition to the wreck.

No commitment can be made at this stage as to who will be on board the vessel used in the expedition.

### Rail Ticket Offices

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each British Rail region and for British Rail as a whole all rail ticket sales offices on BR stations and halts which have been staffed wholly or partly by volunteers in the last 12 months, indicating the date on which such service ceased or is due to cease; and if he will make a statement. [9302]

**Mr. Watts:** Ticket offices at the following stations are currently staffed by volunteers on a commission basis:

Clitheroe
Gobowen
Ledbury
Newtown (Powys)

The information requested on the dates that BR ticket office services ceased is not available.

### Oil Pollution (Wildlife Deaths)

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the numbers and species of birds and sea mammals recently washed up on the north Humberside coast as a result of oil pollution; and what progress has been made in establishing the source of the oil pollution. [8768]

**Mr. Norris** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 22 January 1995:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number and species of birds and sea mammals washed up on the North Humberside coast as a result of oil pollution.

During the period 27 December to 4 January an approximate total of 450 birds were affected by pollution off the North Humberside coastline. Of that number some 320 birds were recovered alive and treated by the RSPCA; these included approximately 250 guillemots, 50 Razorbills, and single figure numbers of Kittiwakes, Puffins and Shelduck. Reported dead birds totalled 127 which were made up of 72 Guillemots, 38 Razorbills, 10 Puffins, 4 Fulmars, 1 Kittiwake, 1 Little Auk and 1 Red Throated Diver. During the same period 3 seals were rescued and taken into care by the RSPCA, one of which was thought to be affected by oil.

The Agency's Marine Pollution Control Unit (MPCU) has not been able to establish the source of the pollution. The first indication of pollution in the area was oiled birds coming ashore in Humberside. Oil samples associated with the incident and collected on behalf of MPCU have been analysed. The analyses have concluded that samples taken from the beach and from the feathers of contaminated birds are a mixture of light fuel oils which may indicate bilge discharges by ships. We do not have sufficient evidence to identify particular ships.

During the period 27 December to 4 January the MPCU surveillance aircraft flew 3 patrols in the sea area off the Humberside coast. These patrols were in response to continuing reports of oiled birds coming ashore in Humberside. One of these patrols detected oil at sea some 23 miles east of Spurn Point which might have caused the damage to wildlife described here.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Crown Prosecution Service

33. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Attorney-General how many members of the Crown Prosecution Service there are at present; what that figure is as a percentage of the optimum complement of the service; and if he will make a statement. [8865]

**The Solicitor-General:** As at 31 December 1995 the Crown Prosecution Service employed 6,769 staff, including part-time workers. Staffing requirements are being reassessed in the light of expected workloads, resources and the senior management and pay and grading reviews.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to improve the training available to the Crown Prosecution Service. [9909]

**The Attorney-General:** The training needs of the Crown Prosecution Service are a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions who carries out her functions under the superintendence of the Attorney-General.

Training is seen as an essential tool for improving Crown Prosecution Service performance. A wide range of training, both professional and managerial, is undertaken and its relevance is continuously reviewed. The provision of training has recently been market tested to ensure quality and value for money.

### Saudi Arabia (Contracts)

34. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Saudi Arabia over contracts. [8866]

**The Attorney-General:** None.

### Scott Inquiry

35. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has had any recent discussions with Lord Justice Scott regarding the Scott report. [8867]

**The Attorney-General:** It is the intention of the inquiry that any exchanges with individual witnesses should be confidential. That is to be respected.

### Public Interest Immunity Certificates

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Attorney-General what guidelines he issued in *(a)* October and *(b)* November 1995 in respect of issuing public interest immunity certificates in the Ordtech appeal hearing; and what factors underlay his advice. [9496]

**The Attorney-General:** Any advice given to Government concerning public interest immunity following the decision of the House of Lords in ex parte Wiley in July 1994 will have taken account of the change of approach signalled in that case. However, by convention, the fact as to whether the Law Officers have advised on a given matter is not disclosed, nor is the content of any advice which may have been given.

### Departmental staff

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Attorney-General how many people currently work in his Department; at what cost to public funds; how this figure compares in similar and real terms with May 1979; and if he will make a statement. [8864]

**The Attorney-General:** Twenty-seven staff are currently employed in the legal secretariat to the Law Officers. The total staff costs for the financial year 1994–95—consisting of salary, allowances, overtime, earnings-related national insurance contributions and superannuation—were £1,040,018. This figure does not include agency staff.

The Supply Estimates for the year 1979–1980 show 22 staff at a cost of £209,000. This figure does not include superannuation which is currently 14.9 per cent. of basic salaries. Applying this percentage to staff costs of £209,000 gives a sum of £240,141.

Since 1979 additional functions have been conferred on the Attorney-General, principally supervision of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office, and those connected with the review of certain criminal sentences which may be unduly lenient with a consequent increase in the number of criminal lawyers on my staff.

The staff cost of £240,141 for the financial year 1979–1980 at 1994–1995 prices is £600,112. The difference between the latter figure and that for 1994–1995 is represented in part by an increase generally in the number of staff and the proportion of higher grades, and in part by the increase in staff salaries over and above the rate of inflation over the period in question.

### John Bennett and Keith Wilson

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Attorney-General what consultations he has hade with the South Wales police in relation to the conviction of John Bennett and Keith Wilson for corruption in Welsh Office printing contracts. [9598]

**The Attorney-General:** The Crown Prosecution Service forwarded to my Department a file of the evidence which resulted from the investigation into the activities of John Bennett and Keith Wilson by the South Wales police. The evidence was considered by the Solicitor-General who agreed to grant his fiat to prosecute both men under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1906. Neither the Solicitor-General nor I have had any direct contact with the South Wales police.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Disability Discrimination Act 1995

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9225]

**Mr. Newton:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *417*. I will ensure that my Department is made aware of its responsibilities under the Act. I am not responsible for any executive agencies or other bodies.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### National Lottery

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are her plans for the development of policy on the distribution of lottery proceeds. [10077]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** I am writing today to the chairmen of the lottery distributing bodies to consult with them on changes to policy directions I issue under section 26 (1) and (2) of the National Lotteries etc. Act 1993. My proposals would allow an amount of revenue funding to help develop the skills and talent of young people including elite young athletes; increase access to the arts and sports; allow the Sports Councils to fund one-off major events in the United Kingdom; and allow the national heritage memorial fund to make awards to building preservation trusts. None of these proposals is intended to substitute for existing funding through grant in aid. These proposals do not affect the Millennium Commission and the National Lottery Charities Board. My colleagues will be writing in similar terms to the chairmen of the distributing bodies in Scotland, in Wales and in Northern Ireland.

I have considered the existing rules on partnership funding. I am satisfied that there is sufficient flexibility available for distributing bodies to take account of special circumstances in individual applications. I shall be encouraging the chairmen of the distributing bodies to be properly flexible in their interpretation of what is possible in this area, and I shall be encouraging the Arts Councils to consider what they can do to foster innovation within the existing definition of capital. The Arts Council of England has proposed using lottery money to help arts organisations gain long-term financial stability, in a way which would not substitute for existing grant in aid. I shall be discussing this further with it.

The consultation period will last until the end of February. I will then consider the responses to the consultation process, with a view to announcing any changes to the directions at the beginning of April.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Former Prime Ministers Allowance

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many former Prime Ministers claim the maximum allowance available to them. [9901]

**Mr. Freeman:** I do not think it right to disclose information about the amount of allowance claimed by former Prime Ministers, any more than the House discloses details of claims by individual Members under the office costs allowance.

### Photocopiers

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *335*, on costs of photocopiers, what was the estimated number of copies projected in respect of each contract and at what cost per copy. [10277]

**Mr. Willetts:** The estimated number of copies projected in respect of each contract and the cost per copy for the 25 photocopiers is as follows:

| *Copies projected for contract period* | *Cost per copy (pence)* |
|---|---|
| 24,000,000 | 0.32 |
| 24,000,000 | 0.32 |
| 1,800,000 | 0.71 |
| 1,800,000 | 0.79 |
| 1,800,000 | 0.79 |
| 900,000 | 0.65 |
| 360,000 | 0.85 |
| 324,000 | 0.90 |
| 270,000 | 0.91 |
| 252,000 | 0.91 |
| 252,000 | 0.84 |
| 240,000 | 0.91 |
| 240,000 | 0.91 |
| 240,000 | 0.91 |
| 240,000 | 0.91 |
| 180,000 | 0.97 |
| 180,000 | 0.97 |
| 144,000 | 0.91 |
| 108,000 | 0.91 |
| 108,000 | 0.95 |
| 72,000 | 0.95 |
| [illegible] | 0.97 |
| 48,[illegible] | 0.97 |
| 1,620,000 | 0.81 per first 90,000 per annum<br>0.63 thereafter |
| 5,000,000 | first 1.2 million per annum included in contract price, next 200,000 at 0.5 per copy thereafter 0.3 per copy. |

## PRIME MINISTER

### Regulators

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *289*, what are the reasons for the degree of variations in the salaries paid to the regulators. [10648]

**The Prime Minister:** The salaries paid to individual regulators are determined by the appointing Secretary of State and take account of various factors including the responsibilities of their particular office and what is necessary to recruit and retain a suitable appointee.

### Liverpool Dockers (Petition)

**Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the petition presented on 9 January by the women's support group on behalf of Liverpool dockers who had been made redundant. [10427]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 18 January, *Official Report*, column *689*.

### Iran-Iraq War

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions between June and October 1989 when in his capacity as Foreign Secretary he made statements, written or oral, or corresponded, on the United Kingdom's policy towards each of the participants in the Iran-Iraq war; in each case what was that stance; and if he will make a statement. [11043]

**The Prime Minister:** A comprehensive record of statements and correspondence on Iran and Iraq could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Statements made are, of course, a matter of public record.

### "Realising our Potential"

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made, subsequent to the letter of 19 September to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, by the research councils and Sir John Cadogan, to implement the science, engineering and technology policy research set out in "Realising our Potential". [8242]

**The Prime Minister:** The research councils continue to implement the policy set out in "Realising our Potential" in accordance with their royal charters and guidance from the Director General of the Research Councils. The President of the Board of Trade announced on 16 January the science budget allocations for 1996–97 and the planning figures for the next two years to enable them to do so. A booklet explaining the allocations, "Allocations of Science Budget 1996–97" is available in the Library.

### Rail Privatisation

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the principal statements, or documents, authorised or made by persons who are, or have been, Ministers of the Crown since 1990, which show that it was the intention of Her Majesty's Government to so privatise the functions of the former British Railways in a manner that made possible *(a)* the dispersal into separate companies the current responsibilities of Railtrack and *(b)* that any such company or any other performing any of the functions of the former British Railways Board could be owned or controlled by (i) shareholders a majority of whom were not citizens of the United Kingdom or (ii) a company registered outside the United Kingdom. [8619]

**The Prime Minister:** The White Paper, "New Opportunities for the Railways", published in July 1992, announced the Government's intention to restructure the railways. Restrictions on the ownership of shares by foreign nationals are tightly controlled by international law and agreements.

### Official Gifts

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister how much was spent on the provision of official gifts by his Office in 1994 and 1995; and if he will now make it his policy to give details of the gifts presented. [10149]

**The Prime Minister:** A total of £22,510 was spent on the provision of official gifts in the 1994–95 financial year. It is not my practice to give details of gifts purchased.

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to put on public display official gifts received by him and his predecessors. [10163]

**The Prime Minister:** All gifts are handled in accordance with the provisions set out in "Questions of Procedures for Ministers".

### Mohammed al-Masari

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Prime Minister who on behalf of Her Majesty's Government made representations to the Government of Dominica to inquire if they would receive Professor Mohammed al-Masari if he was deported from the United Kingdom; if he will place in the Library copies of the correspondence between the two Governments concerning this case; and if the Government of Dominica has indicated if it will receive Professor al-Masari. [10659]

**The Prime Minister:** The initial approach was made by my right hon. and learned Friend, the Foreign Secretary to the Dominican Prime Minister when he visited London on 18 December. It is not normal practice to make public correspondence between Her Majesty's Government and other Governments. The Dominican Government have agreed to accept Dr. al-Masari and to grant him asylum, if he applies for it.

### Nuclear Tests

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Prime Minister what is now the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the French Government's current series of nuclear tests in the Pacific. [10499]

**The Prime Minister:** I have nothing to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on 29 November, *Official Report*, column *790–91*.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Prime Minister what are the responsibilities of the staff employed in the Cabinet Office in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10986]

**The Prime Minister:** The responsibilities of staff in the Cabinet Office employed on matters relating to the inquiry are to provide Ministers and officials with advice on matters arising from the inquiry, and to liaise with the inquiry.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Prime Minister what discussions staff employed in the Cabinet Office in relation to the Scott inquiry have had on matters related to the Scott inquiry with persons *(a)* employed by and *(b)* working as consultants for Conservative Central Office; and what subjects were discussed. [10987]

**The Prime Minister:** None.

### Monetary Union

**Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Prime Minister for how long a currency must be in the exchange rate mechanism before it can be abolished in favour of a single European currency; and what are his current plans regarding the exchange rate mechanism and the pound. [9304]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *114*.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Prime Minister 1) on how many occasions mobile or car phones retained for his use or the use of his staff have been cloned during *(a)* the last two years, *(b)* the last 18 months, *(c)* the last 12 months and *(d)* the last six months; [9570]

(2) on how many occasions mobile or car phones retained for his use or the use of his staff have been cloned since his appointment. [9571]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* As far as I am aware, one, and that was in 1994.

### Libya

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister what is his latest estimate of the cost to British trade of sanctions against Libya. [8167]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* It is not possible to estimate the loss of trade as a result of the United Nations sanctions.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost of travel incurred by his office in each year since 1990–91. [8965]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* The information as requested is as follows:

| | *(£000s)* |
|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 880 |
| 1991–92 | 1,310 |
| 1992–93 | 1,730 |
| 1993–94 | 1,490 |
| 1994–95 | 1,230 |

Figures rounded to the nearest £10,000.

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost to public funds arising from all duties in each complete year since 1990–91 and for 1995–96 to date; and if he will indicate the figures separately for (i) accommodation and (ii) expenses. [8964]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 19 December, *Official Report*, columns *1053-54*. The information as requested for earlier years is available only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide the figures from 1990–91 to 1994–95 and 1995–96 to date for *(a)* the cost of maintaining and running No. 10 Downing street and additional costs at Chequers, *(b)* the grant-in-aid to the Chequers trust and *(c)* the costs on a consistent basis and expressed at constant 1984–85 prices. [9534]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* The information as requested is in the table.

*£000's*

| | *1990–91* | | *1991–92* | | *1992–93* | | *1993–95* | | *1994–95* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Cash* | *1984–85 prices* | *Cash* | *1984–85 prices* | *Cash* | *1984–85 prices* | *Cash* | *1984–85 prices* | *Cash* | *1984–85 prices* |
| No. 10 capital and running costs and costs of Chequers | 7,990 | 5,660 | 8,420 | 5,620 | 9,620 | 6,170 | 8,950 | 5,570 | 7,440 | 4,550 |
| Grant-in-aid to Cheques trust | 240 | 170 | 240 | 160 | 250 | 160 | 270 | 170 | 230 | 140 |
| Total | 8,230 | 5,830 | 8,660 | 5,780 | 9,870 | 6,330 | 9,220 | 5,740 | 7,670 | 4,690 |

Figures rounded to the nearest £10,000.

All figures at 1984–85 prices using GDP deflator.

### Road Investment

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Prime Minister if the recent statement of the Minister of State at the Scottish Office about the fundamental importance of road investment to Scotland's economy represents the policy of Her Majesty's Government; if a similar policy exists for the rest of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on his policies on road investment in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England and setting out the basis for differences between the two. [10238]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* The Government believe that an efficient transport infrastructure, of which trunk roads form an integral part, is essential to national competitiveness. My right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for Transport for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland develop their plans in that context taking account of transport needs of each country within the United Kingdom.

## LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many mobile phones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [9130]

**Mr. Newton:** Excluding the office of my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Privy Seal, the information for the Privy Council Office is as follows. Three mobile phones were purchased between 1989 and 1992, all from the same supplier; the exact year of purchase is no longer recorded. One telephone was supplied in 1993. Two telephones were purchased in 1995, from two different suppliers. No telephones were supplied in 1994.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Disabled People

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to ensure that disabled people are represented on the health boards and health councils which he is responsible for appointing; and if he will make a statement. [9364]

**Mr. Moss:** A number of disabled people already serve in a non-executive capacity on health boards and as members of health councils and their contribution brings a necessary and important perspective to the bodies to which they are appointed. Nominations to serve as non-executives on health boards and as members of health councils are sought from a wide range of community, voluntary and health groups.

Responsibility for appointments to health boards and health councils in Northern Ireland rests with the Department of Health, which seeks to ensure a broad representation of members appointed to these bodies.

### Autism

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the services available to *(a)* children and *(b)* adults with autism; and what plans he has to enhance these services. [9256]

**Mr. Moss:** It is the responsibility of the education and library boards to assess and provide for the special educational needs of all children in Northern Ireland, including children with autism. Placements may be made in special schools, in special units attached to mainstream schools or in mainstream schools themselves.

The health and personal social services needs of people with autism are met by the four health and social services boards within their learning disability programmes of care. Services include residential and nursing home care, day care and respite care and a wide range of community nursing, social work, psychology and paramedical services. There is, however, growing awareness among health and social services boards, trusts and professional staff of the specialised needs of people with autism. One board is organising a series of courses to train staff in TEACCH—treatment and education of autistic related communication handicapped children—a structural treatment and educational programme.

These courses will enable staff in adult settings to continue and develop the TEACCH programmes started in schools and to introduce TEACCH to others who would benefit from it.

In addition, the Department of Health and Social Services is providing financial support for Professionals and Parents and Autism—PAPA—a local voluntary organisation.

### Edgewater Development, Donaghadee

**Mr. John. D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what breaches of planning permission have occurred at the Edgewater development to the north and west of Norfolk avenue, Donaghadee; and if he will make a statement. [9311]

**Mr. Moss:** The Department considered that the continued use of Norfolk avenue to access the development site would be a breach of planning control. The Department contacted the developer about this and the matter is resolved as the access is no longer in use.

### Carers

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has ensure that carers are represented on the health boards and health councils which he is responsible for appointing; and if he will make a statement. [9239]

**Mr. Moss:** Nominations to serve as non-executives on health boards and as members of health councils are sought from a wide range of community, voluntary and health groups, a number of whom will represent the interests of carers.

Responsibility for appointments to health boards and health councils in Northern Ireland rests with the Department of Health, which seeks to ensure that a broad representation of community interests is available through the appointment of members.

### Buddy Bear Conductive Education Centre

**Mr. Mallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy that the Department of Education endorses all statements from education boards, placing children in the Buddy Bear conductive education centre. [9931]

**Mr. Ancram:** Under article 31(3) of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, a proposal by an education and library board to arrange for the special educational provision for a child to be made otherwise than at a grant-aided school is subject to the approval of my Department. My Department considers each proposal made under this legislation on its merits, taking into account the professional advice, parental representations, proposed costs and any other circumstances relevant to each case. There are, however, proposals currently before Parliament to change this legislation: under these proposals, my Department's approval role in individual placements would be replaced by a power to approve institutions other than grant-aided schools as suitable for the placement by boards of children with special educational needs.

**Mr. Mallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when a statement will be approved, and appropriate fees and costs authorised, by the Department of Education for Anna Marie Treanor and Daniel Murphy, currently attending the Buddy Bear conductive education centre in Dungannon. [9932]

**Mr. Ancram:** The two proposals referred to, which have been made by the Southern education and library board, are still under consideration. These have been submitted to my Department in the form of a proposed pilot scheme and further information is being sought from the board about the scheme, including its proposed structure, costs and duration.

**Mr. Mallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date the educational statement issued by the North Eastern education and library board for James Agnew was approved by his Department; and from what date the fees and transport costs of his placement at the Buddy Bear conductive education centre in Dungannon will be paid. [9933]

**Mr. Ancram:** The proposal made by the North-Eastern board to place this child in the Buddy Bear school was approved by my Department on 20 November 1995. I understand that the board will be meeting the associated fees and transport costs with effect from May 1995, when the school received final registration as an independent school.

**Mr. Mallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the pilot conductive education project proposed by the Department of Education, with particular reference to *(a)* the date when the proposal was completed, *(b)* the reasons for abandoning the proposal and *(c)* the reasons for questioning the basis of the pilot proposal presented by the Southern education and library board. [9934]

**Mr. Ancram:** My Department has not proposed a pilot conductive education project. A pilot project was the subject of discussions between my Department and the North-Eastern education and library board in 1992, and subsequently discussions about possible pilots took place with the Southern education and library board and the Buddy Bear trust. It was however decided in April 1994 not to proceed with a pilot project. In coming to this decision, particular regard was had to resource considerations and the potential value of the pilot projects in the form proposed in the light of the findings of a Government-funded research project carried out at the Birmingham Institute for Conductive Education which became available during the course of 1993.

The Southern board has recently sought approval to place two children with special educational needs at the Buddy Bear school in Dungannon for a four-term pilot scheme, but no information was given as to the nature of the proposed pilot. In order to form a view on the value for money which would be obtained from the significant additional expenditure which would be incurred through the proposed pilot, my Department therefore sought further information from the board as to the nature, objectives and operation of the proposed pilot, and its relationship to another pilot which I understand the board has also been considering at one of its own special schools. Some information has been provided, and discussions with the board are ongoing.

### Prison Service

**Ms Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many prison officers are currently employed in *(a)* HMP Maze, *(b)* HMP Maghaberry and *(c)* HMP Belfast; [10341]

(2) how many prisoners are currently in *(a)* HMP Maze, *(b)* HMP Maghaberry and *(c)* HMP Belfast; [10342]

(3) how many prison officers and staff will be made redundant in the proposed round of staff reductions in the Prison Service in Northern Ireland; [10343]

(4) what percentage of the proposed reductions in staffing in the Prison Service will occur in Northern Ireland; [10344]

(5) how many prison staff in Northern Ireland will be eligible for redundancy packages accompanying staffing reductions in the Prison Service; [10345]

(6) when HMP Belfast will close; how many of its prisoners will go to other prisons in Northern Ireland; and if he will list the prisons concerned. [10346]

**Sir John Wheeler:** Responsibility for the subjects in question have been delegated to the Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from A. D. Shannon to Ms Marjorie Mowlam, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to the Parliamentary Questions in which you asked:

(i) the number of prison officers who are currently employed in certain Northern Ireland prisons;

(ii) the number of prisoners in certain Northern Ireland prisons;

(iii) the number of prison officers and staff who will lose their jobs in the proposed round of staff reductions in the Prison Service in Northern Ireland;

(iv) the percentage of the proposed reductions in staffing in the Prison Service which will occur in Northern Ireland;

(v) the number of prison staff in Northern Ireland who will be eligible for redundancy packages accompanying staffing reductions; and

(vi) when HMP Belfast closes, how many of its prisoners will go to other prisons in Northern Ireland; and to list the prisons concerned.

Sir John Wheeler recently announced the closure of HMP Belfast and the construction of new prisoner accommodation at HMP Maghaberry. The inmate population of HMP Belfast will be reallocated to other accommodation some of which is currently vacant and un-staffed. The staffing implications of this decision are currently being assessed, but preliminary studies suggest that around 15 Governor posts, 200 officer posts and 25 civilian posts will no longer be required. It is hoped that the reductions can be achieved through natural wastage and voluntary redundancies.

The recent announcement of staffing reductions in HM Prison Service does not have any impact on the staffing levels of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, which is a separate organisation.

The management of the NIPS is currently consulting with the relevant Staff Associations about the precise terms of any redundancy package which may be offered. The extent of the application of any package forms part of this consultation and has yet to be agreed.

On 18 January 1996 the staffing and inmate figures for each of the prisons was:

| | *Inmates* | *Staffing* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Prison Officers* | *Others* |
| HMP Maze | 588 | 1,241 | 86 |
| HMP Maghaberry | [1]293 | 618 | 65 |
| HMP Belfast | 254 | 400 | 46 |
| HMP Magilligan | 258 | 448 | 45 |

[1] Includes 27 female prisoners.

## Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10965]

**Sir John Wheeler:** A range of projects across all Northern Ireland departments and the Northern Ireland Office are under consideration, but none are yet at the invitation to tender stage. The administration costs incurred to date in the tendering process are part of the normal work of departments and are not separately identified.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10963]

**Sir John Wheeler:** A range of projects across all Northern Ireland departments and the Northern Ireland Office are under consideration, but none are yet at the invitation to tender stage. However, the following external consultancy costs have been incurred in 1995–96 in moving towards this position:

| | *£ thousand* |
|---|---|
| Legal | 58 |
| Publicity | 2 |
| Accountancy | 1 |
| Management consultancy | 97 |

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Prisons (Mechanical Restraints)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since January 1990 inmates at Her Majesty's Prison, Holloway, have been *(a)* detained in a strip cell and *(b)* restrained by body belts for (i) medical or (ii) non-medical purposes. [8440]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service,who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of occasions inmates at Holloway prison have been detained in a strip cell and restrained by bodybelts for medical or non-medical purposes.

The number of occasions since January 1990 that prisoners have been restrained are shown in the attached tables.

*Special cell*

| *Year* | *Non-medical* |
|---|---|
| 1990 | 9 |
| 1991 | 1 |
| 1992 | 13 |
| 1993 | 13 |
| 1994 | 17 |
| 1995 | 14 |

*Body belt*

| *Year* | *Medical* | *Non-medical* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990 | 0 | 0 |
| 1991 | 0 | 0 |
| 1992 | 0 | 0 |
| 1993 | 0 | 0 |
| 1994 | 0 | 1 |
| 1995 | 1 | 1 |

### Disability Discrimination Act 1995

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* departments *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9221]

**Mr. Howard:** I refer to the reply to the hon. Member's question given on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *417*, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People. I, too, will ensure that my Department and bodies for which it is responsible are made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

### Frankland Prison

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the total cost of, and reasons for, replacing the locks at Her Majesty's prison, Frankland; [9266]

(2) where the master key to the locks of Her Majesty's Prison Frankland was found. [9265]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about the replacement of the locks at Frankland prison.

The keys to the security locks of Frankland prison were compromised by the loss of a cell key. In the circumstances it was decided to replace all cell locks and other pass locks in use in the prison.

The cost of locks and labour in fitting them was £93,500. The missing key has not yet been found.

### Helplines

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the helplines, or schemes which include a helpline service, for which his Department provides any funding, stating which are *(a)* independent organisations, *(b)* run by his Department or agencies of his Department or *(c)* of another classification; how many calls each received in each of the last five years; and how much money each received from his Department in each of the last five years. [9804]

**Mr. Howard:** My Department funds a number of telephone inquiry lines which the public can ring for advice. It has not been possible in all cases to attribute costs, but details which are readily available are as follows:

| | | *Calls* | | *Funding* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Helpline* | *Run by* | *Year* | *Number* | *Year* | *£* |
| The National Volunteering Helpline[1] | Independent company | 1995 | 14,000 | 1995 | 130,000 |
| The Prison Service Victim Helpline[2] | Agency | 1994 | 24 | 1994 | [3]9,000 |
| | | 1995 | 238 | 1995 | 12,000 |
| Prisoner Location Service | Agency | 1993 | 48,000 | | |
| | | 1994 | 60,000 | | |
| | | 1995 | 68,000 | 1995 | [4]60,000 |
| UK Passport Agency inquiry lines | Agency | 1991 | 1.5 million | 1991 | 750,000 |
| | | 1992 | 1.5 million | 1992 | 760,000 |
| | | 1993 | 1.6 million | 1993 | 800,000 |
| | | 1994 | 2.1 million | 1994 | 890,000 |
| | | 1995 | 2.3 million | 1995 | 910,000 |

| Helpline | Run by | Calls Year | Calls Number | Funding Year | Funding £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Immigration and Nationality telephone inquiry bureau | Department | 1991 | [5]358,000 | — | — |
| | | 1992 | 395,000 | — | — |
| | | 1993 | 436,000 | — | — |
| | | 1994 | 458,000 | — | — |
| | | 1995 | 501,000 | — | — |
| Nationality Directorate telephone inquiry bureau | Department | 1991 | 205,080 | | — |
| | | 1992 | 202,000 | | — |
| | | 1993 | 225,000 | | — |
| | | 1994 | 240,000 | | — |
| | | 1995 | 218,000 | [6]140,000 | — |
| Office of the Data Protection Registrar inquiries line | NDPB | 1990–91 | 38,000 | — | — |
| | | 1991–92 | 42,000 | — | — |
| | | 1992–93 | 44,000 | — | — |
| | | 1993–94 | 48,000 | — | — |
| | | 1994–95 | 66,000 | — | — |

[1] Commenced 1 March 1995. The helpline is run by Network Scotland with a grant from the Home Office.
[2] Commenced 5 December 1994. Excludes additional running costs of £4,000–£5,000 incurred as a one-off basis in the first four and a half months of the service only.
[3] Includes start-up costs of £8,000.
[4] Estimated cost for 1995. In previous years separate costs have not been recorded.
[5] Figures do not include recorded messages.
[6] Estimated cost for 1995. In previous years separate costs have not been recorded.

## Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what public response he has made to the publication by Amnesty International last June of "Playing Human Pinball-Home Office Practice in Safe Third Country Asylum Cases"; if he will place copies in the Library of letters he has sent to Amnesty International in reply to letters from it concerning matters contained in the pamphlet; and if he will make a statement. [10660]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** My predecessor wrote to Mr. David Bull, director of Amnesty International, on 27 July in response to this report. I have placed a copy of the letter in the Library.

**Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average time taken by his Department to reach substantive decisions on asylum applications lodged since the coming into force of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, when applications are made *(a)* at a port of entry, *(b)* by persons given leave to enter the United Kingdom for a limited period and *(c)* by persons liable to removal as illegal entrants; [10080]

(2) what is the average time taken by his Department between receipt of an asylum application under the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 and the carrying out of substantive interview with the asylum seeker when applications are made *(a)* at a port of entry, *(b)* by persons given leave to enter the United Kingdom for a limited period and *(c)* by persons liable to removal as illegal entrants. [10081]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Information on the average time taken during 1995 to reach a substantive decision on those asylum applications submitted after the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 is given in the table. Reliable information on the time between application date and interview date is not held centrally.

*Average time taken to reach a substantive decision[1] on post 1993 Act asylum applications, 1995*

| 1995 | Average decision time Months |
|---|---|
| Port cases | 8.6 |
| In-country cases previously granted leave to enter[2] | 13.4 |
| Illegal entrants | 7.6 |
| All cases decided[3] | 9.5 |

[1] Excludes without foundation refusals and refusals under paragraph 340 of immigration rules.
[2] Includes those who applied after deportation action had been initiated.
[3] Excludes those cases where the applicant's immigration status was unknown at the time of application.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library all material issued on behalf of Her Majesty's Government to the UN human rights committee concerning the appeal rights of asylum seekers. [10623]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The fourth periodic report by the United Kingdom to the committee, dated October 1994, which included a description of asylum appeal rights under the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act, is already available in the Library. The committee's record of oral evidence by United Kingdom officials to the committee on 21 July 1995 about the report will be placed in the Library when it becomes available.

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the Tamil asylum seekers arriving in the United Kingdom on 13 February 1989 *(a)* have been repatriated and *(b)* have been given leave to remain or are remaining in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [10460]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The information requested is not readily available.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the Home Office circular dated 13 January 1994 setting out the circumstances in which the Home Office may exercise its

discretion and consider asylum cases substantively in potential safe third country cases. [10661]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** I have done so today.

### Channel Islands

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions agreed at the meeting his Department hosted with a delegation from the states of Jersey and Guernsey on 5 January; and if he will place in the Library copies of all documents or briefings made available to the Channel Islands delegation during the meeting. [10087]

**Mr. Sackville:** This meeting was that looked forward to in the reply by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *774*, to an earlier question from the hon. Member. At the meeting, officials from a number of Government Departments and British Nuclear Fuels briefed political representatives of Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and the Isle of Man, and accompanying officials and advisers, on a range of nuclear matters, including the dumping and transport of nuclear waste, the monitoring of radiation levels, contingency planning, and possible developments in the French civil nuclear industry and at Sellafield. Departments undertook to provide further information requested at the meeting or for which the islands might ask subsequently, and to arrange further meetings as need be. Our aim is to ensure that the island authorities have continuing reassurance in these matters. I am arranging to place in the Library copies of all the papers provided to the insular representatives at the meeting, all of which are also available publicly.

### Director General, Prison Service

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions have taken place between the parties on the amount of compensation to be paid to the former Director General of the Prison Service; and whether a quantified offer of compensation has been made by his office; [10324]

(2) how long was taken to agree compensation for the former Director General of the Prison Service; and what is the norm in such cases. [10334]

**Miss Widdecombe:** It would be inappropriate to disclose details of the discussions which are continuing between lawyers representing both parties. The length of time taken to conclude such matters depends upon the circumstances of each case.

### Crime Reduction (Suffolk)

**Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the outcome of the positive people bid from the Suffolk consortium of police, education and business for funding for the crime reduction programme; and if he will make a statement. [9303]

**Mr. Maclean:** The positive people bid is one of a number of second stage applications for funding under the criminality reduction development programme. The matter is being given very careful consideration and I hope to be able to make final decisions shortly.

### Young Offenders

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders sentenced under section 53(1) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 were in custody on the last date for which figures are available; and of those in custody, how many were *(a)* in local authority secure accommodation, *(b)* in prison department custody and *(c)* detained under mental health legislation. [9887]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about young offenders sentenced under section 53(1) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

On 15 January 1996 there were 51 young offenders, including 9 juveniles, sentenced under section 53(1) of the 1933 Act in custody. 48 were held in Prison Service custody and 3, all juveniles, in local authority secure accommodation. There are currently no young offenders who have been sentenced under section 53(1) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 detained under mental health legislation.

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the convicted prison population aged over 21 years had also been convicted of an offence under the age of 21 years, for the latest year for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [9875]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what percentage of the convicted prison population aged over 21 years had also been convicted of an offence under the age of 21 years for the latest year for which information is available.

The latest available information is contained in the attached table.

*Adult prison population[1] in Prison Service establishments under sentence on 30 June 1994: by whether an offence[2] is recorded under the age of 21*

*England and Wales, Adults*

| | | *Percentage* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Population* | *Previous history not found[3]* | *No conviction[2] aged under 21* | *Conviction[2] aged under 21* |
| Males | 28,896 | 5 | 26 | 69 |
| Females | 1,128 | 11 | 54 | 35 |
| Total | 30,024 | 5 | 28 | 67 |

[1] Excludes fine defaulters and is based on samples of 4,606 males and 1,105 females. The adult population consists of those aged 21 and over apart from some young offenders aged 21 who have not been reclassified as adult.

[2] Relates to convictions for "standard list" offences only. These offences include all indictable offences and some of the more serious summary offences.

[3] Information on prisoners was matched to records on the Home Office Offenders Index. In some cases no set of matching records can be found. A prisoner may not be matched because he or she may not have been sentenced to a "standard list" offence and has

no previous record for such offences or alternatively there may be an inconsistency between personal details held on the Offenders Index and those held on prison records.

**Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons aged 15 years were held in young offenders' institutions and remand centres in England and Wales on the last available date; in which establishments they were held; and if they were held on remand or under sentence; [10145]

(2) how many persons aged 16 years were held in each young offenders institution and remand centre in England and Wales *(a)* on remand and *(b)* under sentence, on the last available date. [10146]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alun Michael, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions asking, how many persons aged 15 and 16 years were being held in young offenders' institutions and remand centres in England and Wales on the last available date; in which establishments they were held; and if they were held on remand or under sentence.

The latest available information is for 31 December 1995 and is given in the attached table.

*Population of 15 and 16-year-olds in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 31 December 1995*[1]

| | *15-year-olds* | | | *16-year-olds* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Remand* | *Sentence* | *Total* | *Remand* | *Sentence* | *Total* |
| *Remand centres* | | | | | | |
| Brinsford | — | — | — | 2 | — | 2 |
| Exeter | 1 | — | 1 | 2 | — | 2 |
| Feltham | 1 | — | 1 | 5 | — | 5 |
| Glen Parva | 8 | — | 8 | 26 | — | 26 |
| Gloucester | 1 | — | 1 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Hindley | 5 | — | 5 | 17 | 4 | 21 |
| Low Newton | 5 | — | 5 | 10 | — | 10 |
| Northallerton | — | — | — | 11 | — | 11 |
| Norwich | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 |
| Swansea | — | — | — | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Total remand centres (male) | 21 | — | 21 | 81 | 10 | 91 |
| *Closed YOIs (male)* | | | | | | |
| Aylesbury | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 |
| Brinsford | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — |
| Deerbolt | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Feltham | — | 4 | 4 | — | 11 | 11 |
| Glen Parva | — | 2 | 2 | — | 11 | 11 |
| Moorland | — | 1 | 1 | — | 6 | 6 |
| Onley | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Portland | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 |
| Stoke Heath | — | 1 | 1 | — | 3 | 3 |
| Swinfen Hal | — | — | — | — | 2 | 2 |
| Total closed YOIs (male) | — | 11 | 11 | — | 37 | 37 |
| *Juvenile YOIs (male)* | | | | | | |
| Brinsford | 9 | 7 | 16 | 12 | 10 | 22 |
| Deerbolt | — | 14 | 14 | — | 43 | 43 |
| Feltham | 5 | 22 | 27 | 29 | 43 | 72 |
| Huntercombe | — | 2 | 2 | — | 16 | 16 |
| Lancaster Fms | — | — | — | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Onley | — | 13 | 13 | — | 33 | 33 |
| Portland | — | 9 | 9 | — | 46 | 46 |
| Stoke Heath | — | 11 | 11 | — | 50 | 50 |
| Thorn Cross | — | 4 | 4 | — | 4 | 4 |
| Werrington | — | 13 | 13 | — | 31 | 31 |
| Wetherby | — | 11 | 11 | — | 29 | 29 |
| Total Juvenile YOIs (male) | 14 | 106 | 120 | 45 | 306 | 351 |
| *Closed YOIs (female)* | | | | | | |
| Bullwood Hall | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 |
| New Hall | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Styal | — | 3 | 3 | — | 1 | 1 |
| Total closed YOIs (female) | — | 4 | 4 | — | 3 | 3 |
| *Open YOIs (female)* | | | | | | |
| Drake Hall | — | — | — | — | 2 | 2 |
| East Sutton Park | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Total open YOIs (female) | — | — | — | — | 3 | 3 |

*Population of 15 and 16-year-olds in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 31 December 1995*[1]

| | 15-year-olds | | | 16-year-olds | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Remand* | *Sentence* | *Total* | *Remand* | *Sentence* | *Total* |
| Other establishments | 8 | 5 | 13 | 24 | 16 | 40 |
| Total all establishments | 43 | 126 | 169 | 150 | 375 | 525 |

[1] Provisional figures. Remand includes both untried and also convicted unsentenced prisoners.

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the significance of emotional disturbance among young people as a factor associated with inmates of detention centres; what estimate he has made of the proportion of the cost to detention centres accounted for by such young people; and if he will make a statement. [9018]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* Detention centres and youth custody centres were replaced by young offender institutions in 1988.

Two studies have been commissioned by the Home Office into the mental health of sentenced and unsentenced prisoners. Both include findings of young males in prison, although data on young females was not collated separately from data on adult females. The report of the first study was published in May 1991 under the title, "Mentally Disordered Prisoners". The report of the second study, "Mental Disorder in Remand Prisoners", was received by the Home Office in late September 1995.

The 1990 study showed that 33 per cent. of sentenced young male offenders in the sample group were diagnosed as suffering from some form of psychiatric disorder, including harmful or dependent misuse of substances. The corresponding figure for unsentenced young male offenders in the 1995 study was 53 per cent. of the sample group.

No figures are available on the cost of maintaining inmates with emotional or mental health problems, as opposed to those without such problems.

## European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated; [10060]

(2) what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10072]

**Mr. Howard:** It is my Department's policy not to make regulations implementing European directives which add to the burdens imposed by such directives. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

## Fire Services

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of firefighters and officers per fire service for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [10239]

**Mr. Sackville:** Information on the numbers of personnel in each fire authority is published annually in the reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services for England and Wales. The reports for 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993–94 and 1994–95, Cm 1581, 2008, 2275, 2679 and 2998, each contain a table giving establishments and strengths at 1 January 1991 to 1 January 1995 respectively. However, these tables do not provide a breakdown into firefighters and more senior ranks and such information could not be provided except at disproportionate cost.

## Illegal Immigrants

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the incidents involving illegal immigrants arriving at Gatwick in December 1993 absconding. [10469]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** I will write to the hon. Member.

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons arriving at United Kingdom ports of entry have been allowed to go to temporary addresses in each of the last five years; and how many have absconded in each year. [10459]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The information available is given in the table.

*Passengers at United Kingdom ports of entry*

| | *Passengers granted temporary admission* | *Passengers who absconded*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 13,220 | 601 |
| 1992 | 16,967 | 530 |
| 1993 | 19,063 | 667 |
| 1994 | 19,327 | 1,240 |
| 1995[2,3] | 23,084 | 1,577 |

[1] Either from temporary admission or detention or the control area at ports. The time period relates to when the passenger was recorded as an absconder, not when the passenger entered the country.
[2] January to October.
[3] Data for 1995 are provisional.

## Immigration (Hong Kong)

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Hong Kong citizens have applied for United Kingdom passports; and how many dependents are estimated to arrive from each application. [10461]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to applications for British citizenship made under the British nationality (Hong Kong) selection scheme. As at 26 November 1995, 108,768 principal beneficiary applications had been received. This figure includes invalid, ineligible and withdrawn applications and second applications from some of those unsuccessful in the first tranche of the scheme. So far, 48,376 of these

applicants have been registered as British citizens, along with 80,207 dependants. The scheme allows for a maximum of 50,000 principal beneficiaries.

### James Hanratty

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute a public inquiry into the case of James Hanratty; and if he will make a statement. [10468]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** No. In 1974 Mr. Lewis Hawer QC was appointed to carry out an independent assessment of the case and his report, which did not conclude that there had been a miscarriage of justice, was published as Cm 6021. Following a request in July 1994 by solicitors acting for the late Mr. Hanratty's family, my officials arranged for scientific tests to be carried out on certain material relating to the case, but these proved inconclusive. We are currently considering what further action may be necessary in relation to other points raised by the solicitors.

### Immigration (Detention)

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were detained under Immigration Act powers *(a)* overnight, *(b)* between one night and one month, *(c)* for a period of more than one month up to two months and *(d)* for more than two months in (i) Harmondsworth detention centre, (ii) the Queen's building, Heathrow, (iii) Terminal 4, Heathrow, (iv) the Beehive, Gatwick, (v) HM prison Haslar, (vi) HM prison Pentonville, (vii) Campsfield house detention centre, (viii) HM prison Rochester, (ix) HM prison Holloway and (x) other establishments during (1) 1994 and (2) 1995 to the latest date for which information is available; and, of these people, how many in each category were *(B)* women, *(B)* children under 18 and *(C)* men; and what were the names of the establishments in (x); [7423]

(2) how many people were received into *(a)* Prison Department establishments, *(b)* immigration detention centres and *(c)* police cells under Immigration Act powers during (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995 to the latest convenient date; how many of these were (1) asylum-seekers or (2) applying to remain on non-asylum grounds, by individual prisons establishment or detention centre; what was the average daily population of persons so detained in each of those years; what was the average length of time spent in detention by persons so detained in each of those years; and what was the nationality of persons so detained for each of those years. [7424]

**Mr. Kirkhope** *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* Information on the total numbers of persons detained, analysed by nationality, is given in table 1. The number of detainees received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales under the Immigration Act 1971 is given in table 2 for 1994 and for January to November 1995. The number is shown by the establishment of initial reception. The average population in 1994, including persons originally received for a criminal offence, was 487. The average for January to November 1995 is 481. A breakdown of receptions into Prison Service establishments by nationality is given for 1994 and for January to November 1995 in table 3.

The average period of detention for detainees released in 1994 and in January to November 1995 is provisionally estimated at 21 weeks and 19 weeks respectively. The other information requested is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*Table 1: Passengers at ports[1], illegal entrants and deportation cases[2] detained under Immigration Act powers*

| *Geographical region and nationality* | *1994* | *1995 January–September[3]* |
|---|---|---|
| *European Economic Area* | | |
| Austria | 1 | 1 |
| Belgium | 7 | 2 |
| Denmark | 1 | — |
| Finland | — | — |
| France | 28 | 16 |
| Germany | 7 | 1 |
| Greece | 1 | 2 |
| Iceland | — | — |
| Ireland | — | — |
| Italy | 27 | 15 |
| Luxembourg | 3 | — |
| Netherlands | 41 | 8 |
| Norway | — | — |
| Portugal | 32 | 8 |
| Spain | 3 | — |
| Sweden | 7 | 2 |
| Total EEA | 158 | 55 |
| *Europe* | | |
| Bulgaria | 33 | 67 |
| Cyprus | 345 | 150 |
| Former Czechoslovakia | 59 | 47 |
| Hungary | 18 | 15 |
| Malta | 1 | 2 |
| Poland | 503 | 429 |
| Romania | 215 | 224 |
| Russia | 53 | 62 |
| Other former USSR | 100 | 119 |
| Switzerland | 3 | 5 |
| Turkey | 543 | 283 |
| Former Yugoslavia | 124 | 190 |
| Other Europe | 58 | 59 |
| Total Europe | 2,055 | 1,652 |
| *Americas* | | |
| Argentina | 8 | 6 |
| Barbados | 15 | 16 |
| Brazil | 109 | 85 |
| Canada | 26 | 23 |
| Chile | 13 | 6 |
| Colombia | 212 | 135 |
| Guyana | 33 | 26 |
| Jamaica | 411 | 325 |
| Mexico | 16 | 10 |
| Peru | 43 | 33 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 30 | 17 |
| USA | 115 | 80 |
| Venezuela | 16 | 10 |
| Other Americas | 200 | 199 |
| Total Americas | 1,247 | 971 |
| *Africa* | | |
| Algeria | 542 | 314 |
| Angola | 93 | 43 |
| Egypt | 25 | 15 |
| Ethiopia | 57 | 24 |
| Ghana | 865 | 431 |
| Kenya | 195 | 131 |
| Libya | 23 | 16 |
| Mauritius | 40 | 32 |
| Morocco | 105 | 44 |

*Table 1: Passengers at ports[1], illegal entrants and deportation cases[2] detained under Immigration Act powers*

| *Geographical region and nationality* | *1994* | *1995 January–September[3]* |
|---|---|---|
| Nigeria | 1,633 | 985 |
| Sierra Leone | 319 | 45 |
| Somalia | 111 | 64 |
| South Africa | 108 | 70 |
| Sudan | 35 | 17 |
| Tanzania | 89 | 77 |
| Tunisia | 30 | 10 |
| Uganda | 65 | 32 |
| Zaire | 190 | 101 |
| Zambia | 37 | 35 |
| Zimbabwe | 55 | 46 |
| Other Africa | 684 | 386 |
| Total Africa | 5,301 | 2,918 |
| *Asia* | | |
| Indian sub-continent | | |
| Bangladesh | 311 | 228 |
| India | 827 | 616 |
| Pakistan | 566 | 390 |
| Total Indian sub-continent | 1,704 | 1,234 |
| *Middle East* | | |
| Iran | 48 | 59 |
| Iraq | 43 | 38 |
| Israel | 34 | 21 |
| Jordan | 11 | 1 |
| Kuwait | — | — |
| Lebanon | 21 | 14 |
| Saudi Arabia | — | 1 |
| Syria | 6 | 3 |
| Yemen | 3 | 1 |
| Other Middle East | 8 | 8 |
| Total Middle East | 174 | 146 |
| *Remainder of Asia* | | |
| China | 172 | 371 |
| Hong Kong[4] | 33 | 30 |
| Indonesia | 6 | 4 |
| Japan | 30 | 11 |
| Malaysia | 112 | 130 |
| Phillippines | 58 | 10 |
| Singapore | 8 | 7 |
| South Korea | 13 | 14 |
| Sri Lanka | 279 | 147 |
| Taiwan | 1 | 3 |
| Thailand | 26 | 18 |
| Other Asia | 58 | 35 |
| Total Remainder of Asia | 796 | 780 |
| *Oceania* | | |
| Australia | 21 | 17 |
| New Zealand | 4 | 5 |
| Other Oceania | 2 | 2 |
| Total Oceania | 27 | 24 |
| British Overseas citizens | 16 | 10 |
| Stateless[5] | 568 | 450 |
| All Nationalities | 12,046 | 8,240 |

[1] Passengers detained overnight or longer.[2] Excluding persons detained pending deportation following completion of a custodial sentence.

[3] Data for 1995 are provisional.

[4] Includes Hong Kong stateless persons.

[5] Excluding Palestine and Hong Kong stateless persons.

*Table 2: Receptions of persons detained under the Immigration Act 1971 into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales: by establishment 1994 and January–November 1995*

*Number of Persons[1] [2]*

| *Establishment* | *1994* | *1 January–30 November 1995* |
|---|---|---|
| *Remand Centres* | | |
| Blakenhurst | 36 | 3 |
| Brinsford | 15 | 11 |
| Dorchester | 13 | 2 |
| Exeter | 12 | 11 |
| Feltham | 10 | 16 |
| Glen Parva | 1 | 1 |
| Haslar | 462 | 412 |
| Moorland | 1 | — |
| Northallerton | 1 | — |
| Lancaster Farms | 2 | — |
| *Local Prisons* | | |
| Bedford | 1 | 3 |
| Belmarsh | 22 | 26 |
| Birmingham | 218 | 226 |
| Bristol | 24 | 42 |
| Brixton | 71 | 68 |
| Bullingdon | 5 | 3 |
| Canterbury | 52 | 9 |
| Cardiff | 6 | 4 |
| Chelmesford | 12 | 1 |
| Doncaster | 1 | 3 |
| Dover | 36 | — |
| Durham | 9 | 4 |
| Elmley | 24 | 1 |
| Gloucester | 6 | 1 |
| Highdown | 40 | 26 |
| Hindley | 7 | 12 |
| Holloway | 34 | 45 |
| Holme House | 10 | 2 |
| Hull | 14 | 2 |
| Leeds | 20 | 27 |
| Leicester | — | 4 |
| Lewes | 2 | 3 |
| Lincoln | 2 | 5 |
| Liverpool | 23 | 13 |
| Manchester | 88 | 45 |
| Norwich | 19 | 2 |
| New Hall | — | 2 |
| Pentonville | 62 | 21 |
| Preston | 1 | 1 |
| Reading | 3 | — |
| Risley | 8 | 2 |
| Rochester | 122 | 512 |
| Shrewsbury | 6 | — |
| Swansea | 7 | — |
| Wandsworth | 35 | 24 |
| Winchester | 10 | — |
| Wolds | 8 | 11 |
| Wood Hill | 1 | 3 |
| Wormwood Scrubs | 44 | 74 |
| *Closed training prisons* | | |
| Dartmoor | — | 1 |
| Establishment not recorded | 2 | 2 |
| Nationality not recorded/other | 33 | 25 |
| All Establishments | 1,641 | 1,711 |

[1] The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.

[2] Provisional figures.

*Table 3: Receptions into Prison Service establishments by nationality, 1994 and January to November 1995*

*Number of persons* [1,2]

| *Nationality* | *1994* | *1 January to 30 November 1995* |
|---|---|---|
| Afghanistan | — | 3 |
| Albania | 7 | 9 |
| Algeria | 151 | 124 |
| Angola | 24 | 21 |
| Anguilla | 2 | — |
| Argentina | 2 | 1 |
| Ascensioni Island | 1 | — |
| Austria | — | 1 |
| Australia | — | 3 |
| Bangladesh | 38 | 53 |
| Benin | — | 2 |
| Barbados | 3 | 1 |
| Belgium | 1 | — |
| Bolivia | — | 1 |
| Bosnia-Herzogovina | 1 | — |
| Brazil | 1 | 7 |
| Bulgaria | 3 | 7 |
| Burkina Faso | — | 2 |
| Cameroon, United Republic of | 6 | 5 |
| Canada | 4 | — |
| Chad | 1 | — |
| Chile | 2 | 1 |
| China | 18 | 79 |
| Colombia | 7 | 9 |
| Congo | — | 2 |
| Cyprus | 15 | 8 |
| Czech Republic | 4 | 4 |
| Denmark | 1 | 1 |
| Dominica | 1 | 1 |
| Djibouti | 1 | — |
| Egypt | 7 | 4 |
| Ethiopia | 7 | 5 |
| Equador | — | 4 |
| Estonia | — | 1 |
| Fiji | — | 1 |
| Finland | — | 1 |
| France | 7 | 7 |
| French Southern Territories | 1 | 1 |
| Gambia | 7 | 39 |
| Georgia | — | 4 |
| Germany | 3 | 5 |
| Ghana | 124 | 79 |
| Greece | — | 4 |
| Guyana | 2 | 2 |
| Haiti | 1 | — |
| Hong Kong | 4 | 5 |
| Hungary | 2 | — |
| India | 281 | 294 |
| Indonesia | — | 2 |
| Iran | 11 | 13 |
| Irish Republic | 4 | 2 |
| Indian Ocean Territories | 1 | — |
| Israel | 3 | 2 |
| Iraq | 4 | 10 |
| Italy | 4 | 8 |
| Ivory Coast | 17 | 2 |
| Jamaica | 58 | 83 |
| Japan | 1 | — |
| Jordan | 2 | — |
| Kazakhstan | 1 | 1 |
| Kenya | 13 | 9 |
| Laos Peoples Democratic Republic | — | 1 |
| Lebanon | 6 | 2 |
| Liberia | 19 | 21 |
| Libya | 12 | 3 |
| Lithuania | 1 | 2 |
| Malaysia | 3 | 1 |
| Maldives | — | 1 |
| Mali | 2 | — |
| Moldova | 1 | — |
| Morocco | 19 | 13 |
| Mauritius | 1 | 2 |
| Malawi | 1 | — |
| Mozambique | 4 | 1 |
| Netherlands | 7 | 5 |
| Netherland Antillies | 1 | — |
| Nepal | 4 | 1 |
| Nicaragua | — | 1 |
| Niger | 4 | 1 |
| Nigeria | 237 | 235 |
| Pakistan | 100 | 106 |
| Peru | — | 9 |
| Philippines | — | 1 |
| Poland | 14 | 14 |
| Portugal | 7 | 1 |
| Romania | 26 | 71 |
| Russia | 9 | 15 |
| Rwanda | 2 | 8 |
| Senegal | — | 2 |
| Serbia | — | 1 |
| Singapore | 1 | 1 |
| Sierre Leone | 21 | 14 |
| Slovakia | 1 | — |
| Somalia | 8 | 11 |
| South Africa | 14 | 14 |
| Spain | 2 | 5 |
| Sri Lanka | 25 | 28 |
| St. Lucia | 1 | 1 |
| St. Vincent and the Grenadines | — | 1 |
| Sudan | 8 | 4 |
| Taiwan | — | 1 |
| Tajikistan | — | 1 |
| Tanzania | 6 | 5 |
| Toga | 1 | 2 |
| Tonga | 1 | — |
| Thailand | 1 | 1 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 1 | 3 |
| Tunisia | 5 | 1 |
| Turkey | 104 | 53 |
| Uganda | 1 | 11 |
| United Arab Emirates | 1 | — |
| United States of America | 3 | 11 |
| Venezuela | — | 1 |
| Vietnam | 1 | 1 |
| Yugoslavia | 13 | 33 |
| Zambia | 5 | 4 |
| Zaire | 38 | 22 |
| Zimbabwe | 5 | 3 |
| Nationality not recorded/other | 35 | 27 |
| All | 1,641 | 1,711 |

[1] The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.

[2] Provisional figures.

## Remand Prisoners

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of remand prisoners in England and Wales were *(a)* male and *(b)* female for each of the last 10 years. [9874]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, what percentages of remand prisoners in England and Wales were *(a)* male and *(b)* female for each of the last 10 years.

The information requested is given in the attached table.

*Percentages of male and female remand prisoners[1] in prison service establishments[2] in England and Wales, 1984 to 1994*

| Year | Percentages of remand prisoners | | All remand prisoners[3] |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | |
| 1984 | 95.9 | 4.1 | 8,741 |
| 1985 | 96.0 | 4.0 | 9,742 |
| 1986 | 95.7 | 4.3 | 10,081 |
| 1987 | 95.8 | 4.2 | 11,162 |
| 1988 | 95.6 | 4.4 | 11,440 |
| 1989 | 95.6 | 4.4 | 10,499 |
| 1990 | 96.1 | 3.9 | 9,905 |
| 1991 | 96.2 | 3.8 | 10,157 |
| 1992 | 96.2 | 3.8 | 10,090 |
| 1993 | 96.3 | 3.7 | 10,662 |
| 1994 | 96.0 | 4.0 | 12,357 |

[1] Remand prisoners covers both untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners.
[2] Excludes those held in police cells.
[3] Average population.

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many remand prisoners were held for over three months prior to their trial on 30 June for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [9876]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking how many remand prisoners were held for over three months before their trial on 30 June for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Information for 1994 and 1995 is given in the attached table. Information for 1985–1993 is published in "Prison statistics, England and Wales" (table 2.3 of the 1993 edition, Cm 2893), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House

*Untried prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 30 June 1994 and 1995 held on remandfor over three months[1]*

| Year | Number remanded for over three months |
|---|---|
| *On 30 June* | |
| 1994 | 3,500 |
| 1995 | [2]3,000 |

[1] Untried prisoners awaiting trial. Time since first reception or remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail, but excludes any time spent in police cells beforehand.
[2] Rounded provisional estimate.

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the estimated time spent in custody for untried prisoners in gaols in England and Wales for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [9877]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, what was the estimated time spent in custody for untried prisoners in England and Wales for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Information for 1994 is given in the attached table. Information for 1984 to 1993 is published in "Prison statistics, England and Wales" (table 2.1 of the 1993 edition, Cm 2893), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

*Average time spent in custody for untried prisoners in prison service establishments in England and Wales in 1994[1] by sex*

| Type of custody | Average number of days in custody[2] | |
|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female |
| Untried[2] | 59 | 44 |

[1] Provisional figures. [2] Time spent in custody before conviction.
[3] Calculated from number of receptions and average population in 1994.

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the remand population in England and Wales on 30 June for each of the last 10 years and up to the latest period for which figures are available; how many were aged under 21 years for each of those years; and if he will make a statement. [9878]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, what was the remand population in England and Wales on 30th June for each of the last 10 years and up to the latest period for which figures are available and how many were aged under 21 years for each of those years.

The information requested is given in the attached table.

*Prisoners held on remand[1] in prison service establishments[2] in England and Wales, 30 June 1985 to 1995*

| | Aged under 21 | Aged 21 and over | Total Remand |
|---|---|---|---|
| 30 June 1985 | 3,185 | 6,754 | 9,939 |
| 30 June 1986 | 3,149 | 6,816 | 9,965 |
| 30 June 1987 | 3,416 | 7,253 | 10,669 |
| 30 June 1988 | 3,344 | 7,469 | 10,813 |
| 30 June 1989 | 3,186 | 7,078 | 10,264 |
| 30 June 1990 | 2,754 | 6,359 | 9,113 |
| 30 June 1991 | 2,791 | 6,472 | 9,263 |
| 30 June 1992 | 2,724 | 6,835 | 9,559 |
| 30 June 1993 | 2,795 | 7,837 | 10,632 |
| 30 May 1994 | 3,063 | 9,430 | 12,493 |
| 30 June 1995 | 2,728 | 8,328 | 11,056 |
| 30 November 1995 | 2,796 | 8,588 | 11,384 |

[1] Remand covers both untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners. [2] Excludes those held in police cells.

### Prisoners (Resettlement)

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps have been taken by his office to monitor additional services in resettlement services and accommodation required by prisoners losing their entitlement to housing benefit under the new regulations; [10446]

(2) how many ex-prisoners were placed in hostels for the homeless in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 to date; and at what cost. [10448]

**Mr. Sackville** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* The general use of approved probation/bail hostels and other offender accommodation is monitored through the collection and analysis of routine information on occupancy.

Specific information about the take-up of places by ex-prisoners is not collected centrally; but inspection by Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation and reports from probation services may draw attention to particular pressures or problems.

As for the cost of offender accommodation, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 9 January 1996, *Official Report,* column *188.*

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners released after serving between 13 and 52 weeks were homeless on release in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 to date in respect of (i) male and (ii) female prisoners. [10449]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners serving between 13 and 52 weeks who were homeless on release in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, and *(c)* 1995–96 to date in respect of (i) male and (ii) female prisoners.

The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bradley.** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance on the changes in housing benefit regulations has been given to prisons receiving *(a)* remand and *(b)* sentenced single prisoners with tenancies. [10450]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about guidance issued to prisons holding (a) remand and (b) sentenced single prisoners with tenancies on the changes in housing benefit.

The latest edition of the Prisoners' Information Book, which is available in all prisons and to all prisoners, refers to the changes in the rules on housing benefit and advises prisoners to seek further advice from prison staff and/or the Housing Benefit Office.

By April 1996 all prisons are due to be offering Inmate Development and Pre-Release (IDPR) training covering the main obstacles to effective resettlement, including housing advice, and to have a pool of officers trained by NACRO's Prisons Link Unit (PLU) to deliver a housing and employment advice service to prisoners. The PLU also provides establishments with a substantial set of directories with relevant information and an updating service changes occur.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Jobseeker's Allowance

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how employment levels in the Employment Service will be affected by the implementation of the jobseekers's allowance; [9790]

(2) how many surplus staff there will be in the Employment Service as a result of the implementation of the jobseeker's allowance. [9789]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the planned staffing levels in the Employment Service (ES) as a result of the implementation of the Jobseeker's Allowance, and how many surplus staff there would be as a result of that implementation.

There is no target for specific efficiency savings in staff numbers as a result in the implementation of JSA. In fact during the implementation period some additional staffing will be required. However, if unemployment continues to fall fewer staff will be required and the expectation is that there will be a modest reduction in total staffing. The actual staffing figures for ES—and therefore possible staff surpluses—have not yet been finalised and this will, to some extent, depend upon discussions with the Benefits Agency about staff transferring.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if individuals voluntarily leaving their job will receive any contributory jobseeker's allowance after 8 April. [10298]

**Mr. Forth:** Jobseeker's allowance will be introduced on 7 October 1996. If people have voluntarily left their employment as employed earners without just cause, contribution—based JSA will not be payable to them for a period of at least one week but not more than 26 weeks. Decisions will be made by independent adjudication officers, who will also decide the period of non-payment in each individual case.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be in the implications after 8 April for claims for contributory jobseekers's allowance of suspension of an applicant's unemployment benefit because that applicant voluntarily left a job. [10323]

**Mr. Forth:** Jobseeker's allowance will be introduced on 7 October 1996. Until that date, claims for unemployment benefit will continue to be suspended pending an adjudication officer's decision as to whether claimants have voluntarily left their employment without

just cause. After 7 October, provided the jobseeker satisfies the entitlement conditions that he is available to be employed, actively seeking employment, and has entered into a jobseeker's agreement, payment of JSA will be made in full pending an adjudication officer's decision on a leaving voluntarily question.

### Redundancy Compensation

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many representations her Department has received in the last 18 months on the operation of part IV of the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994; and if she will make a statement; [10082]

(2) what plans she has to amend Part IV of the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994; and if she will make a statement. [10083]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Department has received 17 representations on this matter in the last 18 months. Amendments to the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994 are for the Department of the Environment to consider.

### Secondary School Inspections

**Mr. Keen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of secondary schools inspected under section 9 of the Education Schools Act 1992 are judged to have been in the *(a)* very good, *(b)* good, *(c)* sound, *(d)* unsatisfactory and *(e)* poor category. [10417]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

### Business Start-up Scheme

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what factors led her to put the business start-up scheme into the single regeneration budget. [10414]

**Mr. Paice:** The introduction of the single regeneration budget gave local partnerships greater scope to determine the right mix of measures to support the development of their local economies. As helping unemployed people to set up their own business is an important element in regeneration, the business start-up scheme was incorporated into the single regeneration budget.

### Foreign Students

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many foreign post graduate students were studying at United Kingdom universities at the latest date for which figures are available; and what this number is expressed as a percentage of all post graduate students of United Kingdom universities; [10903]

(2) how many foreign students were studying at United Kingdom universities as undergraduates at the latest date for which figures are available; and what proportion this was of the total number of undergraduate students at United Kingdom universities. [10892]

**Mr. Forth:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 December, *Official Report*, columns *975–76*.

### Work Permits

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many work permit applications for soccer players from abroad were received by her Department in 1995 including those for extensions to existing permits. [10157]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The number of work permit applications for soccer players from abroad, including those for extensions to existing permits, received by the Department in 1995 was 65.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons information regarding work permit applications for soccer players from abroad is not available in respect of clubs, player nationality and refusal numbers as indicated in her answer of 19 July, *Official Report*, column *1341*. [10177]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Each work permit application is considered on its merits against the agreed criteria for soccer players. Information about clubs, and the players' nationality and numbers refused is not recorded separately by the work permit computer system as these factors are not relevant to the decision to approve or refuse a permit application.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new systems she has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10067]

**Mr. Forth:** The Department's policy is not to gold plate EC directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the UK. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to her efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [10053]

**Mr. Forth:** Official guidance on gold plating of European legislation is currently being reviewed by the Cabinet Office deregulation unit in consultation with other Government Departments.

### Dance and Drama Students (Funding)

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what results were obtained from the consultations between the then Department of Education, the Department of National Heritage and the Arts Council on the subject of securing improvements in the funding for students of dance and drama. [10348]

**Mr. Forth:** Discussions on this issue are continuing. No final decisions have yet been taken.

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students of dance and drama are *(a)* presently on course, *(b)* receive discretionary awards and *(c)* finance themselves; and what were the equivalent figures for 1992–93. [10350]

**Mr. Forth:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Upper Secondary Graduation Rate

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what examination the upper secondary graduation rate of 63.6 per cent. was based in the information which her Department supplied to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for "Education at a Glance: OECD" indicators, published in 1995. [10534]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The statistic is based on the number of pupils in the United Kingdom who left school at the end of the 1991–92 academic year with at least one GCSE at grades A to C or equivalent or higher academic qualifications including CSEs at grade 1, Scottish certificate of education standard and higher grades, GCE O and A levels and AS examinations.

### Oral Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many parliamentary questions for oral answer have been transferred to another Department by her since her current Department was set up; and which Members were involved. [11066]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Four oral questions, tabled by the hon. Members for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), have been transferred to other Departments since the establishment of the Department for Education and Employment.

### Dartford Schools (Playing Fields)

**Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she plans to issue a decision on the dispute concerning the allocation of playing fields between the Dartford West high school for girls and the Dartford grammar school for girls; and if she will make a statement. [10771]

**Mrs. Gillan:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already informed the parties of the decision that she is minded to make. Further representations have been made, some only very recently, and these are receiving urgent attention. The case raises a number of complex issues and is further complicated by another case which is now before the Education Assets Board. The outcome of that case may affect my right hon. Friend's consideration of this one.

### Grant-maintained Schools

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which schools with grant-maintained status had financial deficits in the financial year 1994–95; and how much the deficits amounted to for each school at the year end. [10981]

**Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the amount and purpose of each bid from each grant-maintained school for 1996–97; and if she will list the allocation made per school. [11063]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to arrange for replies to be sent to the hon. Members.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs; [10946]

(2) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10945]

**Mr. Forth:** The procurement of projects under the private finance initiative in the education sectors is entirely a matter for individual institutions and local education authorities. The information which the hon. Member requests is, therefore, unavailable for projects undertaken at universities, colleges or schools.

The Employment Service has procured a personnel administration system under the PFI. Information about the running costs relating to the tendering process would be available only at disproportionate cost. The ES relied solely upon consultancy provided by CCTA—the Government centre for information system. Costs for this service are not disaggregated in the form sought in the question, but the service included both legal and procurement advice. Payments totalling £26,711 were made to CCTA over a 13-month period from November 1994 to November 1995.

### Out-of-School Child Care Initiative

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the full evaluation of the out-of-school child care initiative will be published. [10338]

**Mrs. Gillan** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* I expect to publish the second evaluation report on 23 January 1996. A copy will be placed in the Library.

### Employment Advertisements (Age Limits)

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *520–21*, on the banning of an upper age limit in employment advertisements, what is her policy in respect of legislation to ban such advertisements. [10442]

**Mrs. Gillan** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* I have no evidence which suggests that such legislation would have any effect on employment. The Government remain convinced that the way to combat age discrimination is through persuasion.

## DEFENCE

### Low Flying

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for defence what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into a link between noise levels from military low flying and deafness in children; and if he will make a statement. [10086]

**Mr. Soames:** My Department has not conducted specific research into the subject. We do, however, closely monitor scientific research on noise and hearing including that relating to possible hearing loss in children due to aircraft noise. We believe that the restrictions we place on the heights, speeds and operating procedures of military aircraft should ensure that the level of noise experienced on the ground is not harmful, particularly given the brief exposure involved.

### Bosnia

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the cost of peacekeeping in Bosnia is to be borne by each of the member states of NATO. [10253]

**Mr. Soames:** Those costs which have been accepted as common costs for the IFOR operation will be borne by all members of NATO according to the appropriate cost share formulas.

All other costs will be borne by the individual troop-contributing nations, largely by each meeting the cost of their own national deployments. The United Kingdom has assessed its own costs to be in the region of £300 million for the duration of the operation. We have no visibility of the costs other nations will have to incur.

### Armed Forces Driving Schools

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* what savings and *(b)* what costs will flow from moving the Royal Air Force driving school from Saint Athan to Leconfield; and when he expects the cost of the move to be paid back by the savings made. [10028]

**Mr. Soames:** The investment appraisal carried out as part of the study into the future of the tri-service driver training indicates that moving the RAF driving school from RAF St. Athan to Leconfield will:

(a) provide savings of £47.222 million at net present value—over 25 years. This saving takes into account the additional costs,

(b) require additional costs of £10.616 million over 25 years.

The additional costs will be paid back by the fourth year following implementation—currently FY200/01.

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the qualifications of the management accountants who visited the three sites affected by the proposal to amalgamate the armed services driving schools; and whom they interviewed at each site. [10027]

**Mr. Soames:** The investment appraisal into the future location of driver training was produced by a member of management accountancy services (Army), the MOD's own internal management accountancy service. All members of the service are qualified management accountants.

The management accountant and other members of the study team interviewed a number of civilian and military personnel at each of the sites visited. Information was also obtained by telephone, by facsimile and by letter. The management accountant and the study team also visited policy and finance staffs in the services.

### HMS Malabar

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy ships have visited Hamilton since the closure of HMS Malabar; and at what cost. [10254]

**Mr. Soames:** Since the closure of HMS Malabar on 31 March 1995, three Royal Navy ships and a Royal Navy submarine and a Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship have visited Bermuda. The bills for the three Royal Navy ship visits have not yet been received, but the ships' broker and agent has estimated a total approximate cost of £33,000, excluding refuelling costs. The cost of the submarine visit was £107,559; that for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship is not yet available.

### Royal Naval Publications

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of writing, publishing, printing and disseminating the Royal Navy promotional literature "Broadsheet 1995–96" and "VJ The Final Victory". [9939]

**Mr. Soames:** "Broadsheet" is an annual publication produced by the Royal Navy to promote awareness of wider naval issues among a broad audience, including serving and retired personnel, and hon. members with an interest in such matters. Some 44,000 copies of the present issue were produced. The "VJ The Final Victory" brochure was a one off publication to commemorate the substantial contribution of the East Indies and Pacific Fleets to the victory in the far east. Some 85,000 copies were produced. The total cost of producing and disseminating "Broadsheet 95/96" and the VJ day brochure was approximately £235,000.

### Royal Marines School of Music

**Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the expected date for the Royal Marines school of music to occupy the former RNDQ premises in Her Majesty's naval base, Portsmouth. [10321]

**Mr. Soames:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 17 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *581*.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who provided external legal advice for Ministers in the Department in relation to the Scott inquiry. [11050]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The source of legal advice to witnesses to the Scott inquiry is a confidential matter.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions staff employed in his Department in relation to the Scott inquiry have had on matters related to the Scott inquiry with persons *(a)* employed by and *(b)* working as consultants for Conservative Central Office; and what subjects were discussed. [10995]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** None.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the responsibilities of the staff employed in his Department in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10994]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The responsibilities of the staff employed in my Department in relation to the Scott inquiry are to provide Ministers and officials with advice on matters associated with the inquiry, and to liaise with the inquiry.

### HMS Ocean (Damage Costs)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the damage done to HMS Ocean; what is the cost of rectifying the damage; and who is responsible for paying this cost. [10494]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The minor extent of the damage to HMS Ocean when she was launched in October was confirmed at a dry docking over the Christmas period. We now await proposals from the contractor in respect of the arrangement to make good the damage and the estimated cost of repairs. An element of the cost will be borne by the contractor with the balance being covered by MOD's normal self-insurance arrangements

### Maritime Patrol Aircraft

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the contract for the replacement maritime patrol aircraft. [10496]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Our assessment of bids continues, and we expect to let a contract with the selected prime contractor in late summer this year.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10944]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The tendering process of a particular project may consider a number of procurement routes and it is not possible to separately identify those costs attributable to the private finance initiative. The procurement route selected is that which provides best value for money over the whole life of the project.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10943]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The information required is available only at disproportionate cost. The private finance unit of the MOD has in this financial year spent some £200,000 on management consultants in support of projects which may have a PFI element.

### Falkland Islands (Argentine Mines)

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the number of Argentine mines remaining in the Falkland Islands; and what contribution is being made by Argentina towards the cost of clearance. [10159]

**Mr. Soames:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 8 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *321*.

### Dishonourable Discharges (Army)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates of dishonourable discharges from the Army as a result of breaches of military discipline in the period November 1992 until December 1993 together with the units from which they were discharged. [10498]

**Mr. Soames:** "Dishonourable discharge" is not an expression used by the services. Fifteen personnel were discharged with disgrace from the Army during the period 1 November 1992 to 31 December 1993.

The list of those discharged under this heading is as follows:

*Discharged with disgrace*

| *Date* | |
|---|---|
| 10 November 1992 | Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Manning and Record Office |
| 23 November 1992 | 7th Signal Regiment |
| 7 December 1992 | The Royal Dragoon Guards |
| 13 January 1993 | 32 Engineer Regiment |
| 11 February 1993 | 16th Signal Regiment |
| 12 March 1993 | Army Medical Services Training Group |
| 20 April 1993 | 7 Armoured Workshops, REME |
| 4 July 1993 | Army Medical Services Training Group |
| 4 August 1993 | The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards |
| 26 August 1993 | Combined Manning and Record Office |
| 3 September 1993 | 26 Engineer Regiment |
| 13 September 1993 | Support Battalion, Allied Rapid Reaction Corps |
| 20 September 1993 | 12 Transport Squadron Royal School Military Engineering |
| 30 October 1993 | Royal Green Jackets |
| 2 November 1993 | Army Training Regiment, Lichfield |

The list does not necessarily show the units at which the individuals were serving at the time they committed the disciplinary offences for which they were discharged. In many cases the personnel may have been discharged from holding units or their manning and record to which they were transferred after the disciplinary offence.

The manning and record office accounts for those personnel who are not held on the establishment of a specific unit.

### Stores Losses

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), on 14 December. *Official Report*, column *762*, what are the 20 most valuable items which have been *(a)* stolen and *(b)* lost from the armed services stores in the past five years; and what is their estimated (i) value and (ii) replacement cost. [11096]

**Mr. Soames:** Figures for items lost or stolen valued at below £100,000 could not be provided without disproportionate cost since a central register is not held.

A central register of stores losses of over £100,000, however, is maintained. From this register there are two cases of items lost from armed services stores.

(1) Stores lost in transit from stores depot to RN vessel.

*Description*

A Thermal Imager was lost in transit. Extensive searches have failed to locate its whereabouts.

Value: £118,000

Replacement Cost: £118,000

Date of Loss: July 1993

(2) Stores lost in transit on return to stores depot

*Description*

A consignment of 3 inch rockets being returned to a Royal Naval armament depot in Scotland after the Gulf conflict was lost in transit. Despite extensive investigation, the exact cause of the loss could not be determined.

Value: £104,000

Replacement Cost: £104,000

Date of Loss: April 1991

Both losses are detailed in the 1995 appropriations account which was approved by the National Audit Office.

### NATO (Interoperability)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning NATO command, control and communication information interoperability. [9976]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Much work has been done, in recent years, to improve interoperability of United Kingdom and NATO command, control, communication and information systems. The pace of change in information systems technology means that it has been necessary to maintain a constant programme of work to build on current achievements.

Recently, major initiatives such as the joint Warrior interoperability demonstration and the interoperability symposium in The Hague have assisted progress. Particular successes have been achieved in naval and air systems including the joint tactical information distribution system.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Local Government (House Sales)

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the total receipts to local government from the sale of their homes for rent; by whom the balances are now held; and what is *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the proportion of these receipts that has been used to write off local authority debt. [9861]

**Mr. Clappison:** Total receipts to local government from the sale of local authority dwelling since 1971–72 are about £23 billion. Most of these receipts will have been used to repay debt or for new capital expenditure, but no breakdown is available relating to housing receipts. Unused amounts remain with the authorities that received them.

### Rented Property

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if properties remain subject to assessment by the rent officer service where a tenant's consent has been obtained on form RR1. [10251]

**Mr. Clappison:** Schedule 11 to the Rent Act 1977 sets out the procedures for rent officers receiving applications for the registration of a rent.

If a landlord and tenant apply jointly on form RR1 for the registration of a rent, the rent officer may, after making any enquiry he thinks fit or asking for any information he requires, simply register the asking rent if he thinks it is a fair rent. If he does not think it is a fair rent, he may determine a fair rent.

### Homelessness

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment (1) what action was taken by local authorities in England for those households accepted as homeless and in priority need by reason of old age, in each quarter of 1993 and 1994 and in the first two quarters of 1995; [10262]

(2) what were the reasons for homelessness among those households accepted as homeless by local authorities in England, who were in priority need by reason of old age, in each quarter in 1993 and 1994 and in the first two quarters of 1995. [10266]

**Mr. Curry:** The quarterly P1(E) return on which local authorities in England report information on their activities under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 does not provide a breakdown by priority need category of the data collected on the use of temporary accommodation for households accepted for re-housing, the type of accommodation in which households are finally placed or the reason for the loss of previous settled accommodation.

### Wild Birds (Shooting Licences)

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by species the number of licences issued in 1995 under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for the destruction of wild birds; and how many birds were killed in each case. [10152]

**Mr. Clappison:** Details of licences issued under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 are contained in reports by the Untied Kingdom to the European Community on derogations under article 9 of the directive on the conservation of wild birds (79/409/EEC). The latest report for which figures are

available covers 1994. Figures are not yet available for 1995, but when the report has been prepared a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Rough Sleepers (London)

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what emergency provisions were made for rough sleepers in metropolitan areas during the very cold spell over Christmas and the new year; and if he will make a statement. [9972]

**Mr. Curry:** Under the Government's rough sleepers initiative, an annual programme of winter shelters provides additional beds for rough sleepers in central London between December and March. The 1995–96 programme is providing 310 beds in seven shelters. Extra emergency beds are opened during particularly cold spells and, so far this winter, up to 125 beds have been made available between 5 and 13 December and between 21 December and 7 January.

Extra assistance for rough sleepers during the winter is also provided nationally by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies.

### European Regional Fund

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many bids have been successfully made for objective 1 status funding in Merseyside; and how many relate to *(a)* the Wirral and *(b)* the Liverpool side of the river. [10458]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** A total of 1,521 bids have so far received approval under the objective 1 process. Of these some 300 are based in or being delivered directly in the Wirral. A further 178 training projects involve some beneficiaries from the Wirral and a further 30 business support and technology transfer projects will benefit companies across Merseyside. This leaves 1,013 projects based in or directly aimed at residents of the other four Merseyside districts.

### East Cambridgeshire District Council

**Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has decided to take in relation to East Cambridgeshire district council following the notice served on it on 19 May 1995 in respect of anti-competitive behaviour in awarding a refuse collection contract in-house. [10588]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** On 19 May my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, served a notice under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 on East Cambridgeshire district council, setting out his view that the authority had acted anti-competitively during a competition for refuse collection work.

My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the response to that notice. East Cambridgeshire awarded the contract for refuse collection to its direct service organisation when it had received substantially lower bids from private companies. In my right hon. Friend's view they did not have well-founded reasons for doing so. He has therefore today given the authority a direction under section 14 of the Act which requires them to retender their refuse collection work by 22 January 1997. It must seek his consent if it plans to assign the work to its direct service organisation.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs; [10948]

(2) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10947]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Department of the Environment and its sponsored bodies have achieved increases, year on year, in the amount of private finance attracted in support of departmental programmes. In 1995–96 we estimate that £4.6 billion will be levered-in. The administrative costs of this activity are not separately identified.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the bids for reorganisation costs for 1996–97 that have been made by those local authorities subject to reorganisation on 1 April 1995, 1996 and 1997 and the proportion of the bids which have now been allocated supplementary credit approval cover for 1996–97. [10840]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The amounts are as follows:

| | *Bid* | *Allocation* | *Allocation as percentage of bid* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1995 Reorganisation* | | | |
| Isle of Wight Council | 1,029 | 500 | 49 |
| *1996 Reorganisations* | | | |
| Hartlepool Borough Council | 3,638 | 2,150 | 59 |
| Redcar and Cleveland Council | 3,980 | 3,400 | 85 |
| Middlesbrough Borough Council | 3,200 | 2,750 | 86 |
| Stockton on Tees Borough Council | 7,209 | 3,250 | 45 |
| Bath and North East Somerset Council | 11,742 | [1]— | |
| Bristol City Council | 13,826 | [1]— | |
| North West Somerset Council | 5,301 | 3,000 | 57 |
| South Gloucestershire Council | 9,541 | 3,000 | 37 |
| East Riding Yorkshire Council | 18,940 | [1]— | |
| Kingston-upon-Hull Council | 10,544 | [1]— | |
| North Lincolnshire Council | 5,625 | 3,500 | 62 |
| North-East Lincolnshire Council | 6,808 | 4,000 | 59 |
| North Yorkshire County Council | 492 | 400 | 81 |
| Selby District Council | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| York District Council | 19,975 | [1]— | |

| | Bid | Allocation | Allocation as percentage of bid |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1997 Reorganisations* | | | |
| Bedfordshire County Council | 4,000 | 300 | 8 |
| Luton Borough Council | 6,355 | 3,250 | 51 |
| Milton Keynes Borough Council | 3,452 | 2,500 | 72 |
| Derbyshire County Council | 6,180 | 300 | 5 |
| Derby City Council | 7,840 | 2,500 | 32 |
| Bournemouth Borough Council | 8,210 | 2,500 | 30 |
| Poole Borough Council | 2,980 | 2,500 | 84 |
| Durham County Council | 965 | 300 | 31 |
| Darlington Borough Council | 4,702 | 2,500 | 53 |
| East Sussex County Council | 3,585 | 300 | 8 |
| Brighton Borough Council | 1,254 | 350 | 28 |
| Hove Borough Council | 1,710 | 350 | 20 |
| Hampshire County Council | 5,131 | 300 | 6 |
| Portsmouth City Council | 9,561 | 2,500 | 26 |
| Southampton City Council | 6,040 | 2,500 | 41 |
| Staffordshire County Council | 5,326.7 | 300 | 6 |
| Stoke on Trent City Council | 11,539 | 2,500 | 22 |
| Wiltshire County Council | 1,555 | 100 | 6 |
| Thamesdown Borough Council | 9,193 | 2,500 | 27 |

[1] The councils of the East Riding of Yorkshire, Hull City, Bristol City, Bath and North-East Somerset and York District have been asked to reconsider whether the reorganisations in their area could be implemented more economically. If they submit revised bids by the end of January, they will be considered and allocations made during February.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will update his answers of *(a)* 17 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *868–69*, to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) and *(b)* 17 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *869*, to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) for the financial year 1994–95. [10942]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** A list by region of the amounts of accumulated usable capital receipts for each English local authority at 31 March 1995 has been placed in the Library of the House. Figures for the amounts set aside as provision for credit liabilities at 31 March 1995 are not yet available.

The regional totals for these amounts are:

*Amounts held at 31 March 1995 (£ million)*

| Region | Usable receipts |
|---|---|
| South-East | 958 |
| South-West | 123 |
| East Anglia | 74 |
| West Midlands | 78 |
| East Midlands | 64 |
| North-West | 91 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 37 |
| Northern | 39 |
| Miscellaneous authorities (all regions) | 86 |
| Total | 1,550 |

### Nottingham Unitary Authority

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to lay the orders making Nottingham a unitary authority. [11226]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I expect to make an announcement shortly.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9758]

**Sir Paul Beresford** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The companies with which my Department and its executive agencies hold air-time contracts are:

BT Mobile; Carphone Warehouses; HL Communications; Hutchinson Orange; Martin Dawes Communications; Mercury One 2 One; Peoples Phone; Talkland; Vodac; Vodacom.

Contract duration varies but the standard arrangement is for a minimum of 12 months subject to a termination period of between one or three months thereafter. Figures are not available for the cost of each contract.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9759]

**Sir Paul Beresford** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The procedures followed depended on the value of the contract being awarded and ranged from full competitive tendering processes to obtaining quotations from a number of potential suppliers. The companies involved with these processes were:

BT Mobile, Carphone Warehouse, HL Communications, Hutchinson Orange, Martin Dawes Communications, Motorola, Mercury One 2 One, Peoples Phone, Securicor Cellular, Talkland, Uniqueair, Vodac and Vodacom.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9760]

**Sir Paul Beresford** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* None. My Department has withdrawn from over 250 air-time agreements but has done so by exercising its right to give notice of termination in accordance with the terms of the contract.

## SCOTLAND

### Prison Population

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the average daily population in each penal establishment for each month from 1990 onwards. [7788]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter E. W. Frizzell to Mr. John McFall, dated 22 January 1996:*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the average daily prison population in each establishment for each month from 1990 onwards.

I enclose tables which provide the information requested for the calendar years 1990–1994 and January 1995–November 1995. As this information is rather lengthy. I have also arranged for a copy of these tables to be placed in the Library of the House.

### Severe Weather Conditions

**Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by local authority area, the total number of houses in each local authority which have been reported as suffering damage as a result of the recent severe weather conditions. [8939]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The information requested is not yet available centrally as local authorities are continuing to assess the damage caused. However, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is collecting information from individual local authorities on the position. When I met COSLA's housing committee on 12 January I asked for the information that it collects to be passed on to the Scottish Office as soon as a full picture emerges and it has undertaken to do so.

Local authorities may have limited information about houses where the occupants did not call upon the council for assistance.

### Flood Prevention Schemes

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what impact the abolition of ring-fencing in relation to the capital programmes of local authorities will have on his plans to impose a statutory duty on local authorities to assume responsibility for flood prevention schemes. [9285]

**Mr. Kynoch:** It is for each local authority to determine the relative priorities of schemes within its capital programme in the light of its statutory duties and identified local needs. The financial implications of any changes in flood prevention responsibilities will be taken into account in the review which the Secretary of State announced on 1 November 1995. A consultation paper will be issued soon.

### Hafez Dalkamoni

**Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions there have been between the Crown Office and the German authorities concerning Hafez Dalkamoni, and if he will make a statement. [9402]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** There have been no recent discussions between the Crown Office and the German authorities concerning Hafez Dalkamoni. Any decision concerning the release of a national of a third country from a German prison is solely a matter for the German authorities.

### Disabled People (Sport)

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in relation to the development of sports for disabled people. [9214]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The Government are committed to the development of sporting opportunities for disabled people and significant progress has been made in this area in recent years through the Scottish Sports Council. In December 1994 the council appointed a co-ordinator of sport for people with a disability within the framework of the successful team sport Scotland initiative. This appointment came in the wake of the launch of the national ready, willing and able scheme aimed at improving the opportunities for people with disabilities to take part in sport. Ready, willing and able is a partnership between the Scottish Sports Council, the Scottish Sports Association for People with Disabilities and the Royal Mail, whose sponsorship of the programme has been matched through the sportsmatch scheme.

### Carpet Industry

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Scottish carpet manufacturing industry, with particular reference to European competition and European Community regulations; what plans he has to promote, enhance and develop the Scottish carpet industry; and when he next plans to meet representatives of the industry to discuss economic advancement. [9288]

**Mr. George Kynoch:** The census of employment estimates that in September 1993 some 1,300 people were employed in the Scottish carpet manufacturing industry. A wide range of business development advice and assistance to the industry is available from the Scottish Office, the Scottish Enterprise network and the Scottish Textiles Association.

Article 92 of the treaty of Rome requires that all support to the carpet industry from any public source has to comply with the European Community state aid rules. Where aid has been found to be incompatible with the rules the European Commission has ordered its repayment. The UK Government monitor closely cases which arise in other member states. The Government also maintain close contact with representatives from the UK carpet industry.

### National Waste Strategy

**Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to establish a national waste strategy for Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [9207]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The Environmental Protection Act 1990, as amended by the Environment Act 1995, provides for the preparation of a national waste strategy for Scotland. It places a duty on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to prepare a strategy as soon as possible. The agency will become operational on 1 April 1996.

### New Zealand Flatworm

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent assessment he has made of dangers arising from the New Zealand flatworm; and what finance the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland allocates to *(a)* Invergowrie and *(b)* other research establishments for investigations relating to the New Zealand flatworm. [8412]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** In 1991 the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department commissioned and funded a survey of the distribution of the New Zealand flatworm in Scotland. Further surveillance on horticultural and farm businesses is presently being undertaken and will be completed later in the year.

There is no current funding made available to the Scottish Crop Research Institute at Invergowrie or to any other research establishment for investigations relating to the New Zealand flatworm. However, it is proposed to commission shortly a three-year project which will look at the environmental and ecological impact of the flatworm. This is part of a joint approach to research into the flatworm by the UK Agriculture Departments.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [10056]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The Scottish Office is currently considering with other Government Departments the introduction of guidance about gold plating in relation to EC directives.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10064]

**Mr. Kynoch:** My Department's policy is not to gold plate EC directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the UK. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research is undertaken by his Department *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly into combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder; and if he will indicate for *(b)* the organisations involved and the total funding provided. [10546]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The Scottish Office Department of Health is not undertaking any research, either directly or indirectly, into combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what provision is made by his Department for the treatment of combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder; [10544]

(2) what provision is made by his Department for respite care for sufferers of combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder; [10547]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of ex-service *(a)* men and *(b)* women in Scotland suffering from combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder. [10545]

**Lord James Douglas Hamilton:** Health boards in Scotland are responsible for purchasing health services to meet the needs of their resident populations. Services are purchased nationally only in the case of a few rare highly specialist treatments. These do not include services for people suffering post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Scottish Office Department of Health has not, therefore, specifically assessed the numbers suffering, nor has it made specific provision for treatment of, or respite care for, people suffering from this condition. These are matters for health boards.

### Rural Areas

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to revise the definition of rural areas following the introduction of new local authority boundaries in April. [10590]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department is planning to commission research which will review the existing definitions of rurality and develop an appropriate formula in the light of that research and taking account of forthcoming changes to the structure of local government in Scotland.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he intends to ensure that all agencies with an interest in rural affairs work to a common set of definitions. [10591]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The Scottish Rural White Paper "Rural Scotland: People, Prosperity and Partnership", which was published on 15 December 1995, sets out the Government's policies for rural communities in Scotland and proposes measures to put these into practice.

The White Paper proposes a Scottish rural partnership system, based on local rural partnerships, supported by a Scottish national rural partnership and resourced through a Scottish Partnership Fund. The national rural partnership will provide a forum at national level for a range of agencies and organisations concerned with rural Scotland to formulate and implement their policies in an integrated manner and to work towards the achievement of the objectives laid out in the Scottish Rural White Paper.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the rural local authorities, according to the Scottish "Economic Bulletin" Randall definition, updated to take account of data for the 1991 census of population. [10589]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The Scottish "Economic Bulletin" Randall definition defines rural as those local authority districts which have a population density of fewer than 100 persons per square kilometre.

The information set out in the following list details the local authority districts classed as rural under this definition, taking account of data from the 1991 census of population.

Angus
Annan
Argyll and Bute
Badenoch
Banff and Buchan
Berwick
Caithness
Clydesdale
Cumnock and Doon
Ettrick
Gordon
Inverness
Kincardine
Kyle and Carrick
Lochaber
Moray
North-East Fife
Nairn
Nithsdale
Orkney
Perth and Kinross
Ross and Cromarty
Roxburgh
Shetland
Skye and Lochalsh
Stewarty
Stirling
Sutherland
Tweeddale
Western Isles
Wigtown

## Scottish Grand Committee

**Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many recent representations he has received calling for an extension of the powers and role of the Scottish Grand Committee; and if he will make a statement. [2542]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* During my statement to the House on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns 1228–42, setting out my proposals for extending the role of the Scottish Grand Committee, three hon. Members called for the Committee to be given voting powers. However, my proposals to raise the profile and increase the activity of the Scottish Grand Committee were well supported and welcomed by hon. Members from both sides of the House; and during the debate on Standing Orders on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns 1408–33, the proposals were approved without amendment.

## Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4240]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

| *Minister* | *Total number of visits made* | *Number of visits abroad* | *Percentage of visits abroad* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Michael Forsyth | 27 | 1 | 4 |
| Lord James Douglas-Hamilton | 45 | 2 | 4 |
| Raymond Robertson | 69 | 2 | 3 |
| George Kynoch | 68 | 3 | 4 |
| Earl of Lindsay | 115 | 3 | 3 |

## Consultants

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total cost of consultants' reports commissioned by his Department since April 1992; and what identifiable savings have been achieved as a result of implementing report recommendations. [5148]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The total cost of consultancy projects commissioned by the Scottish Office from April 1992 to the end of March 1995 was £12,971,654. Consultancy reports do not invariably result in savings but my Department will summarise the benefits resulting from major projects over this period and I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

**Mr. George Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those consultants, outside organisations and individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purpose of their employment and the individual payments and total payments made to those contractors. [5512]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The available information regarding consultants engaged by my Department is being collated and I shall write to the hon. Member on this subject as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

The information requested regarding other organisations and individuals is not held centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

## Water Authorities

**Mr. George Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the members of the boards and *(b)* the chief executives of the new Scotland water authorities, together with their salaries, performance-related bonuses and membership of other non-departmental public bodies in Scotland. [5645]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* In relation to the membership, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Local Government to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donahoe) on 11 December, *Official Report*, columns *470-71*.

The Chairmen of the North and West of Scotland water authorities are paid £40,000 per annum; the chairman of the East of Scotland water authority is paid £24,000 per annum. The chief executives of each of the three water authorities are paid £80,000 per annum, and the members £6,000 per annum.

Only chief executives are eligible to receive a performance related bonus, which is limited to a maximum of 20 per cent. of salary.

The following are members of other NDPBs in Scotland as indicated:

*North of Scotland water authority*

Mr. John Robertson: Chairman, Highland health board

Mr. Alasdair MacCallum: Member, Scottish Crop Research Institute

Mr. Nicolas McAndrew: Member, Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr. David Paton: Member, North East River Purification Board

*West of Scotland water authority*

Councillor Robert Reid: Chairman, Argyll and Bute NHS Trust

Mr. Ian Young: Member, Cumbernauld development corporation.

**Mr. George Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what have been the costs to date of establishing each of the new Scottish water authorities; [5509]

(2) what estimate he has made of the transition and set-up costs in respect of each of the new water authorities in Scotland. [5511]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* Grant-in-aid provision for the three new water authorities in Scotland in 1995–96 and their expenditure are as follows:

| | *Grant-in-aid, 1995–96* £ million | *Expenditure to 11 December 1995* £ |
|---|---|---|
| East | 3.2 | 900,099 |
| West | 3.2 | 175,000 |
| North | 3.3 | 635,000 |
| Total | 9.7 | 1,710,099 |

## Scottish Office (Media Coverage)

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements exist for the Scottish Office Information Directorate to monitor media coverage of Scottish Office activities; how long such arrangements have been in existence; and if he will make a statement. [7271]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* Two independent press cuttings agencies have been providing, on a sequential basis, a trial monitoring service since October 1995. Tenders for the service were invited and these are presently being considered.

## Messrs Kynoch of Keith

**Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what progress he has made in recovering moneys paid to Messrs Kynoch of Keith by the Scottish Development Agency and Scottish Enterprise, following that firm's withdrawal from Scotland; [8180]

(2) what at constant prices is the amount of Scottish Enterprise's investment in Messrs Kynoch of Keith; and what is its current value. [8181]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* Scottish Enterprise's investment in Kynoch Group plc, formerly G and G Kynoch plc, is an operational matter within the delegated authority of Scottish Enterprise. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

## Delegated Legislation

**Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9591]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## Mobile Phones

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9766]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* No costs have been incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9765]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* Mobile phones and car phones are purchased as and when required, taking advantage of offers on the market at the time with a view to securing the best value for money.

## WALES

### Local Government Finance

12. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the all-Wales average increase for standard spending assessments for 1996–97; and what was the standard spending assessment provisional announced sum for the Bridgend unitary authority for 1996–97. [8840]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The average increase between 1995–96 indicative standard spending assessments and 1996–97 provisional standard spending assessments for county councils and county borough councils is 2.9 per cent. Bridgend county borough council's provisional standard spending assessment for 1996–97 is £107.537 million.

16. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the revenue settlement for local government provides per head of population in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England. [8845]

**Mr. Hague:** The provisional settlement proposals for 1996–97 provide for total standard spending per head of population of £984 in Wales and £922 in England. Comparable figures for central Government support for that spending are £864 and £732.

Both I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will announce our final settlement decisions at the end of the month.

22. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received following the announcement of the 1996–97 local government finance settlement. [8853]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend and I discussed the provisional settlement with representatives of local government at a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on local government finance on 18 December 1995. We have also received various written representations.

26. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his Department's latest estimate of the percentage change in the average council tax bill in Wales for 1996–97 compared with 1995–96. [9774]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** 1996–97 council tax levels will depend on the budgetary decisions local authorities take following my right hon. Friend's final revenue settlement, which he will announce shortly.

### Tourism

14. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest trends in tourism in Wales. [8842]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Latest information for 1995 suggests that domestic visitors to Wales increased by 11 per cent. with spending up 8 per cent. There were 690,000 overseas visitors to Wales in 1994 with spending up 10 per cent. to £190 million.

### Closed Circuit Television

15. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what resources have been allocated to provide more closed circuit television cameras to fight crime in Wales. [8843]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** £1.6 million has been allocated over the next two years under the strategic development scheme for new closed circuit television camera projects in Wales, with over 100 additional cameras being brought into use for the fight against crime. Welsh projects can also compete for a share of the £15 million Home Office funding for CCTV schemes in England and Wales in 1996–97.

### Cardiff International Airport

17. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what developments have taken place to improve the facilities at Cardiff international airport. [8846]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Several, including a new international arrivals hall opened officially by my right hon. Friend last November.

### Unemployment

18. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the figure for male unemployment in *(a)* Newport, Gwent and *(b)* Wales at the latest available date and expressed in percentage terms. [8847]

**Mr. Richards:** In December 1995, the unadjusted number of males on the claimant unemployment count in the Newport travel-to-work-area was 5,841. This compares with 82,839 in Wales. The unemployment rates were 10 per cent. and 11.1 per cent. respectively.

### Government Spending

19. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about Government spending and tax receipts per head in Wales. [8849]

**Mr. Hague:** A Welsh Office report, "Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales 1993–94", published on 8 January, estimated that total Government expenditure on behalf of the population of Wales in 1993–94 was £14.7 billion. This is equivalent to £5,040 per head in Wales compared with expenditure of £4,871 per head in the United Kingdom as a whole. Total tax receipts from Wales in the same year are estimated at £9.3 billion or £3,020 per head. This compares with the UK figure of £3,973 per head.

### Trade (Far East)

20. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what activities the Welsh Office is undertaking to promote trade in the far east. [8850]

**Mr. Richards:** General advice is available to any company which is considering exporting to any overseas market, including the far east. In addition, the Welsh Office trade mission programme and trade fair representative service specifically encourage small and medium sized Welsh companies to export to new markets worldwide. Eight visits to various countries in the far east have been made or are planned under current programmes between 1993 and spring 1997.

### Public Transport

21. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to protect and improve the level of local public transport services in Wales. [8852]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The level of services is primarily a matter for operators. It is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that essential public transport services are provided where it cannot be done commercially.

### Grant-maintained Schools Foundation

23. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much it has cost to set up an office for the Grant-maintained Schools Foundation in Wales. [8854]

**Mr. Richards:** The Grant-maintained Schools Foundation's regional office in Swansea opened in January last year. The costs incurred in 1994–95 were £15,298. Payments so far made to the foundation in 1995–96 are a little over £20,000.

### Cycle Paths

24. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he has taken to encourage the development and use of cycle paths in Wales. [8855]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** I recently announced that £1.3 million has been allocated over three years under the strategic development scheme to help create 326 miles of cycle paths in north and south Wales.

The Welsh Office is also assisting with the funding of a feasibility study for the proposed Swansea to Newport cycle route.

### Schools (Expenditure)

25. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from headmasters and others on the level of education expenditure in schools in Wales. [8857]

**Mr. Richards:** Many representations have been received on the level of expenditure on schools in Wales. However, it is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources that are made available to them are allocated between services, including education, in the light to their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities.

### Carers

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that carers are represented on the health boards and health councils which he is responsible for appointing; and if he will make a statement. [9366]

**Mr. Richards:** People representing all sections and interests of the community are encouraged, through open advertisement, to apply for non-executive appointment to NHS trusts and health authorities and to become members of community health councils. An equal opportunities policy in the selection process is adopted for all appointments.

### Incontinence Pads

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his policy is in relation to the supply of incontinence pads to those who require them because of disability; what plans he has to review these arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [9211]

**Mr. Richards:** The organisation of continence services in Wales and the manner in which they are delivered, including the provision of continence pads, are matters for district health authorities and hospital and community units. They are under a general obligation to provide these services where need exists and having regard to their resources and priorities.

NHS responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs, which include the provision of community health services such as the supply of continence pads, are set out in Welsh Health Circular WHC(95)7.

### Disability

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest assessment of the impact of local government reorganisation on the provision of services of disabled people; what guidelines he *(a)* has issued, and *(b)* intends to issue, to unitary authorities on the provision of services for and to disabled people; what arrangements he intends to put in place to ensure the continuation of services which are currently provided across the new local government authority boundaries; and if he will make a statement. [9237]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The new unitary authorities will be responsible for deciding how their statutory responsibilities for social services can best be discharged. The Welsh office issued guidance in August 1995 to all shadow unitary authorities in Wales, summarising local authority social services functions and responsibilities. This highlights the particular features of social services which the new authorities will need to consider as they plan the effective provision of social services for the people who need them.

Sections 32–34 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 allow my right hon. Friend to take certain steps if the arrangements for any service or aspects of that service appear to be unsatisfactory or appear likely to become unsatisfactory. These powers are available until 31 March 1999.

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that disabled people are represented on the health boards and health councils which he is responsible for appointing; and if he will make a statement. [9363]

**Mr. Richards:** People representing all sections and interests of the community are encouraged, through open advertisement, to apply for non-executive appointment to NHS trusts and health authorities and to become members of community health councils. An equal opportunities policy in the selection process is adopted for all appointments.

### Hospices

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of the national lottery on raising funds to support the development and operation of the hospice movement and hospices; what plans he has to ensure the financial security of hospices; and if he will make a statement. [9282]

**Mr. Richards:** There is, as yet, no conclusive evidence concerning the impact of the national lottery on the fund raising activities of the voluntary hospices in Wales. However, the Government have given a commitment to monitor charitable income, and the Welsh Office is associated with a Home Office research project which will analyse and monitor changes in charitable income, following the introduction of the national lottery. One hospice in Wales has benefited from the national lottery.

Since 1 April 1995 funds for hospices have been included in the health authority allocations. Authorities will be expected to assess local health needs and commission an appropriate level of palliative care, entering into three-year rolling contracts, where possible.

### Youth Training

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many eligible young people in Alyn and Deeside, Clwyd, Gwynedd and Wales are currently unable to obtain a place on a youth training scheme; and if he will make a statement. [9551]

**Mr. Richards:** Information is not available in the form requested. However, at 30 November 1995—latest available—no young person in Wales eligible for the Government's youth training guarantee was waiting for an offer to start a training place.

### Nursery Education

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of under-fives' education in Wales is on a full-time basis. [9552]

**Mr. Richards:** Of children estimated to be under five years of age at 31 December 1994 and enrolled in school at January 1995, 58.8 per cent. were attending on a full-time basis.

### Flintshire Unitary Authority

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to respond to the request made to his Department in November 1995 for more funds for the Flintshire unitary authority in the financial year 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [9555]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Flintshire county council's views are being considered as a representation on the provisional local government revenue settlement, consultation on which ended on 5 January. My right hon. Friend will announce his final settlement proposals shortly.

### Smoking

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce a programme to tackle the problem of teenage smoking on similar lines to the Quitline programme in England. [9022]

**Mr. Richards:** The Quitline telephone helpline in England provides advice on smoking cessation for all age groups and is not aimed specifically at teenage smokers.

The Health Promotion Authority for Wales currently delivers a wide range of programmes designed to prevent the take up of smoking or to help individuals to stop smoking. Many of these programmes, including the "Smokebusters" initiatives—which aim to discourage 11 to 13–year–olds from starting smoking—and "Quit and Win" project— aimed at 15 to 19–year–olds—are designed specifically to address the problem of smoking among young people. There are no plans to introduce a programme similar to Quitline in Wales.

Under the new arrangements for funding Health Promotion Wales which are to be introduced from April 1996, it will be primarily for health authorities to commission future programmes to deal with the problem of teenage smoking in Wales.

### Council Tax

**Mr Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish his estimate of the average council tax—band C, two adults—in constant prices for each of the new unitary council authorities and for Wales as a whole for 1994–95 and 1995–96 together with his estimate for the same categories for 1996–97. [9198]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The average council taxes for band C dwellings with two adults for 1994–95 and 1995–96, at constant 1995–96 prices, are £303 and £348 respectively. No information is available on a unitary authority basis for 1994–95. Implied band C taxes for individual unitary authorities for 1995–96 are given in the following table. The figures have been derived from the final disaggregated budget and indicative standard spending assessments (SSAs) issued on 27 October 1995. These redistribute 1995–96 budgets and SSAs for the existing councils to the new authorities.

Council tax levels for 1996–97 will depend on the budgetary decisions of individual authorities in the light of the final settlement which will be announced at the end of the month.

*Band C council tax estimates for unitary authorities: estimates based on the latest budget and indicative SSAs for 1995–96*

| | *Implied band C council tax 1995–96* £ |
|---|---|
| Anglesey | 285 |
| Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire | 375 |
| Aberconwy and Colwyn | 259 |
| Denbighshire | 437 |
| Flintshire | 379 |
| Wrexham | 327 |
| Powys | 309 |
| Cardigan | 525 |
| Pembrokeshire | 331 |
| Carmarthenshire | 394 |
| Swansea | 309 |
| Neath and Port Talbot | 458 |
| Bridgend | 348 |
| Vale of Glamorgan | 308 |
| Rhondda, Cynon, Taff | 435 |
| Merthyr Tydfil | 387 |
| Caerphilly | 361 |
| Blaenau Gwent | 466 |
| Torfaen | 312 |
| Monmouthshire | 215 |
| Newport | 218 |
| Cardiff | 330 |
| Wales | 348 |

*Source:*
Local authority returns.

### Departmental Staff

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people currently serve in his Department; at what cost to public funds; what were the figures in real and current terms in May 1979; and if he will make a statement. [8848]

**Mr. Hague:** There are currently 2,400 full-time equivalent staff in my Department, with a total running cost budget of £76 million for 1995–96. In 1979–80 there were some 2,600 staff with recorded running costs of £18 million, which is equivalent to £46 million at 1995–96 prices. However, these running cost figures are not comparable; for example, running costs in 1979–80 did not include superannuation charges, the training and enterprise council management fee and various overhead costs including accommodation, which have added at least £22 million to the 1995–96 figure. The Welsh Office has assumed additional functions over this period; for example, further responsibilities for industry, higher education and training.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10063]

**Mr. Hague:** My Department's policy is not to gold-plate EC directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [10057]

**Mr. Hague:** I shall arrange for a copy of the current guidance on deregulation to Welsh Office staff to be placed in the Library of the House as soon as possible. This guidance is already subject to review and will be affected by the outcome of the official review of guidance on gold plating.

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what research is undertaken by his Department *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly into post traumatic stress disorder and if he will indicate for *(b)* the organisations involved and the total funding provided; [10550]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of ex-service men and women in Wales suffering from combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder. [10549]

**Mr. Richards:** None.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what provision is made by his Department for the treatment of combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder; [10548]

(2) what provision is made by his Department for respite care for sufferers of combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder. [10551]

**Mr. Richards:** None. The provision of services is a matter for local determination.

### Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the hospitals, registered nursing homes and homes for the elderly that have suffered outbreaks of MRSA, indicating the severity of the outbreak with special reference to the number of victims and of deaths. [10592]

**Mr. Richards:** The epidemiology of MRSA is a complex matter. Certain data are available on an England and Wales basis, but the Welsh element could be disaggregated only at disproportionate cost. MRSA is undoubtedly a rising problem. For this reason, last year, the Chief Medical Officer in the Welsh Office invited the Public Health Laboratory Service in Wales to undertake separate surveillance on MRSA in Wales.

**Mr. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will instruct NHS trust hospitals to publish information about the number of cases of *(a)* MRSA and *(b)* other infections in their annual report. [10593]

**Mr. Richards:** There are no plans to require NHS trusts to provide this information in their annual reports. However, details should be available from the Chief Executive of NHS trusts on request, since they have been asked to ensure that adequate infection control arrangements are in place within their hospitals.

### Wrexham Maelor Hospital

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost of the tender and the other associated expenses in demolition and adaptation of block T05 of phase 2 of the Wrexham Maelor hospital carried out in the second half of 1995. [10352]

**Mr. Richards:** The cost of the tender for the scheme, to provide an expanded rehabilitation unit as part of the redevelopment of the hospital, carried out in the second half of 1995 was £133,457. The total cost of the scheme was £244,000 which included the cost of the professional fees, equipment and VAT.

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was block T05 designed for when phase 2 of the Wrexham Maelor hospital was constructed; and if it was used for this purpose. [10353]

**Mr. Richards:** Template T05 within phase 1 of the Wrexham Maelor hospital and provides accommodation for rehabilitation services, that is, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy. It has been used for this purpose since it was opened in 1986.

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the budget of the Welsh development agency for 1996–97. [8856]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

### Chunghwa Picture Tube Company

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial assistance or inducement was offered to the Chunghwa Picture Tube Company of Taiwan by the Welsh development agency to locate its new United Kingdom assembly plant in Cardiff. [10684]

**Mr. Hague:** There were many discussions with Chunghwa about a wide range of support, including financial assistance, to encourage the company to locate in Wales. The package included support from my Department; the Welsh development agency; the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council; South Glamorgan county council; and Cardiff Bay development corporation.

### Theatr Clwyd, Mold

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amounts he has included in Flintshire's standard spending assessment specifically for Theatr Clwyd, Mold. [10841]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The formula for calculating standard spending assessments comprises objective indicators of relative need which are relevant to local government as a whole. The formula for 1996–97 has been agreed with the local authority association and ratified by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance.

The formula does not include specific indicators for expenditure items, such as Theatr Clwyd, which are relevant to individual authorities. However, as a major recreational facility Theatr Clwyd will influence Flintshire county council's SSA and revenue support grant entitlement since the SSA formula includes indicators which contain estimates of day and night visitors to the authority's area.

Clwyd county council's budgeted expenditure for Theatr Clwyd in 1995–96 is being disaggregated into Flintshire's notional amount figure. Flintshire will have the spending power associated with that.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs; [10941]

(2) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10971]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** For 1995–96, the only Welsh Office running costs and consultancy fees relating to the tendering of private finance initiative projects are as follows: staff costs £195,300; other costs £550, and management consultancy fees £18.580.

No costs were incurred before 1995–96.

### Roads (Porous Surfaces)

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on which roads in Wales porous surfaces have been laid. [11067]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Porous asphalt has been laid on the M4 between the Coryton and Miskin interchanges.

### Traffic Separation

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on which roads in Wales chevron road markings are used to encourage traffic separation. [10998]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** None.

### NHS (Priorities)

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his priorities for the national health service in Wales during 1996. [8844]

**Mr. Richards:** The priorities are clear. My right hon. Friend wants the NHS in Wales to redouble its efforts to provide effective care, care that has been shown to be of benefit to patients with minimum bureaucracy and delay and with maximum efficiency.

Our priorities in detail are:

(i) more emphasis on services of proven benefit to patients;

(ii) more responsive services;

(iii) partnerships with Social Services and voluntary groups;

(iv) co-operation within the NHS; and

(v) improved efficiency.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Family Credit

**Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the proposed family credit ceilings in 1996–97 for a family with *(a)* one child aged under five years, *(b)* two children aged under 11 years, *(c)* two children aged over 11 years, *(d)* three children aged under 11 years, *(e)* three children age over 11 years and *(f)* two children under 11 years and two children aged over 11 years. [8158]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** At the new benefit levels proposed for April 1996, the family credit ceilings represented by the highest amount of net earnings and other relevant income, including child benefit, a family can have and still qualify for family credit at the minimum payment of 50p will be as follows:

| | *Parent working 16 to 29 hours per week* £ | *Parent working 30 hours or more per week* £ |
|---|---|---|
| Family with one child under five years | 168.43 | 183.14 |
| Family with two children under 11 | 194.01 | 208.73 |
| Family with two children over 11 (but under 16) | 216.01 | 230.73 |
| Family with three children under 11 | 219.60 | 234.31 |
| Family with three children over 11 (but under 16) | 252.60 | 267.31 |
| Family with two children under 11 and two children over 11 (but under 16) | 267.19 | 281.90 |

These ceilings may be increased by up to £15 where maintenance is received and by up to £60 where there are relevant child care expenses.

From October 1994, up to £40 a week per family in respect of formal child care charges incurred can be offset in the calculation of normal earnings for family credit. It applies where the care is for a child under 11 in the family of a lone parent or a couple where one is working and the other is incapacitated. This increases the potential ceilings still further.

### Cold Weather Payments

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reassess the appropriateness of the interval between qualification for cold weather payments and receipt of the money. [8416]

**Mr. Heald:** The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 19 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will reassess the appropriateness of the interval between qualification for Cold Weather Payments (CWPs) and receipt of the money.

The Metrological office supply the Agency with temperature data on the basis of forecast and recorded periods of Cold Weather. A forecast period is seven consecutive days during which the mean daily temperature is forecast to be equal to or below zero degree centigrade. A recorded period is seven connective days during which the mean daily temperature was recorded as equal to or below zero degree centigrade.

Once a Cold Weather period has been identified a scan of the Income Support computer is run to establish those who are eligible for a Cold Weather Payment (CWP). If a period of Cold Weather is identified ending on a Thursday, a scan is run that weekend. A Cold Weather period identified ending on a Friday will be included in a scan the following weekend. The scans can only be run at a weekend when District offices are closed and the computer system is not needed. Payment is sent out automatically the following week.

This method ensures that payment is made timeously and without the customer having to make a claim. Where payment is made on a forecast period of Cold Weather potential qualifiers can be established more quickly than waiting for a period of Cold Weather to be confirmed.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claimed extra heating allowance in the areas covered by the Peterlee and Seaham area benefit offices during the recent cold weather; and on which dates they qualified. [9511]

**Mr. Heald:** The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings dated 19 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people claimed the extra heating allowance in the areas covered by the Peterlee and Seaham area benefit offices during the recent Cold Weather; and on which dates they qualified.

Cold Weather Payments, are paid automatically when the average daily temperature in an area, as reported by the weather station covering that area, has been or is forecast to be Zero Degree Centigrade or below for seven days. A customer is entitled to a Cold Weather Payment, if for at least one day in the Cold Weather period, they receive Income Support which includes an amount for a dependant under five, or one of the following premiums; Higher Pensioner, Enhanced Pensioner, Disability, Severe Disability and Disabled Child.

The benefit offices of Seaham and Peterlee are part of the North Durham District. Geographical areas are linked to weather stations by post code. Postal codes covered by the North Durham District are linked to the weather stations at Leeming and Tynemouth.

The information you requested is provided at Annex A.

I hope my reply is helpful.

*Annex A*

| *Weather station* | *Qualifying period* |
|---|---|
| Leeming | 23 December 1995 to 2 January 1996 inclusive |
| Tynemouth | 22 December 1995 to 3 January 1996 inclusive |

| *Benefit office* | *Number of payments* |
|---|---|
| Peterlee | 6,678 |
| Seaham | 1,985 |

### Unemployment Costs

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current annual overall cost of unemployment to his Department; and what is the average cost per unemployed claimant *(a)* per week and *(b)* per annum. [9536]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The total estimated outturn expenditure by the DSS on unemployed people in 1994–95 was £9,100 million. Of this, £1,260 million is unemployment benefit, £5,323 million is income support, £48 million is social fund payments and £2,470 million is housing benefit and council tax benefit. The average weekly amount received by unemployed claimants receiving a specific benefit is: income support £55.38, unemployment benefit £48.60, housing benefit £42.65 and council tax benefit £7.44.

### Pensioners' Benefits

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of pensioners who are in receipt of *(a)* income support and *(b)* housing benefit. [10207]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The numbers of pensioners receiving income support and housing benefit are 1.78 million and 1.94 million respectively.

*Notes:*

1. Sources: Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1995 (5 per cent. sample), Housing Benefit Management Information Systems 1 per cent. sample May 1994.
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000.
3. A pensioner is defined as aged 60 or over.

### Pensions (Women)

**Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when his Department received the results from the research it commissioned from Ms Julia Field and others in 1994 into women's pension provision for retirement, the financial effects of divorce and the treatment of occupational pensions; [9920]

(2) when his Department will publish the findings of research it commissioned from Ms Julia Field and others in 1994 into women's pension provision for retirement, the financial effects of divorce and the treatment of occupational pensions; [9921]

(3) what was the total cost of the research his Department commissioned from Ms Julia Field and others in 1994 into women's pension provision for retirement, the financial effects of divorce and the treatment of occupational pensions. [9922]

**Mr. Heald:** Preliminary results of the research on women's retirement provision and on the treatment of pensions rights on divorce commissioned from social and community planning research were received in the Department by the end of December 1995. We expect to receive the final draft reports by the end of March 1996 and will publish the findings soon afterwards. The total cost of the four linked surveys that constitute this programme of research is £457,100.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reconsider his decision to prevent local authorities from paying housing benefit in advance to housing associations. [9925]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Proposals for changing the rules for paying housing benefit from payment wholly or partly in advance to payment in arrears were put to the Social Security Advisory Committee and the local authority associations in December 1995. The committee decided to consult more widely on the proposals with interested bodies. Its report and the views of the local authority associations are due in February and will be taken fully into account when deciding what changes, if any, should be made to the housing benefit rules.

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to place in the Library the report of research undertaken by the Benefits Agency Security, benefit review team, into housing benefit fraud. [10495]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) on 19 January 1996, *Official Report,* Column *834.*

### Compensation Recovery Unit

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount of state benefits recouped by the compensation recovery unit in each of the last three years. [10133]

**Mr. Heald:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 19 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the total amount of state benefits recouped by the Compensation Recovery Unit in each of the last three years.

The information requested is given in the table below

| *Financial year* | *Amount £ million* |
|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 51.3 |
| 1993–94 | 81.9 |
| 1994–95 | 110.1 |

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

The figure for the current financial year to 31 December 1995 is £96 million.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what responses, in addition to his formal one, he has made to the report of the Social Security Committee of 1994–95 (HC 196) concerning the compensation recovery unit; and if he is conducting a consultation exercise with interested parties regarding the work of the compensation recovery unit and its future operations; and if he will make a statement. [9470]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** I wrote to the Chairman of the Select Committee on 10 January. My letter explained that a compliance cost assessment of the Select Committee's proposals for reform of the compensation recovery scheme would be published shortly. A consultation exercise on the Select Committee's proposals was conducted in late 1995. I shall publish a summary of the results of the consultation shortly.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10068]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This Department's policy is not to gold plate EC directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the UK. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed by all Departments.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [10052]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The largest block of EC legislation on social security is in the form of Council regulations, which are directly effective. There is relatively little other EC legislation on social security. This has been implemented on a case-by-case basis in line with overall policy of not gold plating directives, the guidance on which is currently under review. In addition, the Department has its own action plan on deregulation and EC law which is designed to ensure that there is no over-implementation of EC directives.

## National Insurance

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of people awarded national insurance contribution credits in 1994–95, *(b)* the average number of credits awarded and *(c)* the cost of funding these national insurance credits; and if he will indicate the different groups being credited with national insurance contributions. [10770]

**Mr. Heald:** Some 10.5 million people in the United Kingdom in one or more of the categories listed were awarded an average of 39.4 national insurance credits in the tax year 1994–95.[1] Estimates of the costs arising from these credits are not available.

Categories of people awarded national insurance credits:

Young people, for the tax years containing their 16th, 17th and 18th birthdays.

People over age 18 undergoing courses of approved training.

People entitled to invalid care allowance.

People who are unemployed or incapable of work.

Men age 60-64 who are not liable to pay class 1 or class 2 contributions.

People on jury service.

Women receiving statutory maternity pay.

People whose course of full-time education, training or apprenticeship has terminated.

Widows on termination of widowed mother's allowance.

Source: [1]1 per cent sample of national insurance records.

## Income Support

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total annual expenditure on income support to cover mortgage interest payments in each financial year between 1989–90 and 1994–95. [10710]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is set out in the table.

| | *Total number of cases with mortgage interest included in the assessment* | *Total amount of estimated annual expenditure* |
|---|---|---|
| | | *£ million* |
| 1989–90 | 281,000 | 353 |
| 1990–91 | 310,000 | 553 |
| 1991–92 | 411,000 | 949 |
| 1992–93 | 499,000 | 1,143 |
| 1993–94 | 529,000 | 1,145 |
| 1994–95 | 511,000 | 1,001 |

*Notes:*

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and expenditure to the nearest million.

2. Caseload figures are for May each year, except for 1994–95 where February 1995 figures have been used.

3. Expenditure estimated for 1989–90 to 1992–93 is derived by multiplying the number of cases by the average weekly amount then multiplying by 52. Figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95 are based on an average of four quarters.

*Source:*

Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiries 1989–92.

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries May 1993 to February 1995.

## Disability Living Allowance

**Mrs. Ann Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to review his policy in respect of the award to children under five years of age of the mobility component of disability living allowance; and if he will make a statement; [10842]

(2) how many applications have been made on behalf of children under five years of age for the mobility component of disability living allowance in each of the years since 1993; [10843]

(3) how many children under five years of age were exceptionally allowed to claim the mobility component of disability living allowance in each year since 1993. [10984]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information is not available in the format requested. Claims for disability living allowance are for the benefit as a whole and not for an individual component. The Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 specifies that a person must be aged over five to be entitled to the mobility component of DLA. There are currently no plans to review this policy.

## Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10967]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** In 1994–95 this Department's private finance initiative projects spent £1.044 million on external consultants in the PFI tendering process on the areas of consultancy identified. This figure comprises (i) legal fees of £420,000; (ii) publicity costs of nil; (iii) accountancy fees of £167,000 and (iv) management consultancy fees of £457,000. In 1995–96 prices these costs would be £1.073 million in total and (i) £431,000; (ii) nil; (iii) £172,000 and (iv) £470,000 respectively.

The Department's PFI projects forecast that in 1995–96 we will spend £2.774 million on external consultants in the PFI tendering process on the areas of consultancy identified. this figure comprises (i) legal fees of £359,000; (ii) publicity costs of nil; (iii) accountancy fees of £95,000 and (iv) management consultancy fees of £2.32 million.

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10968]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** In 1994–95 this Department's private finance initiative projects incurred total running costs relating to the PFI tendering process of around £1.5 million, rounded either as a cash figure or at 1995–96 prices. In 1995–96 the Department's PFI projects forecast that they will have incurred total running costs of around £2.5 million relating to the PFI tendering process. A breakdown of the costs is not available in the format requested.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Tuesday 23 January 1996*

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Magistrates (Doncaster)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when and in which newspapers the advisory committee for Doncaster advertised for applicants for positions as magistrates; and if he will publish the advertisement. [9903]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The Lord Chancellor's advisory committee for Doncaster placed advertisements in the *Doncaster Free Press, South Yorkshire Times* and *Doncaster Star* on 25 May 1995. The text of the advertisement is shown. In addition 20,000 leaflets were delivered with the *Doncaster Courier* on 21 July 1995.

COULD YOU SERVE THE COMMUNITY AS A JUSTICE OF THE PEACE?

The answer is yes, if you have the necessary personal qualities such as common-sense, courage, compassion and the time to offer about 18 days (or 36 half days) a year plus time for training, which would give you a unique insight into the skills required for decision making. Justices of the Peace, often called magistrates, are at the heart of Britain's system of justice and come from all walks of life, many different ethnic backgrounds and all sectors of the community.

Justices of the Peace are unpaid but they may receive certain allowances to cover travelling expenses, subsistence and financial loss occasioned by the performance of their duties.

Justices of the Peace in England and Wales are appointed on behalf of the Sovereign by the Lord Chancellor on the recommendation of local Advisory Committees.

The Advisory Committee for the Doncaster District are currently looking for men and women who live in or within 15 miles of the Metropolitan Borough boundary and who are suitable to be appointed as Justices of the Peace. If you are between 27 and 50 and would like to know more about this vitally important public duty they want to hear from you. If you are between 50 and 60, you may still be considered.

For an application form, information on the selection process and what is entailed, please write to me at the address below, or telephone (01302) 366711.

S. W. Stokes

Secretary to the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee

The Law Courts

PO Box 49

College Road

Doncaster DN1 3HT

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Newbury Bypass

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he estimates the cost will be to the local police constabulary of policing the site of the Newbury bypass. [9343]

**Mr. Maclean:** Policing of the bypass site is a joint operation between Thames Valley police and Hampshire constabulary.

Estimated total policing costs in 1995–96 have been assessed by Thames Valley police as £1.525 million and by Hampshire constabulary as £478,000. This includes the costs of officers who would otherwise be on duty elsewhere in the force areas.

### Sex Offenders

**Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps Her Majesty's Government are presently taking to examine the conviction in Sweden of Bengt Bolin under Sweden's extra-territorial law on sex offences against children; [9672]

(2) when Her Majesty's Government expect to be able to make a statement on the implications of the Bengt Bolin case in Sweden for future United Kingdom legislation on child sex offences committed aborad. [9673]

**Mr. Maclean:** My officials have obtained from the Swedish authorities various documents concerning the Bolin case, including transcripts of the court proceedings. The Swedish chief prosecutor gave a presentation about this case to an Interpol working group in November last year, and Home Office officials who attended the presentation spoke to him about the case. My officials have also recently met a representative from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs to discuss this matter. In addition, a meeting is being arranged with the Thai prosecutor who was involved in the Bolin case.

The information so far received suggests that there would have been difficulties in securing a conviction in this country on the basis of the evidence presented to the Swedish court. The United Kingdom could, however, unlike Sweden, have extradited a British offender in similar circumstances. We remain of the view that this is the best approach, and have not been persuaded by the experience of the Swedes that extra-territorial jurisdiction would be helpful in dealing with British tourists who commit offences overseas.

### School Bus Drivers

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what responsibilities the police have for checking the suitability of applicants to be school bus drivers; [10185]

(2) if applicants for school bus driving positions are always checked by the police against a central criminal database; [10186]

(3) how many applicants for school bus driving vacancies were checked against the central criminal database in 1995. [10187]

**Mr. Maclean:** The police have responsibility for carrying out criminal record checks on applicants for jobs in the statutory sector if the applicant will have a substantial level of regular unsupervised access to children, particularly if such access is on a one-to-one basis in an isolated setting. The Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office have agreed guidance on which groups should be eligible for checks and this is set out in Home Office circulars. School bus drivers are listed as one of the groups which should not

normally be subject to checks as it is assumed that, for most journeys, they will be transporting large numbers of children with a teacher or parent also present. If a bus driver is likely to be transporting a child or small number of children on a regular basis without a teacher or parent being present, the police have discretion to carry out a check.

If the police are satisfied that a check is justified, the applicant will be checked both against Phoenix, the national criminal record database, and local police records. No statistics are kept on the number of applicants for jobs as school bus drivers who have been checked.

### Electro-shock Equipment

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the duration of the hard arrests trial programme; what areas of equipment, policy or training were involved; and what was the budget of the programme; [10249]

(2) what research his Department has carried out since 1987 on the operation, safety or use of electronic shock equipment. [10248]

**Mr. Maclean:** I assume that the hon. Member's interest relates to the issue of electronic shock equipment. Neither my Department nor the police service has any knowledge of "the hard arrest trial programme" or of any other programme in this area.

Chief officers of police, with their police authorities, are responsible for deciding what equipment to obtain for their officers, either for testing or for introduction. A number of forces have obtained electro-shock equipment for use against ferocious dogs and training in their use would have been undertaken at the local level. The cost of training was met from existing resources. As I have made clear previously, no force has obtained any form of this equipment for use against people.

In 1990 the Forensic Science Service published a theoretical assessment of the effects of electric shock weapons.

### Premium Telephone Numbers

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued to police forces on the use of premium telephone numbers for services to the public. [10256]

**Mr. Maclean:** None.

### Police Vehicles (Accidents)

**Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many road traffic accidents involving police patrol vehicles were reported for the years 1994 and 1995; and how many police officers or civilians sustained serious or fatal injuries in such accidents. [10408]

**Mr. Maclean:** The latest information which is available centrally, in respect of police forces in England and Wales, is for the year 1993, and is shown. The information on injuries relates to those where death or serious injury has arisen in the course of either police pursuits or responses to emergency calls.

*Police vehicle accidents in 1993—all types of police vehicles*

All accidents: 18,631.

Accidents in course of pursuits or responses to emergency calls: 5,887.

Police fatal injury: 5

Police serious injury: 113

Civilian fatal injury: 29

Civilian serious injury: 187

### Special Constables

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of special constables in each police force in England, indicating in each case the ratio of specials to full-time officers and to the population of the force area. [10631]

**Mr. Maclean:** The following table, which is broken down by police force area, shows:

the number of special constables in post on 30 September 1995[1];

the number of regular officers in post on 30 September 1995[2];

the proportion of regular officers the number of special constables notionally represents (disregarding discrepancies in hours of duty[3];

the population of each force area according to the latest available estimates from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (mid-1994)[4]; and

the number of special constables per 5,000 population[5].

Many special constables perform about four hours' duty a week.

| *Police force* | *Specials*[1] | *Regulars*[2] | *Percentage*[3] | *Population (000's)*[4] | *Specials per 5 thousand population*[5] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | 676 | 2,986 | 22.6 | 1,456 | 2.3 |
| Bedfordshire | 196 | 1,116 | 17.6 | 543 | 1.8 |
| Cambridgeshire | 264 | 1,254 | 21.1 | 688 | 1.9 |
| Cheshire | 269 | 1,950 | 13.8 | 976 | 1.4 |
| City of London | 81 | 859 | 9.3 | 5 | 81.0 |
| Cleveland | 204 | 1,429 | 14.3 | 560 | 1.8 |
| Cumbria | 221 | 1,143 | 19.3 | 490 | 2.3 |
| Derbyshire | 440 | 1,762 | 25.0 | 954 | 2.3 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 1,079 | 2,871 | 37.6 | 1,530 | 1.9 |
| Dorset | 230 | 1,272 | 18.1 | 672 | 1.7 |
| Durham | 192 | 1,376 | 14.1 | 608 | 1.6 |
| Dyfed-Powys | 304 | 977 | 31.1 | 473 | 3.2 |
| Essex | 548 | 2,897 | 18.9 | 1,497 | 1.8 |
| Gloucestershire | 330 | 1,141 | 28.9 | 550 | 3.0 |
| Greater Manchester | 749 | 7,026 | 10.7 | 2,578 | 1.5 |
| Gwent | 129 | 1,006 | 12.8 | 462 | 1.4 |

| Police force | Specials[1] | Regulars[2] | Percentage[3] | Population (000's)[4] | Specials per 5 thousand population[5] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hampshire | 549 | 3,307 | 16.6 | 1,730 | 1.6 |
| Hertfordshire | 307 | 1,704 | 18.0 | 853 | 1.8 |
| Humberside | 380 | 2,024 | 18.8 | 890 | 2.1 |
| Kent | 598 | 3,099 | 19.3 | 1,546 | 1.9 |
| Lancashire | 594 | 3,194 | 18.6 | 1,424 | 2.1 |
| Leicestershire | 334 | 1,860 | 18.0 | 917 | 1.8 |
| Lincolnshire | 311 | 1,164 | 26.7 | 606 | 2.6 |
| Merseyside | 349 | 4,536 | 7.7 | 1,434 | 1.2 |
| Metropolitan | 1,657 | 27,395 | 6.0 | 7,455 | 1.1 |
| Norfolk | 325 | 1,391 | 23.4 | 769 | 2.1 |
| Northamptonshire | 298 | 1,160 | 25.7 | 595 | 2.5 |
| Northumbria | 479 | 3,610 | 13.3 | 1,442 | 1.7 |
| North Wales | 323 | 1.351 | 23.9 | 658 | 2.5 |
| North Yorkshire | 359 | 1,310 | 27.4 | 727 | 2.5 |
| Nottinghamshire | 534 | 2,314 | 23.1 | 1,031 | 2.6 |
| South Wales | 469 | 2,954 | 15.9 | 1,330 | 1.8 |
| South Yorkshire | 423 | 3,041 | 13.9 | 1,305 | 1.6 |
| Staffordshire | 687 | 2,190 | 31.4 | 1,054 | 3.3 |
| Suffolk | 419 | 1,158 | 36.2 | 649 | 3.2 |
| Surrey | 241 | 1,656 | 14.6 | 774 | 1.6 |
| Sussex | 514 | 3,020 | 17.0 | 1,449 | 1.8 |
| Thames Valley | 764 | 3,759 | 20.3 | 2,017 | 1.9 |
| Warwickshire | 351 | 982 | 35.7 | 496 | 3.5 |
| West Mercia | 587 | 2,007 | 29.2 | 1,116 | 2.6 |
| West Midlands | 849 | 7,078 | 12.0 | 2,628 | 1.6 |
| West Yorkshire | 783 | 5,122 | 15.3 | 2,104 | 1.9 |
| Wiltshire | 259 | 1,236 | 21.0 | 588 | 2.2 |
| Total | 19,655 | 124,697 | — | 51,629 | — |

[1] (a) Number of special constables in post at 30 September 1995.
[2] (b) Number of regular officers in post at 30 September 1995.
[3] (c) Special constables as an equivalent percentage of regular officers.
[4] (d) Population of police force area at 30 June 1994 (in thousands).
[5] (e) Number of special constables per five thousand head of population.

### Standards in Public Life

**Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete the review of the law relating to the bribery of hon. Members referred to in the Government's response to the first report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Cm 2931. [10559]

**Mr. Maclean:** The Government are committed to the consolidation of the corruption statutes, and have welcomed the opportunity to clarify the position of hon. Members as part of that exercise. I cannot say at this stage when a conclusion might be reached.

### Immigration and Asylum Interviews

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has reconsidered requests for tape recording immigration and asylum interviews at ports of entry and at the Home Office. [10478]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** We have no plans to allow asylum and immigration interviews at ports of entry or the Home Office to be tape recorded.

### Juvenile Offenders

**Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of juvenile offenders subject to a supervision order reoffend within two years of the making of the order. [10863]

**Mr. Maclean:** The latest available information relates to a sample of those sentenced for standard list offences during three separate weeks of 1991.

Eighty per cent. of those aged under 17 when sentenced to a supervision order were reconvicted within two years of the making of the order. This reconviction rate includes only reconvictions for standard list offences and relates only to offenders sentenced for such offences—standard list offences consist of all indictable offences and some of the more serious summary offences. The reconviction rate is based on a sample 275 offenders.

Reconviction rates will be influenced by criminal histories and types of offences committed.

**Ms Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of juvenile offenders who receive custodial sentences reoffend within two years of release. [10864]

**Mr. Maclean:** The latest available information relates to prisoners discharged from Prison Service establishments during 1992.

Eighty-nine per cent. of those aged under 17 when sentenced to custody were reconvicted within two years of release from prison. This reconviction rate includes only reconvictions for standard list offences—these consist of all indictable offences and some of the more serious summary offences.

Reconviction rates will be influenced by criminal histories and type of offences committed.

### Dangerous Dogs Legislation

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many dogs are currently being held under the dangerous dogs legislation. [11263]

**Mr. Sackville:** There are presently 81 dogs held in police custody in England and Wales under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. No dogs are currently being held by the police under other dog legislation.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many dogs have been destroyed under the dangerous dogs legislation to date. [11249]

**Mr. Sackville:** Information on the number of dogs destroyed under the dangerous dogs legislation is not collected in the form requested.

However, during 1992, 1993 and 1994, a total of 781 people were convicted either of offences under section 1 of the 1991 Act or of aggravated offences under section 3. In each of these cases, the court would have had no option but to order the destruction of the dog concerned. The figure quoted is thus likely to be close to the actual number of dogs put down under the Act over that period.

Corresponding figures for 1995 are likely to be available in the autumn.

### Crime Control (International Co-operation)

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what international research and co-operation his Department has been involved concerning the introduction of new technologies to combat crime; and if he will make a statement. [9889]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Home Office police scientific development branch has memoranda of understanding with the Dutch Ministry of Justice, the Bundeskriminalamt in Germany and the Office of National Drug Control Policy in the United States of America with a view to collaborating in the research, development, evaluation and operational use of law enforcement technologies. Further MOUs are under discussion with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Drug Enforcement Administration and the New South Wales police. PSDB is also a member of the working group on international technology support and participates in numerous international specialist crime-related conferences. My Department is also working with the European Committee for Standardisation to develop a European standard for vehicle tracking devices.

### Closed Circuit Television

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library all information held by his Department concerning the effectiveness of installed closed circuit television on preventing crime; and if he will make a statement. [9890]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* My Department has published a number of research papers looking at various aspects of closed circuit television effectiveness as part of its series of crime prevention unit papers and the successor series of crime detection and prevention papers. The most recent of these—published on 29 December 1995—is paper No. 68—"CCTV in Town Centres: Three Case Studies". Copies of all these papers are held in the Library.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total central Government expenditure to date on crime prevention closed circuit television schemes; and if he will make a statement. [9891]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Approximately £800,000 has been allocated to 56 crime prevention projects featuring closed circuit television since 1989 under the safer cities programme. In addition, £5 million was awarded to 106 CCTV schemes in last year's CCTV challenge competition. The current CCTV challenge competition will provide a further £15 million for CCTV in 1996–97. Information about CCTV projects funded by other Government programmes is not collected centrally.

### National DNA Database

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what international co-operation and research the United Kingdom Government have been involved concerning the operation of a national DNA database; and if he will make a statement. [9892]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Forensic Science Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Dr. Janet Anderson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 23 January 1996:*

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question about international co-operation and research concerning the operation of the National DNA Database. As you know, the arrangement now is that the Chief Executive of an Executive Agency, with the agreement of the Minister, replies to Members of Parliament on operational matters. I am therefore replying on behalf of the Forensic Science Service.

The National DNA Database was launched in April 1995. The DNA technique used for the Database, Short Tandem Repeats (STRs)., was pioneered and developed by the Forensic Science Service (FSS). Following extensive peer review, a test system using STRs was successfully introduced into casework. The technique was chosen for the Database after a pilot study commissioned by the Home Office. The FSS work on STRs is now being taken forward internationally and I have set out some details below.

FSS has engendered and maintained close contacts throughout the world. It was at the forefront of the foundation of the European DNA Profiling Group (EDNAP) whose members now include representatives from virtually all European countries. The work of EDNAP is focused on STRs. The FSS takes a leading role in the direction fo forensic testing in Europe through this group orchestrating collaborative trials and studies. This in turn helps to enrich the FSS research programme.

FSS Scientists are regular guest lecturers in North America, Australia and Asia. These talks help to assure that their work is subjected to the widest possible peer review. It is a measure of the quality of the most recent advances, which have tended toward simultaneous analysis of highly discriminating tests, that the philosophy and indeed the particular test systems have been adopted by countries throughout the world.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total cost of launching and operating the national DNA database; and if he will make a statement. [9893]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The total cost of launching the national DNA database and the cost of its first year of operation, 1995–96, are forecast to be £3.2 million.

### Crime (Retail Premises)

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to reduce crime against retail premises; and if he will make a statement. [10244]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* There are many measures in place to reduce retail crime. The retail action group, an associate group of the Home Office crime prevention agency board, has produced booklets for retailers on preventing burglary, robbery, and violence to staff; further guidance on the prevention of customer theft, and external fraud, and on making an arrest will be published later this year. The group is also looking at ways of identifying and promulgating best practice, and considering the uses of technology in crime prevention.

The use of closed circuit television can make a significant contribution to reducing crime against retail premises, especially when it forms part of a package of crime prevention measures. The Home Office has helped to spread the use of CCTV through the publication of guidance on its use, and through last year's CCTV challenge competition in which the majority of successful bids were from partnerships which wished to install security cameras in shopping centres and high streets in town centres around the country. A further CCTV competition in which £15 million will be available is to be held this year, and it is likely that shopping areas will again be major beneficiaries.

The British Retail Consortium is making a valuable contribution through the programme of work being pursued by the retail crime initiative. This initiative, which aims to develop the retail perspective in inter-agency crime prevention initiatives, is an important and valuable way of raising the general awareness of retail and town centre crime and of encouraging retailers to work together to beat crime.

The projects carried forward by local partnerships, business and shop watch schemes, ring round schemes, police advice on the part that building design can play in preventing crime, as well as the numerous individual police force initiatives being pursued across the country all contribute to retail crime prevention. The safer cities programme has also funded a number of schemes aimed at improving the security of retail premises.

The recently published Home Office commercial victimisation survey singles out for the first time the effect of crime on commercial victims, and we are continuing to analyse the data collected so that retailers, the police and others can target their crime prevention initiatives to best effect.

The Home Office was represented on the Health and Safety Executive committee which last year published guidance for employers on the prevention of violence to retail staff in the workplace; and we also contributed to the funding of a non-profit-making video for retailers on the prevention of customer theft, which was produced by Compass Vision Ltd.

### Party Conferences (Policing Costs)

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the policing costs associated with the annual conferences of the *(a)* Liberal Democrats, *(b)* Conservative and *(c)* Labour parties; and what amounts were claimed by each party from central funds for security costs. [10246]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* I understand from the forces involved that the latest estimated additional costs of policing the 1995 party conferences are:

(a) Liberal Democrats (Strathclyde Police)—Nil

(b) Conservative (Lancashire Constabulary)—£1 million

(c) Labour (Sussex Police)—£29.029

Finalised claims for security costs incurred by the political parties at these conferences have not yet been received.

### Rough Sleepers

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what co-ordinated action police forces are taking to provide adequate mechanisms for rough sleepers and similar vulnerable people to report physical attacks. [9971]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Government's consultation paper "Rough Sleepers Initiative: Future Plans" makes it clear that the police aim to provide the same quality of service to the homeless as to all other victims of crime, and in doing so should have regard to the special needs and vulnerability of homeless people. It is for individual chief officers, though, to decide the most suitable approach locally.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9751]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* Arrangements for the procurement of mobile telephones in my Department are devolved to executive agencies and dispersed business units and no central records are kept. I am aware of agreements for four individual mobile telephones which have been terminated. The cost to my Department was about £145. The companies involved were Cellcom and People's Phone.

### Killings and Woundings (Toxteth)

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* killings and *(b)* woundings have taken place in Toxteth over the past year to the most recent available date; and if he will make a statement. [10467]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* This information is not collected centrally.

## Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10955]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The amount spent on external consultants in the tendering process since the introduction of private finance initiative is as follows:

*(a)* In real terms: applying the GDP deflator to the cash totals in *(b)* below, costs are equivalent (1995–96 prices) to:

£

| | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 27,740 | 421,170 | 1,381,448 |
| (b) In cash terms: | | | |
| Legal fees | 4,500 | 186,450 | 537,128 |
| Publicity costs | — | — | — |
| Accountancy fees | 22,000 | 135,834 | 260,901 |
| Management consultancy | — | 87,616 | 583,419 |
| Totals | 26,500 | 409,900 | 1,381,448 |

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10956]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The information requested is not separately recorded.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how often the Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy has met. [10022]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" makes it clear that information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet or Cabinet Committees is not normally made public.

### Ministerial Responsibilities

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what changes have taken place in his responsibilities over the last four years; and what impact this has had on the running costs of his Department. [10023]

**Mr. Freeman:** The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's ministerial responsibilities in December 1992 were as follows:

The discharge on a day-to-day basis of the responsibilities of Minister for the Civil Service; overseeing progress and development of the citizens charter initiative, the next steps programme, the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service and the market-testing programme; responsibility for the Office of Science and Technology which, in addition to responsibility for Government policy on science and technology, is responsible for the research councils; and ministerial responsibility for Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

These responsibilities were carried out by the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service and Science. The estimated annual running costs associated with these responsibilities in 1992–93 was £96 million.

On 1 April 1993 financial provision for the Prime Minister's Office, the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, support to the Whips and minor other functions were transferred to the Cabinet Office "other services" vote. This reduced the OPSS annual running costs by £15.5 million.

On 1 April 1995 my predecessor took over responsibility for civil service pensions and civil service pay and conditions, including the senior civil service. These responsibilities were transferred by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, following HM Treasury's fundamental expenditure review, and strengthened my civil service efficiency and effectiveness remit. The effect of these additional responsibilities serve to increase the OPSS annual running costs by some £13 million.

The machinery of Government changes announced in July 1995 saw significant changes with responsibility for the science and technology transferring from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the Minister for Science and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry. At the same time, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster assumed responsibility for supporting the Deputy Prime Minister on the competitiveness agenda and for the progress and development of deregulation, transferred from the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry. The net annual affect on running costs of these changes to my Department—now the Office of Public Service—is estimated to be a reduction of £3 million.

On the 1 January 1996 I assumed responsibility from the Minister for the Environment and Countryside for two executive agencies—the Security Facilities Executive and the Buying Agency. The effect of this transfer on my Department's annual running costs is £29 million.

### Advertising

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6571]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Details of expenditure on newspaper advertising and other promotional materials and activities by the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's Office, and the Office of Public Service were as follows:

*Cabinet Office*

£

| | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aberdeen Press and Journal | 2,132 | 3,686 | 2,694 | — | — |
| Ambulance UK | — | — | 453 | 453 | — |
| Andover Advertiser | — | — | 892 | — | — |
| Assessment | — | — | 2,425 | — | — |
| B A News | — | — | 1,152 | 4,064 | — |
| Banbury Guardian | — | — | 677 | — | — |
| Bath (and West Evening) Chronicle | — | 497 | — | — | — |
| Bedfordshire Times | — | — | 1,405 | — | — |
| Belfast Irish News | 900 | 476 | 1,143 | — | — |
| Belfast Telegraph | 4,777 | 6,155 | 5,233 | 355 | — |
| Birmingham Evening Mail | — | 2,262 | 3,700 | — | — |
| Bracknell News | — | — | 874 | — | — |
| Bournemouth Evening Echo | — | 751 | — | — | — |
| Braintree and Witham Times | — | 416 | 999 | — | — |
| Brighton Evening Argus | — | — | 2,000 | — | — |
| Bristol Evening Post | — | 2,498 | — | — | — |
| Bromley Borough News | — | 371 | — | — | — |
| Bucks Free Press | — | — | 972 | — | — |

*Cabinet Office*

£

| | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burnley Express | — | — | 603 | — | — |
| CA Magazine | — | — | — | — | 721 |
| Carmarthen Citizen | — | 161 | — | — | — |
| Carmarthen Journal | — | — | 516 | — | — |
| Chronicle and Echo | — | — | 1,076 | — | — |
| Coalville Times | — | — | 529 | — | — |
| Community Care | 847 | — | 2,541 | 1,457 | — |
| Cornishman | — | — | 434 | — | — |
| Courier and Advertiser (Dundee) | 1,906 | 1,165 | 2,499 | — | — |
| Coventry Evening Telegraph | — | 1,127 | — | — | — |
| Croydon Advertiser series | — | 1,535 | 1,593 | — | — |
| Daily Express | 63,510 | 4,650 | 24,200 | 1,260 | — |
| Daily Mail | 78,335 | 33,520 | 26,616 | 53,410 | — |
| Daily Mirror | 49,062 | 7,800 | 14,800 | 41,357 | — |
| Daily Post (Liverpool) | 990 | — | 1,515 | — | — |
| Daily Record | 7,000 | 2,300 | 4,600 | — | — |
| Daily Star | 11,700 | 1,700 | 6,300 | — | — |
| Daily Telegraph | 68,908 | 9,545 | 38,548 | 19,040 | 11,900 |
| Derby Evening Telegraph | — | 794 | 1,512 | — | — |
| Derry Journal | — | 498 | — | — | — |
| Dorset Evening Echo | — | 342 | 689 | — | — |
| Dumfries and Galloway Standard | — | — | 856 | — | — |
| East Anglian Daily Times (Ipswich) | — | 635 | 1,327 | — | — |
| East Kent Gazette | — | — | 547 | — | — |
| Eastbourne Herald | — | — | 932 | — | — |
| Eastern Daily Press (Norwich) | — | — | 1,467 | — | — |
| Evening Chronicle (Newcastle) | — | 1,522 | 2,189 | — | — |
| Evening Gazette (Teeside) | — | — | 1,465 | — | — |
| Evening Herald (Plymouth) | — | — | 1,159 | — | — |
| Evening Leader (Wrexham/Deeside) | — | — | 815 | — | — |
| Evening News (Worcester/Hereford) | — | 633 | — | — | — |
| Evening Standard | — | 5,000 | 8,800 | 22,700 | — |
| Evening Star (Ipswich) | — | 576 | — | — | — |
| Express and Star W Midlands/Shropshire Star | — | 920 | 5,576 | — | — |
| Federation Focus | — | — | — | — | 176 |
| Financial Times | 15,200 | — | — | 1,770 | — |
| Fire | — | 995 | 1,946 | 2,043 | — |
| Folkstone Herald/Dover Express | — | — | 635 | — | — |
| Gazette (South Shields) | — | — | 787 | — | — |
| General Practitioner | — | — | 4,447 | 2,329 | — |
| Glasgow Evening Times | — | 1,987 | — | — | — |
| Gloucester Citizen | — | 436 | 895 | — | — |
| Gloucestershire Echo | — | — | 885 | — | — |
| Governors News | — | — | — | — | 418 |
| Guardian | 36,600 | 15,398 | 8,664 | 15,369 | — |
| Hamilton Advertiser | — | 869 | — | — | — |
| Health Service Journal | 2,046 | 1,739 | 4,067 | 3,357 | — |
| Herald Glasgow | 2,850 | 5,262 | 3,591 | — | — |
| Hinckley and Bosworth | — | — | 613 | — | — |
| Hinckley Times | — | — | 555 | — | — |
| Housing Associations Weekly | — | — | — | — | 407 |
| In Attendance | — | — | 357 | — | — |
| Independent | 26,250 | 11,148 | 7,068 | 435 | — |
| Independent on Sunday | 10,189 | — | 3,648 | 450 | — |
| Irish News | — | 1,050 | 1,143 | — | — |
| Inside Housing | — | — | — | — | 473 |
| Journal (Newcastle) | — | — | 1,499 | — | — |
| Junior Education | — | — | 900 | 1,980 | — |
| Kent Messenger | — | — | 2,408 | — | — |
| Kent Today | — | 1,254 | — | — | — |
| Lancashire Evening Post | — | 1,056 | — | — | — |
| Leek Post and Times | — | — | 371 | — | — |
| Leicester Herald and Post | — | — | 715 | — | — |
| Leicester Link | — | — | 2,528 | — | — |
| Leicester Mail series | — | — | 3,006 | — | — |
| Leicester Mercury | — | 1,480 | 5,687 | — | — |
| Liverpool Echo | — | 1,756 | — | — | — |
| Local Government Chronicle | — | 1,772 | 3,389 | 2,912 | 1,482 |
| Londonderry Sentinel | — | 414 | — | — | — |

*Cabinet Office*

£

| | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Loughborough Echo | — | — | 1,189 | — | — |
| Loughborough Herald and Post | — | — | 818 | — | — |
| Luton and Dunstable Herald and Post | — | 600 | — | — | — |
| Lynn News | — | — | 1,252 | — | — |
| Mail on Sunday | 20,500 | 7,020 | 28,500 | 2,100 | — |
| Managing Schools Today | — | — | — | — | 266 |
| Manchester Evening News | — | — | 6,344 | — | — |
| Market Harborough Mail | — | — | 719 | — | — |
| Marketing | — | — | — | 720 | — |
| Melton Times | — | — | 1,515 | — | — |
| Municipal Journal | — | 1,580 | 2,244 | 2,541 | — |
| Museums Journal | — | — | — | 741 | — |
| News Letter—Ulster | 1,088 | 1,684 | 2,715 | — | — |
| News of the World | 10,000 | 34,280 | 10,500 | 3,750 | — |
| Nottingham Evening Post | — | 2,342 | 1,258 | — | — |
| Nursing Times | — | — | 2,236 | 2,346 | — |
| Observer | 11,600 | 1,906 | 4,788 | 630 | — |
| On the Bell | — | — | 357 | — | — |
| P S Magazine | — | — | 476 | — | — |
| The People | 5,500 | 11,200 | 5,400 | 2,079 | — |
| Peterborough Evening Telegraph | — | 625 | — | — | — |
| Police Review | 476 | 1,032 | 1,620 | 1,440 | — |
| Portsmouth—The News | — | — | 1,862 | — | — |
| Practice Manager | — | — | 424 | 424 | — |
| Prison Service News | — | — | 1,604 | — | — |
| Private Education | — | — | — | — | 371 |
| Public Sector Commercial Management | — | 971 | — | — | — |
| Public Service and Local Government News | — | 953 | — | — | — |
| Rail News | — | — | 1,747 | — | — |
| Rutland and Stamford Mercury | — | — | 1,087 | — | — |
| South Wales Evening Post | 910 | 1,058 | 1,333 | — | — |
| Salisbury Journal | — | 451 | — | — | — |
| Scarborough Evening News | — | 481 | — | — | — |
| Scotland On Sunday | 1,903 | 451 | — | — | — |
| Scotsman (Edinburgh) | 5,469 | 4,371 | 3,163 | 430 | — |
| Solihull News Series | — | 265 | — | — | — |
| Somerset County Gazette | — | 552 | — | — | — |
| South Wales Argus | 738 | 638 | 944 | — | — |
| South Wales Echo | 1,574 | 3,412 | 1,764 | — | — |
| Southern Evening Echo | — | — | 1,815 | — | — |
| Southern Reporter | — | 773 | — | — | — |
| Stafford Newsletter | — | — | 1,059 | — | — |
| Staines Informer | — | — | 929 | — | — |
| Sun | 73,800 | 30,000 | 32,250 | 92,950 | — |
| Sunday Express | 13,000 | 27,470 | 27,500 | 1,740 | — |
| Sunday Life (Belfast) | 856 | — | — | — | — |
| Sunday Mail (Glasgow) | 2,000 | — | 2,500 | — | — |
| Sunday Mirror | 7,600 | 35,300 | 7,800 | — | — |
| Sunday News | 700 | — | — | — | — |
| Sunday Post | 8,329 | — | 7,200 | — | — |
| Sunday Telegraph | 18,446 | 4,590 | 28,202 | — | — |
| Sunday Times | 39,370 | 29,200 | 39,294 | 2,484 | — |
| Sunday World (Northern Ireland) | 1,152 | — | — | — | — |
| Surrey Advertiser Group | — | — | 1,165 | — | — |
| Teacher | — | — | — | — | 858 |
| Tempo | — | — | 953 | 2,171 | — |
| This Caring Business | — | — | 1,791 | — | — |
| Times | 22,556 | 9,790 | 9,940 | 18,804 | 6,000 |
| Times Educational Supplement | 2,162 | 8,200 | 5,057 | 5,018 | 546 |
| Times Higher Educational Supplement | 4,324 | — | 2,146 | 3,097 | 461 |
| Today | 3,150 | 2,899 | 5,450 | 480 | — |
| Training and Enterprise Journal | — | — | — | — | 445 |
| Transport Journal | — | 856 | 847 | — | — |
| TV Times | 900 | — | — | — | — |
| Tyrone Constitution | — | 370 | — | — | — |
| Viewpoint | — | — | 397 | — | — |
| Voluntary Housing | — | — | — | — | 407 |
| Wales on Sunday | 132 | — | — | — | — |
| Water and Waste Treatment | — | 970 | — | — | — |

*Cabinet Office*

£

| | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Water Bulletin | — | 1,690 | 847 | — | — |
| Welwyn and Hatfield Times | — | — | 2,753 | — | — |
| West Briton | — | 520 | — | — | — |
| Western Mail | 249 | 1,550 | — | 304 | — |
| Western Morning News | — | 760 | — | — | — |
| West Lancashire Evening Gazette | — | — | 1,498 | — | — |
| Western Mail | — | — | 2,223 | — | — |
| Wrexham Leader (Weekly) | 63 | — | — | — | — |
| Yorkshire Post | — | 1,510 | — | — | — |
| | 641,769 | 368,961 | 507,602 | 318,990 | 24,931 |
| | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
| HMSO *(a)* | 556,000 | 645,000 | 1,705,000 | 1,905,000 | 2,500,000 |

1. The figures for the Cabinet Office excludes expenditure by the Office of the Prime Minister, which was the subject of a separate Answer by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.
2. Cabinet Office expenditure is virtually all on the Citizen's Charter.
3. Expenditure by title excludes agency or COI costs.
4. There has been no expenditure on newspaper advertising by the Department's agencies, other than for the purposes of recruitment.
5. 1995–96 figures are actual expenditure to end-November.
6. Estimates for 1995–96 are not available. Newspaper advertising is treated for budgeting purposes as part of advertising in all its forms.
7. HMSO figures are based on its year of accounting, which is January to December, and encompass all forms of advertising including newspaper advertising. The advertising is used to promote sales of HMSO books, and other products and services. Much of this is placed in trade journals, but more general periodicals and newspapers are also used.
8. The Cabinet Office does not have any NDPBs.

### Information Technology

**Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if Government Departments may sell spare information technology capacities to other Departments; and if he will make a statement. [10680]

**Mr. Willetts:** Computer systems need to be installed with sufficient capacity to meet peak work loads and, as a consequence, Departments may have spare processing capacity outside these peak periods.

Departments are encouraged to make the most efficient and effective use of their information technology resources. Where economic quantities of spare computing capacity can be identified, this may be sold to other Department so long as the normal technical, security and financial controls are met.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees; [10957]

(2) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10958]

**Mr. Willetts:** As yet, nil.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the mobile phones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11009]

**Mr. Willetts:** In the Cabinet Office the following phones were cloned:

Four telephones in January 1994;

One telephone in October 1995 and,

One telephone in June 1995.

None of the mobile phones purchased by the Central Office of Information in the last eight years has been cloned.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office does not hold this information centrally and it could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Historic Monuments

**Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the outcome of the prior options stage of the financial management and policy review of the Royal Commission on the historical monuments of England; and if she will make a statement. [11819]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** The overall conclusion of the prior options report was that maintaining the central functions of the royal commission is a necessary national task, and that the RCHME is best placed to carry out this work. I have accepted this recommendation and confirm that the RCHME will continue to carry out its role as the national body of survey and record of the historic environment, as defined in its royal warrant. A copy of the prior options report has been placed in the Library of the House.

The report also looked at the relationship between the RCHME and other heritage bodies working in the field and recommended that there was scope for greater co-operation between RCHME and English Heritage, and for a further clarification of their respective roles with regard to survey work. Discussions are taking place between the two bodies to give effect to these recommendations.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Furniture Inventory

**Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what progress has been made with compiling a comprehensive inventory of the furniture in the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement. [10839]

**Mr. Ray Powell:** The inventory of historic furniture was completed in late 1995. More than 7,500 pieces were identified on the parliamentary estate. These were numbered and photographed and the descriptions recorded on a computer database. The inventory is currently being edited and will provide an important tool for the management and conservation of these valuable assets.

## TREASURY

### Official Hospitality

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on official hospitality by agencies associated with his Department in 1993–94, 1994–95 and projected for 1995–96. [9089]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* Expenditure by agencies associated with Her Majesty's Treasury on official hospitality is included in the running costs published for each agency.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report,* column *636,* on hospitality spending by his Department in 1994–95 and 1995–96, if the figures included spending by his Department's agencies. [9090]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* No. The figures were for the central Treasury only.

### Steam-powered Vehicles

**Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many steam-powered road vehicles over 25 years old were liable for road tax in the financial years 1993–94, 1994–95 and the first six months of the financial year 1995–96. [10627]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** There were 340 steam-propelled vehicles over 25 years old liable for road tax at the end of 1994, the only year for which figures are currently available.

**Mr. Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was raised from road tax sources on steam-powered vehicles over 25 years old in the financial years 1993–94, 1994–95 and the first six months of the financial year 1995–96. [10625]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Figures are currently available only for calendar year 1994. Total revenue raised in 1994 for steam-powered vehicles over 25 years old was £15,000.

### Regional Agents

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the cities in which regional agents who monitor the economy for the Bank of England are based in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales. [10429]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The Bank has regional agents in Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Winchester. There is additionally an agent in London, covering the south-east. In Scotland there is an agent in Glasgow. There is no agent in Wales. The Bank is currently reviewing its agencies, with a view to enhancing their coverage and profile in the regions.

### Part-time Employment

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of part-time employment posts in the north-west region in each of the past three years. [10302]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The information requested is shown in the following table:

*Part-time employees—north-west: September*

| *Year* | *Level* |
|---|---|
| 1993 | 634,000 |
| 1994 | 634,000 |
| 1995 | 648,000 |

*Source:*
CSO.

### Cash Machines

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the banking industry over the introduction of vein scanning in cash machines. [10630]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** None, although from time to time my officials discuss with the industry ways of reducing fraud.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 1995, *Official Report,* column *527,* who provided external legal advice to his Department's Ministers in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10875]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** The names of individuals receiving external legal advice at public expense, and of their legal advisers, are confidential to them.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions staff employed by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in relation to the Scott

inquiry have had on matters related to the Scott inquiry with persons *(a)* employed by and *(b)* working as consultants for Conservative central office; and what subjects were discussed. [10991]

**Mr. Clarke** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Staff employed by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in relation to the Scott inquiry have had no discussions with persons employed by or working as consultants for Conservative central office.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the responsibilities of the staff employed by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10990]

**Mr. Clarke** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The responsibilities of staff in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry are to provide Ministers and officials with advice on matters arising from the inquiry, and to liaise with the inquiry.

### Biodiesel

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to encourage the production of biodiesel fuel; and if he will make a statement. [11091]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I have no such plans. The environmental case for biodiesel has not been established, although the Government continue to fund research in this area.

### Student Loans

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report,* column *528,* on the postponement of the introduction of private loans, when he plans to conclude his consideration. [10983]

**Mr. Waldegrave** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* In due course.

### Eurotunnel

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations the Government have received from Eurotunnel in relation to its debt; what requests were contained in those representations; and what response he has made. [10980]

**Mr. Waldegrave** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Government have received representations from Eurotunnel on a number of issues, including the company's current financial difficulties.

It has been made clear to the company that any financial restructuring of Eurotunnel is a matter for the company to resolve, in discussion with its bankers, and without Government intervention. From the start, it was always envisaged that the channel tunnel would be an entirely private sector project and that the concessionaries would have no recourse to Government funds or guarantees of a commercial nature. That remains the position.

### Mobile phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the mobile phones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last five years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11012]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** A total of three mobile phones have been cloned during the last five years. Two of these have been cloned three times and the other once. The dates are:

(1) 15–17 November 1994, 21–22 April 1995 and 4–6 May 1995.

(2) 11–12 March 1995, 21 April 1995 and 17–18 September 1995.

(3) 24–26 October 1995.

### Income Tax Relief

**Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the full year yield of restricting income tax relief available at the 40 per cent. marginal rate to *(a)* £2,000, *(b)* £3,000, *(c)* £4,000, *(d)* £6,000 and *(e)* £8,000 (i) including and (ii) excluding profit-related pay giving in each case the number of people affected. [11003]

**Mr. Jack:** Available information was given in my answer to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 17 January 1996, *Official Report,* column *607.*

## DEFENCE

### Royal Squadron

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 8 December 1995 aircraft of the Royal Squadron were used by members of the royal family for private travel; and if he will list in each case the point of departure of the aircraft and the destination, the sum which was reimbursed and the members of the royal family involved. [10649]

**Mr. Soames:** Since 8 December 1995 there have been two occasions when aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron have been used by members of the royal family for private travel. The details of these flights, including the sums to be reimbursed to the Ministry of Defence by the royal households, are as follows:

| *Departure Point* | *Destination* | *Charge £* | *Members of royal family* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Blackpool | London | 1,186.67 | Her Majesty The Queen<br>HRH The Duke of Edinburgh<br>HRH The Prince of Wales |
| Mildenhall | Zurich | 1,584.00 | Prince William<br>Prince Henry |

### Mr. David Hart

**Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set those qualifications held by Mr. David Hart which led to his employment as a special adviser. [11086]

**Mr. Portillo:** I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of

State for Defence Procurement on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column 3.

**Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Mr. David Hart has an office in the Department. [11082]

**Mr. Portillo:** No.

**Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence of which projects in the Department Mr. David Hart has direct control; and in which areas of work he has responsibility. [11081]

**Mr. Portillo:** None.

**Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many meetings Mr. David Hart has had with foreign defence equipment suppliers since he was appointed; [11085]

(2) how many meetings Mr. David Hart has had with British defence equipment suppliers since he was appointed as a special adviser. [11165]

**Mr. Portillo:** Since David Hart was appointed as an independent adviser my Department has not maintained a record of such meetings.

**Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what interests Mr. David Hart has declared in respect of consultants *(a)* currently working for his Department and *(b)* committed to work for his Department. [11083]

**Mr. Portillo:** None.

**Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many departmental staff, of which grades, work directly for Mr. David Hart. [11080]

**Mr. Portillo:** None.

### Consultancy Agreements

**Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultancy agreements his Department has entered into for *(a)* the current and *(b)* future financial years on (i) efficiency studies, (ii) value for money studies, (iii) financial control systems and (iv) other related matters; and in each case what are the costs (1) now committed and (2) estimated to be incurred. [11084]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Budget holders throughout the Ministry of Defence have delegated authority to engage external advisers, on a paid consultancy basis or otherwise, to conduct independent reviews of aspects of the Department's work. Information on such studies is not collected centrally, or in the format required, and the details could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Marine Services

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the result of the market test of the marine services business. [10509]

**Mr. Arbuthnot;** The market test of the marine services business has reached the stage of final tender evaluation. The select of the successful bidder will be taken following this evaluation and will be announced as soon as possible thereafter.

### Service Women (Pregnancy)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the compensation payments made to pregnant service women dismissed between 1979 and 1990 by rank and the service in which they served. [11329]

**Mr. Soames:** Some 5,000 compensation payments averaging under £11,000 each have been made to service women discharged on pregnancy between 1978 and 1990. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State will write to the hon. Member with a list of the individual payments which have been made to date, broken down by service, but details of the rank relating to each payment could be provided only at disproportionate cost. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what distinction his Department makes in fitness standard requirements between service women returning to work following a period of maternity leave and female service personnel who have not been pregnant. [11326]

**Mr. Soames:** Women who return to duty following a period of maternity leave are, in common with other female personnel, normally expected to meet the level of fitness necessary to carry out their duties. However, in accordance with health and safety regulations, special considerations apply to pregnant women, women who have recently given birth, and breast-feeding mothers. It is possible, therefore, that some women returning to duty from maternity leave may be temporarily placed in a reduced medical category which necessitates their employment on restricted duties for a period of time.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the fitness requirements and testing applied to service women returning to work following a period of maternity leave; and how many such service women have failed these tests. [11324]

**Mr. Soames:** Service women returning to duty following maternity leave undergo a medical examination to confirm that they are fit to return to duty. The ability of a service woman to return to her normal duties will be assessed in the light of the medical examination. If necessary, a woman returning to work after a period of maternity leave will be temporarily placed on restricted duties. No data are available centrally in respect of the number of women who fail to meet the medical standards necessary for them to resume their normal duties.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many female service personnel gave up children for adoption in each of the years from 1978 to 1990; and what was his Department's policy towards such personnel during this period. [11327]

**Mr. Soames:** Information in respect of the numbers of women who gave up children for adoption in each of the years from 1978 to 1990 is not held centrally. During this period, pregnant service women were compulsorily discharged from the armed forces. Some women may have decided to have their child adopted prior to applying to re-enter the armed forces and any application for re-entry would have been treated in the same way as all other applications. Any decision by a serving mother to

give up her child for adoption is a private matter for the woman concerned.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service women have returned to work following a period of maternity leave in each of the years since maternity leave became available. [11325]

**Mr. Soames:** My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State will write to the hon. Member and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Equal Treatment Directive

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has implemented article 7 of the equal treatment directive. [11328]

**Mr. Soames:** Yes.

### Industrial Tribunal Orders

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions he has failed to comply with orders from industrial tribunals within the time prescribed by the industrial tribunal. [11330]

**Mr. Soames:** The information requested is not held centrally, but it is my Department's practice to comply wherever possible with all such orders, once they have been received.

### Ministerial Visits (Kuwait)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last visited Kuwait; what issues were discussed; when the visit was arranged; and if he will make a statement. [11322]

**Mr. Portillo:** I had been planning to visit Kuwait for some time and was able to do so at short notice on 13 January. I discussed a range of bilateral issues, including regional security, defence co-operation and the supply of defence equipment.

### Conventionally Armed Stand-off Missile

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the desirability of a merger of British and American projects to meet a requirement for a conventionally armed stand-off missile. [11321]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** There have been discussions with several countries with a similar requirement to our own for a conventionally armed stand-off missile to assess the potential for co-operation. The outcome of these discussions will be taken into account during our assessment.

### Portland Naval Base

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department is involved in the search for ordnance within the waters of the former Portland naval base; and if he will make a statement. [11323]

**Mr. Soames:** In anticipation of the closure of the naval base on 31 March 1996. Portland harbour is being searched for the purpose of safely removing any ordnance which may exist. This is in accordance with MOD policy to clear surplus sites of ordnance before disposal. The Royal Navy is clearing the harbour floor and an area outside the harbour in areas deeper than 10 m. A MOD-approved specialist contract diving company is clearing areas inside the harbour of less than 10 m depth up to the shoreline. Only a small quantity of live but stable ordnance has been found and is being safely disposed of by Navy ordnance disposal specialists.

### Franco-German Armaments Agency

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his French and German counterparts concerning British participation in the Franco-German armaments agency. [10497]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Secretary of State met his German counterpart on 27 November 1995, and his French counterpart on 30 October 1995, on which occasions helpful discussions took place with regard to possible UK participation in the Franco-German armaments agency. Also I met my German counterpart on 18 January 1996 and had constructive discussion on this issue.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made as to the number of asylum seekers who are abusing their position in the United Kingdom. [11136]

**The Prime Minister:** The level of abuse of the asylum procedures is very high. Last year only 5 per cent. of asylum applicants were granted refugee status under the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees and 79 per cent. of applicants were refused outright. The great majority of Home Office asylum decisions are upheld on appeal by independent adjudicators; last year, only 3 per cent. of such appeals were allowed. The Government are taking measures across a broad front to deter abusive asylum claims and to strengthen the procedures for determining applications.

### Opposition Policies

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements have been made for the retention of assessments drawn up of Opposition policies in advance of general elections; and what facilities for the public inspection of these records are available. [10982]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Departments are asked from time to time, under Governments of any party, to provide factual costings of the policies of the Opposition. Such costings form part of departmental files and are not subject to any special access arrangements.

### Political Honours Scrutiny Committee

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Prime Minister who are the members of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee; when they were appointed and by whom; and what is the term of their appointment. [11100]

**The Prime Minister:** The current members, my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Pym, the right hon. Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos and the right hon. Lord Thomson of Monifieth, were appointed by Order in Council on 9 November 1992. They were appointed on my advice following consultations with the right hon. Members for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). The Order in Council provides that the committee is appointed for the duration of office of the present Government.

### 2001 Census

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will require the 2001 census to ascertain proficiency in *(a)* all indigenous languages of the United Kingdom and *(b)* in major European Community languages. [8783]

**The Prime Minister:** No final proposals will be made until 1998 in the light of cases made for all potential questions. However, little need has been stated for information from the census on proficiency in European Community languages and it seems unlikely that there will be a question about this. Some needs have been expressed for extensions to the questions on indigenous languages asked in Wales and Scotland in the 1991 census, and these are being considered.

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will require the 2001 census to ascertain the extent of proficiency in the Welsh language in all nations of the United Kingdom. [8784]

**The Prime Minister:** The matter is under consideration. No final proposals will be made until 1998 in the light of the cases made for all potential questions.

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will establish an office in Wales to oversee the conduct of the 2001 census. [8785]

**The Prime Minister:** By statute it is the duty of the Registrar General to make the arrangements for taking the census throughout England and Wales. The Registrar General is, and will be, working closely with the Welsh Office in planning and co-ordinating the proposed 2001 census.

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will require the 2001 census forms in Wales to be published in a bilingual Welsh-English form. [8786]

**The Prime Minister:** In the 1991 census in Wales, bilingual English-Welsh publicity material was distributed and the census form itself was available in Welsh as well as in English. The acceptability, effectiveness and practicability of a bilingual census form are under consideration.

### Royal Yacht Britannia

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government have yet decided the future of HMY Britannia after decommissioning in 1997; whether any replacement vessel is to be acquired; and if he will make a statement. [9305]

**The Prime Minister:** A number of suggestions have been made about the future of HMY Britannia and these are being considered. The Government are also considering the question of whether to replace Britannia. An announcement will be made in due course.

### Engagements

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 January. [9471]

**The Prime Minister:** This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Executive Agencies

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provisions of pre-retirement courses in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies; and if he will make a statement. [9138]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The chief executives of the following executive agencies will respond direct to the hon. Member—Companies House, the Insolvency Service, the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, the Patent Office and the Radiocommunications Agency.

*Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

I am replying in relation to the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about pre-retirement courses. The Personnel Section of the Patent Office runs such courses for staff who are about to retire and I can confirm that we will continue to provide them for our staff in the future.

*Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to respond to your Parliamentary Question.

I can confirm that the Radiocommunications Agency will continue to provide appropriate training to help those staff that are preparing for retirement.

*Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the action being taken to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses.

The Insolvency Service currently uses the courses run by the Department of Trade and Industry's Personnel Training Services Consortium. About a year before expected retirement the individual members of staff are invited to attend a course: The Service pays for the individual and his/her partner to attend.

The Service expects to continue the provision of such courses.

*Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about the provision of pre-retirement courses.

There are no changes planned and this Agency will continue to provide pre-retirement courses.

*Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 12 January 1996:*

I have been asked to answer with respect to the Laboratory of the Government Chemist your question to the President of the Board of Trade number 9138 asking what action heads of executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies.

The Laboratory of the Government Chemist continues to operate a policy of offering staff approaching retirement age the opportunity to attend a pre-retirement course.

*Letter from David Durham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

You have recently tabled a written Parliamentary Question asking what action the Department of Trade and Industry's Executive Agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses. I have been asked to reply as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency.

Companies House initiated its own programme of pre-retirement courses in March 1990; prior to this the service was provided by the Department's Training Division. An invitation to attend the training is issued to every member of staff and their partner across all sites twelve months before they reach the age of 60. This invitation is also extended to any member of staff who takes up the option of early retirement.

The course is a two day event. It is delivered by local external speakers who tailor their material on the financial, social and personal aspects of retirement to the needs of the course members. So far 92 staff have attended the training. We will continue to provide this service as part of our commitment to the welfare of our staff.

This reply also takes account of your amended question.

## Telecommunications Services

**Mr. Shaw:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the relative levels of penetration of integrated services data network lines in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. [10425]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** The OECD compiles a table representing the level of penetration of OECD lines in member countries which it amends and makes available to my Department regularly. I will arrange for a copy of the most recent survey, 1995, to be placed in the Library of the House.

## Labour Statistics

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people in full-time employment in the United Kingdom earn less than the minimum hourly wage rates in each country of the European Union. [10637]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Information in the form requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the number of full-time employees in Great Britain earning less than the minimum hourly wage rates in those European Union countries which have a statutory national minimum wage is contained in the following table:

| *Country* | *National minimum hourly wage* £ *Sterling equivalent*[1] | *Number of full-time workers in Great Britain earning less than the minimum rate*[2] *Millions* |
|---|---|---|
| Belgium | 5.46 | 6.19 |
| France | 4.84 | 4.78 |
| Greece | 1.82 | 0.27 |
| Luxembourg | 5.51 | 6.31 |
| Netherlands | 5.04 | 5.24 |
| Portugal | 1.30 | 0.15 |
| Spain | 2.00 | 0.29 |

[1] Market exchange rates of 17 January 1996 were used.

[2] Derived from the Labour Force Survey—Summer 1995.

## Business and Innovation Centre

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many universities in the United Kingdom have participated in the development of a business and innovation centre. [10897]

**Mr. Page:** Nineteen universities in the United Kingdom have participated in the development of a business and innovation centre.

## Wylfa Power Station

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on *(a)* erosion and *(b)* other defects in fuel rod containers and tubes at the Wylfa power station on Ynys Môn since 1 January 1989. [11017]

**Mr. Eggar:** I understand that, during the course of its normal regulatory inspection duties at Wylfa nuclear power station, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate was informed of the discovery in July 1990 of a small number of corroded fuel elements in one of the dry fuel stores and also of the identification in May 1993 of erosion in part of the defuelling route. Nuclear Electric has made acceptable safety cases to the NII for dealing with these occurrences and is implementing appropriate action.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* all leaks and *(b)* all accidents that have occurred at the Wylfa power station on Ynys Môn since 1 January 1989; and if he will make a statement. [11016]

**Mr. Eggar:** Details of all incidents at Nuclear Electric plc's Wylfa nuclear power station are recorded in site logs and published in widely circulated fortnightly site newsletters. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) to a question from the then Member for Sherwood on 30 April 1987, *Official Report*, columns *203–204*.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library copies of the safety reports prepared since 1 January 1986 concerning the Wylfa power station on Ynys Môn. [11018]

**Mr. Eggar:** A copy of the report by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate setting out the findings of its assessment of Nuclear Electric's long-term safety review of Wylfa is already available in the Library of the House. In addition, site newsletters, which cover safety issues, are published for all United Kingdom civil nuclear installations, including Wylfa. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

### Oil and Gas Consumption

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for *(a)* each of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole for each of the last available five years the total consumption in quantity and in value at constant prices of (i) oil and (ii) gas, indicating the proportion of the total in each case and the overall percentage change in each component over the period. [8787]

**Mr. Page:** Data for the United Kingdom as a whole are shown in the table:

*UK Energy Consumption (1)*

| | *Oil* | | *Natural gas (2)* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Quantity (thousand tonnes)* | *Value (3) (£ million)* | *Quantity (gigawatt hours)* | *Value (3) (3 million)* |
| 1990 | 57,518 | 22,505 | 525,885 | 7,210 |
| 1991 | 57,741 | 21,845 | 561,088 | 7,700 |
| 1992 | 58,392 | 21,256 | 550,633 | 7,214 |
| 1993 | 59,496 | 22,631 | 562,960 | 6,855 |
| 1994 | 59,198 | 22,808 | 565,022 | 7,205 |
| *Percentage change in consumption* | | | | |
| 1990–94 | +4.1 | +1.3 | +7.4 | -0.1 |

*Notes:*

[1] Consumption by final users (i.e. net of fuel industry own use and conversion, transmission and distribution losses, but includes conversion losses by final users).

[2] Including colliery methane.

[3] Adjusted for inflation to 1990 price levels using the GDP deflator.

*Source:*

Digest of UK Energy Statistics 1995, Tables 5.7 and 27 (HMSO).

Comprehensive information on a comparable basis for the constituent nations of the United Kingdom is not available.

### ROM-Data Corporation

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those employees in the Department of Trade and Industry south-west regional office who took part in the assessment of the regional selective assistance grant made to the ROM-Data Corporation in 1991 who subsequently *(a)* acted as directors and *(b)* were employed in a different capacity by ROM-Data Corporation. [8925]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* I expect to be able to make a report about the findings before long.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions staff employed in his Department in relation to the Scott inquiry have had on matters related to the Scott inquiry with persons *(a)* employed by and *(b)* working as consultants for Conservative central office; and what subjects were discussed. [10993]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* None.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the responsibilities of the staff employed in his Department in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10992]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The responsibilities of staff in the Department of Trade and Industry employed on matters related to the inquiry are to provide Ministers and officials with advice on matters arising from the inquiry, and to liaise with the inquiry.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any connection in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10222]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The direct salary cost of officials within DTI wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry since 1992 is approximately £303,000. Other officials will inevitably be involved from time to time; their direct salary cost is unquantifiable.

The direct salary cost since 1992 of Sir Richard Scott's inquiry team, which also falls to my Department, is approximately £718,000.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Attorney-General who provided external legal advice for Ministers in the Department in relation to the Scott inquiry. [11049]

**The Attorney-General:** Information on who has sought legal advice and from whom is confidential.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### General Electric Company

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *358*, about contracts awarded to GEC *(a)* what was bought by the Overseas Development Administration from GEC in the two contracts in 1991 and 1992 and *(b)* what was bought in each of the contracts supported by Overseas Development Administration finance between GEC or its subsidiary companies and overseas clients; who the overseas client was; and how much Overseas Development

Administration money was spent in connection with each of these contracts. [10271]

**Mr. Hanley:** The information is as follows:

*a) ODA's contracts with GEC in 1991–92*

Under the 1991 contract GEC have provided technical advisory services to the Yue Yang power station in China, including the training of Chinese engineers in the operation of coal fired power stations. The 1992 contract provided technical advisory services and equipment to the Abu Zabaal Fertiliser and Chemical Company Ltd in Egypt.

*b) other contracts referred to in the answer of 15 January*

The Indonesia project, working with GEC Alsthom and approved in 1995, includes the construction of one 500kV substation, the extension of another, the construction of seven 150kV substations, and the extension of four existing 150kV substations. The contract covers project management, substation design, engineering and specification of substation equipment, supply of 500kV, 150kV, and 20kV substation equipment and miscellaneous items, provision of engineering data and drawings, supply of test equipment, insurance and warranty, and the training of Indonesian personnel. The overseas client is PT Perusahaan Listrik Negara, the public electricity authority. The contract's value is £44.333 million, with ODA contributing ATP support of £15.516 million plus up to £43,000 for project monitoring.

The Chandrapur to Ramagundum high voltage direct current link project, in India was approved in 1993. ODA has agreed to finance up to £63 million of a larger contract between GEC and PowerGrid Corporation of India. Under the ODA-financed portion GEC are supplying two HVDC back-to-back convertor stations plus associated equipment and technical services. £43 million has been spent to date.

The Hirakud project in Orissa, India was approved in 1994. Within a total ODA project allocation of £18.8 million, ODA is financing a £14.7 million contract between GEC and the Orissa state electricity board, under which GEC is supplying capital equipment and training for Indian engineers. £8.5 million has been spent to date.

### Aid Procurement

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make available the recent review undertaken by his Department on aid procurement tied to the purchase of British goods and services. [10421]

**Mr. Hanley:** The review on aid procurement tied to the purchase of British goods and services was undertaken by ODA and other interested Whitehall Departments. ODA is currently producing a summary version of the review which will be made available as soon as possible.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Labour Statistics (Manchester)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many persons aged *(a)* 16 and *(b)* 17 years are currently available for work in the Greater Manchester area and not in receipt of benefit. [10304]

**Mr. Forth:** There is no requirement for 16 and 17-year-olds to hold themselves available for work. No information is held on the number of 16 and 17-year-olds who are not in receipt of benefit.

### Access to Work

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the principal types of disabilities of people who have received assistance under the access to work scheme in each of the years 1994–95 and 1995–96 to date. [10129]

**Mr. Forth** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* Responsibilities for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the types of disability of people who have received support through Access to Work.

I attach a table that shows all the help provided through Access to Work from 6 June 1994 (the first day of the programme) to 31 March 1995. The table shows the elements of help and the number of people in disability categories. Some people get more than one element of help and therefore the totals do not show the total number of people supported.

In 1994/95, 10,394 people were helped, including a number receiving help under the previous special schemes that replaced Access to Work on 6 June 1994.

The principal types of disability of those receiving help were disabilities of the spine (around 21%); organic nervous diseases (10%); hearing difficulties (18%) and visual impairments (26%).

I am sorry that we do not have interim figures for 1995/96. Analysis by disability type is done annually and figures will be available after the end of the operating year in March.

I hope this is helpful.

*Access to Work Beneficiaries by element of support by medical code letter*

*Period: 6 June 1994-31 March 1995*

| Medical Code | Special aids and equipment | Adaptions to premises and equipment | Personal reader service | Assistance with fares to work | Communicator support at interview | Support worker | Adaptations to vehicles | Miscellaneous support | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 66 | 2 | — | 2 | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 73 |
| B | 9 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 10 |
| C | 59 | — | — | 7 | — | 2 | 4 | — | 72 |
| D | 12 | 1 | — | 4 | — | — | — | 1 | 18 |
| E | 10 | 1 | — | 3 | — | — | — | — | 14 |
| Q1 | 131 | — | — | 6 | 4 | 2 | — | 2 | 145 |
| Q2 | 53 | — | — | 3 | — | — | — | — | 56 |
| R | 390 | 12 | — | 115 | — | 4 | 13 | 10 | 544 |
| S | 469 | — | — | 14 | — | 7 | 7 | 15 | 512 |
| T1 | 470 | 21 | — | 125 | — | 11 | 25 | 8 | 660 |
| T2 | 2,059 | 6 | 1 | 92 | — | 10 | 8 | 26 | 2,202 |
| Y | 3 | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | 5 |

*Access to Work Beneficiaries by element of support by medical code letter*

*Period: 6 June 1994-31 March 1995*

| Medical Code | Special aids and equipment | Adaptions to premises and equipment | Personal reader service | Assistance with fares to work | Communicator support at interview | Support worker | Adaptations to vehicles | Miscellaneous support | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 714 | 6 | — | 61 | 1 | 12 | 9 | 15 | 818 |
| H | 37 | — | — | 3 | — | 1 | — | — | 41 |
| I | 6 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 7 |
| J | 73 | 4 | — | 18 | — | 3 | 1 | 2 | 101 |
| K1A | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| K1B | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| K2 | 43 | — | — | 9 | — | — | — | 2 | 54 |
| L | 13 | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | 2 | 17 |
| V1 | 51 | — | — | 103 | — | 11 | 2 | 3 | 170 |
| V2 | 864 | 16 | 1 | 294 | — | 23 | 17 | 13 | 1,228 |
| X | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| U1 | 12 | — | — | 11 | — | 6 | — | — | 29 |
| U2 | 8 | — | — | 12 | — | 3 | — | — | 23 |
| U3 | 96 | — | — | 126 | 1 | 38 | — | 8 | 269 |
| M1 | 438 | 5 | — | 8 | 187 | 101 | — | 53 | 792 |
| M2 | 862 | 10 | — | 12 | 79 | 95 | — | 49 | 1,107 |
| N | 534 | 10 | — | 7 | 11 | 25 | — | 16 | 603 |
| O | 1,696 | 9 | 176 | 174 | 8 | 42 | 2 | 27 | 2,134 |
| P | 1,141 | 3 | 37 | 149 | — | 25 | — | 27 | 1,382 |
| Z | 409 | 5 | — | 58 | — | 14 | 5 | 9 | 500 |
| Total | 10,728 | 111 | 215 | 1,423 | 291 | 437 | 94 | 290 | 13,589 |

*Medical code letters*

A, B, C, D, E : Amputations

F : Arthritis and rheumatism

H : Diseases of the digestive system

I : Diseases of the genito-urinary system

J : Diseases of the heart and circulatory system

K1A, K1B, K2 : Diseases of the respiratory system (except TB)

L : Diseases of the skin

M1, M2, N : Hearing impairments

O, P : Visual impairments

Q1, Q2 : Injuries of head, face, neck, thorax, abdomen, pelvis, trunk

R, S : Disabilities of the limbs

T1, T2 : Disabilities of the spine

U1, U2, U3 : Mental disabilities

V1, V2 : Organic nervous disorders

X, Y : TB

Z : Other disabilities.

## EU Universities (UK Students)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many United Kingdom students are currently studying at other European Union university institutions as *(a)* undergraduates and *(b)* postgraduates. [10902]

**Mr. Forth:** Information is not available in the detail requested. Figures published by the European Union show that in 1991–92—the latest year for which full information is available—nearly 9,000 United Kingdom higher education students were studying in other member states, of which over 6,500 were participating in the Erasmus and Lingua programmes. In 1994–95, there were nearly 12,000 UK students studying in other member states under the Erasmus and Lingua programmes as well as an unknown number of other UK higher education students.

## University Facilities

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many universities in the United Kingdom have established *(a)* a business school and *(b)* a science park. [10898]

**Mr. Forth:** This information is not collected by the Government. However, I understand that there are currently 71 United Kingdom universities with business schools and 49 science parks in the UK with UK Science Park Association membership.

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many universities in the United Kingdom have developed joint programmes with their local training and enterprise councils. [10894]

**Mr. Paice:** This information is not held centrally, but officials have requested Government offices to make inquiries of the training and enterprise councils in their regions and I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

## University Funding

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what powers she has to provide exceptional funding to universities which have particular areas of expertise. [10899]

**Mr. Forth:** Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, responsibility for determining the allocation to universities of grant funds provided by the Department for Education and Employment rests with the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The allocation to universities of grant funds relating to initial teacher training is, under the Education Act 1994, the responsibility of the Teacher Training Agency. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has no powers to provide exceptional funding to universities which have particular areas of expertise.

### Careers Service (London)

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has for the careers service in Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, following the decision of the Grand Met Trust to withdraw its plans to take over the contract to run the service. [10530]

**Mr. Forth** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Department is discussing options with the four local authorities. The Department's priority is to ensure a high-quality careers service for the young people of the area.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many expressions of interest were received by each of the boroughs of Greenwich, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham with regard to the contract to run these authorities' careers services; and which consortiums bid for the contract. [10532]

**Mr. Forth** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* There were four bids submitted for the combined area of Greenwich, Lewisham, Lambeth and Southwark. Bids were submitted on a commercial in confidence basis and the Department must respect the confidence of the other organisations involved.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what criteria the Grand Met Trust was given preferred bidder status in respect of the contract to run the careers service in the boroughs of Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark; what experience Grand Met has had in providing a careers service; and how many people were employed by the subsidiary of Grand Met bidding to run the careers service when the Department awarded it preferred bidder status. [10531]

**Mr. Forth** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Grand Met Trust submitted the best bid as measured against the criteria that were published in the "Prospectus for the Provision of London Careers Services from April 1996". Grand Met Trust has not previously provided a careers service. The Department recognised that bids might come from organisations entering this area of work for the first time. The prospectus stated, therefore, that such bidders must provide clear and realistic plans for meeting our requirements before the contract began. Grand Met Trust did so. The bid was submitted by Grand Met Trust, not a subsidiary. However, the trust stated its intention to form a subsidiary company to contract with the Department if preferred bidder status was awarded.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what occasions and on what date Grand Met Trust expressed an interest in partnerships to run local authority careers services; and on what dates it notified her Department of withdrawals of interest. [10533]

**Mr. Forth** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Grand Met Trust submitted its bid to run the careers service in London's area 5 the boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham, Lambeth and Southwark by the closing date of 10 April 1995. It confirmed its intention to withdraw from contract negotiations on 10 January 1996.

### Business Links

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many universities in the United Kingdom have participated in the launch of local business links initiatives. [10896]

**Mr. Page:** I have been asked to reply.

Precise numbers are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, universities and other higher and further institutions have been closely involved in developing most business link partnerships.

### National Vocational Qualifications

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to improve the provision by employers of national vocational qualifications; and if she will make a statement. [8788]

**Mr. Paice:** Decisions on the usage of national vocational qualifications are a matter for individuals and employers. The Government are, however, providing funds for the marketing of these qualifications. In the 1994 competitiveness White Paper, the Government announced a package of £31 million over three years to help ensure NVQs are fully up to date, rigorous and of high quality; and provide funds for their attainment in training programmes for young people and unemployed adults.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish for the last available two years for each of the constituent nations and standard regions of the United Kingdom and for the United Kingdom as a whole the total number of employers using national vocational qualifications to train their work force, indicating this figure as a percentage of the total number of employers in each case. [8919]

**Mr. Paice:** Estimates from the "Skill Needs in Britain" surveys show that the percentage of establishments with 25 or more employees in Great Britain offering national vocational qualifications or Scottish vocational qualifications to their employees increased from 31 per cent.—approximately 46,000—in 1994 to 40 per cent.—approximately 61,000—in 1995. The "Skill Needs of Small Firms 1994–95" survey estimated that approximately 144,000 establishments, or 13 per cent., with fewer than 25 employees offered NVQs or SVQs to their employees.

The requested data are not available for Northern Ireland or the United Kingdom or for standard regions but data for Great Britain, Wales, Scotland, England and training, enterprise and education directorate—TEED—regions are given in the following two tables:

*Table 1: Establishments offering NVQs to their employees*

| | 1994 | | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Great Britain | 46,000 | 31 | 61,000 | 40 |
| Wales | 2,500 | 35 | 3,500 | 49 |
| Scotland | 3,500 | 26 | 4,000 | 29 |
| England | 40,000 | 31 | 54,000 | 41 |

*Table 1: Establishments offering NVQs to their employees*

| | 1994 | | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| *TEED Regions* | | | | |
| London | 5,000 | 21 | 7,000 | 31 |
| South-East | 6,000 | 31 | 8,000 | 41 |
| South-West | 4,500 | 37 | 6,000 | 48 |
| Eastern | 2,500 | 18 | 4,000 | 32 |
| East Midlands | 3,000 | 27 | 4,500 | 41 |
| West Midlands | 6,000 | 40 | 7,000 | 46 |
| North-West (Manchester) | 3,000 | 38 | 3,500 | 43 |
| North-West | 3,500 | 35 | 5,000 | 52 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 5,000 | 38 | 6,000 | 45 |
| Northern | 2,000 | 34 | 3,000 | 45 |

*Notes:*
Base: Establishments with 25 or more employees.
Estimated numbers of establishments have been individually rounded to the nearest 500 or 1,000 as appropriate depending on sample size.
*Source:*
Skill Needs in Britain 1994 and 1995.

*Table 2: Small establishments offering NVQs to their employees 1994–95*

| | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Great Britain | 144,000 | 13 |
| Wales | 9,000 | 16 |
| Scotland | 8,000 | 8 |
| England | 128,000 | 13 |
| *TEED Regions* | | |
| London | 10,000 | 5 |
| South-East | 29,000 | 18 |
| South-West | 14,000 | 14 |
| Eastern | 11,000 | 10 |
| East Midlands | 9,000 | 13 |
| West Midlands | 13,000 | 13 |
| North-West (Greater Manchester) | 15,000 | 24 |
| North-West | 8,000 | 11 |
| Yorks and Humberside | 14,000 | 14 |
| Northern | 5,000 | 13 |

*Notes:*
Base: Establishments with less than 25 employees.
Estimated numbers are rounded to the nearest 1,000. Figures for Greater Manchester region should be treated with greater caution than those for other regions because they are based on only 95 interviews.

*Source:*
Skill Needs of Small Firms in Britain 1994–95.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the mobile phones which have been supplied to her Department in each of the last eight years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11008]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1036*.

### Employment Service

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of overpayments to unemployed claimants as a result of the industrial dispute in the Employment Service agency; and if he will make a statement. [11205]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of overpayments made to unemployed claimants as a result of the current industrial dispute with the CPSA in the Employment Service.

Details of overpayments made are collected quarterly. The next set of figures will relate to the period ending 31 March. No current information is available about changes in levels of overpayments during the period since the industrial action started.

Overpayments can, and do, arise for a variety of reasons and it would be very difficult to identify separately overpayments which are directly attributable to the industrial action. To do this would require complex analysis and reporting arrangements additional to those presently in place. These would add to the burden on those ES people continuing to work in the affected offices and further hinder the ability of the Employment Service to maintain customer service during this period of industrial action.

I am sorry that I am unable to provide the information you requested.

## HEALTH

### Mortuaries

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mortuaries in *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* elsewhere had insufficient accommodation to meet demand over the Christmas period; and what plans he has to ensure adequate accommodation in the future. [9908]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally. It is for individual trusts and local authorities to plan their mortuary accommodation to meet local needs.

### Medical Negligence

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many medical negligence cases were taken out against hospitals in the north-west region in each year since 1987–88 and in 1995–96, to date; [10560]

(2) how many medical negligence cases were taken out against *(a)* hospitals in the north-west region and *(b)* each hospital in the region in each year since 1987–88; and if he will list (i) the solicitors' practices used by each hospital and (ii) the number of cases they undertook and at what cost for each of these years. [10640]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Donald Wilson, chairman of North West regional health authority, for details.

### Methadone

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in methadone prescribing in south-east Northumberland since 1990; and what was the cost. [10626]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Jackie Axelby, chief executive of Northumberland Health, for details.

### Meals on Wheels

**Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in ascending order the amount charged by each county council for the provision of meals on wheels. [10419]

**Mr. Bowis:** The information requested is not available centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which publishes information on charges for services in its "Personal Social Services Statistics, Actuals and Estimates".

### Acute Beds

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of acute beds *(a)* closed in 1995 and *(b)* opened since 1 January 1996. [10752]

**Mr. Horam:** The information available centrally provides details of the average daily number of available acute beds in each national health service trust. The latest year for which data are available is 1994–95 and this information is published annually in "Bed Availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library. Organisational changes may mean that the data for each trust may not be strictly comparable over time.

### NHS Staff (Assaults)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assaults occurred against NHS staff in each of the last five years. [10919]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *948*.

### NHS Finance

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1141*, on health authority general allocations, in what way the national weighted capitation formula differs from the York university recommendations. [10921]

**Mr. Horam:** The national weighted capitation formula does not differ from the recommendations made by York university in its report entitled "A Formula for Distributing NHS Revenues Based on Small Area Use of Hospital Beds".

### Consultants

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent female and male consultants there were in England at September 1994. [10751]

**Mr. Malone:** The information is shown in the table.

*Male and female consultants in England as at 30 September 1994—whole-time equivalents*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Male | 12,930 |
| Female | 2,710 |

### Suicide

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his policies to reduce the suicide rate. [10747]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Government's "The Health of the Nation" strategy set a target of reducing the rate of suicide by 15 per cent. between 1990 and the year 2000. Figures based on estimates provided by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys show that the suicide rate in England fell by around 7 per cent. between 1992 and 1994. A wide range of initiatives are being pursued to this end. The key themes of our suicide prevention work are improving mental health services, increasing public awareness of mental health issues, targeting occupational and demographic groups at particular risk of suicide, and reducing access to means.

### Patient Hotels

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts which have opened patient hotels indicating in each case *(a)* the location, *(b)* number of beds, *(c)* average bed occupancy rates, *(d)* the revenue cost of provision per occupied bed per day, *(e)* the opening date and *(f)* and the capital cost and in each case if the funding was (i) from NHS capital, (ii) by the private finance initiative and (iii) from other sources. [11109]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally. It is a matter for local management.

### Specialised Services

**Mr. Coe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements he has made to support the purchasing of highly specialised services. [11704]

**Mr. Malone:** Following an internal review initiated by the chief medical officer into the provision of specialised services within the national health service, I have agreed that a new group be established to advise on the purchasing of specialised services. The new group is to be known as the national specialist commissioning advisory group and I have today placed in the Library the group's terms of reference and a list of its appointed members. The NSCAG will take over work currently carried out by the supra-regional services advisory group.

### Long-term Care

**Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will respond to the Health Committee's first report, HC19, on long-term care. [11821]

**Mr. Bowis:** We have today published the Government's response to this report, copies of which are in the Library.

We welcomed the report's recognition of the priority we are attaching to implementation of our guidance on national health service responsibilities for continuing health care. Our response emphasises our commitment to securing, over time, significant improvements in the provision of continuing health care and much greater consistency in these services across the country.

### Residential Care

**Sir Michael Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the statutory responsibilities to the social services departments of local authorities in respect of the provision of permanent residential care for those individuals who have exhausted their savings paying for private residential care. [8802]

**Mr. Bowis:** Since April 1993 local authorities have had a responsibility to arrange accommodation in residential care and nursing homes for elderly people who, for whatever reason, are assessed as needing such care but are unable to meet the cost.

Elderly people who entered independent sector homes before April 1993 will have preserved rights to the higher rates of income support and are the statutory responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. If they face eviction from a residential care home, local social service authorities have powers to make alternative arrangements.

Regulations and guidance were issued to local authorities and health authorities in March 1993 detailing their powers to help people who were resident in independent sector residential care and nursing homes on 31 March 1993 and who have preserved rights to the higher levels of income support. Copies of circular LAC(93)6 are available in the Library.

### Intensive Care Beds (Yorkshire)

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adult intensive care beds were available in each health area in Yorkshire in each of the last 15 years; and what was their occupancy rate. [10326]

**Mr. Horam:** Available information on the average daily number of adult intensive care beds, for 1988–89 to 1994–95, is published annually in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library. Information on bed occupancy rates is not available centrally.

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive care beds for children were available in each health area in Yorkshire in each of the last 15 years; and what was their occupancy rate. [10362]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally. The national health service executive arranged for Sheffield children's hospital to co-ordinate the monitoring of occupancy and demand for beds at 17 paediatric intensive care units in England for the period to 31 March.

### Deaths (Winter Months)

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of deaths of those aged 60 years or above, registered in each week, in each region, since the beginning of November 1995 until the most recent week. [10553]

**Mr. Horam:** Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' weekly death figures are a best estimate of the number of deaths registered over the whole of England and Wales. A regional analysis is not available for the most recent weeks. The latest available regional data are for the last week of 1995.

The provisional numbers of deaths of those aged 60 years or over, registered in each week, in each health region of residence, from the beginning of November to the end of December 1995, are shown in the table.

*Total weekly death registrations of those age 60 and over by health region of residence, November and December 1995*

*Weekly death registrations.*

*Week ending:*

| *Health region of residence* | *3 November 1995* | *10 November 1995* | *17 November 1995* | *24 November 1995* | *1 December 1995* | *8 December 1995* | *15 December 1995* | *22 December 1995* | *29 December 1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern | 561 | 545 | 579 | 614 | 592 | 575 | 624 | 739 | 673 |
| Yorkshire | 682 | 717 | 688 | 742 | 783 | 806 | 821 | 896 | 907 |
| Trent | 841 | 896 | 860 | 948 | 936 | 1,030 | 1,028 | 1,066 | 1,036 |
| East Anglia | 478 | 504 | 475 | 532 | 514 | 542 | 585 | 669 | 551 |
| North-west Thames | 442 | 449 | 481 | 478 | 503 | 527 | 531 | 578 | 467 |
| North-east Thames | 588 | 613 | 659 | 682 | 633 | 704 | 775 | 767 | 724 |
| South-east Thames | 685 | 705 | 762 | 751 | 723 | 723 | 920 | 990 | 742 |
| South-west Thames | 494 | 547 | 583 | 565 | 532 | 635 | 692 | 713 | 598 |
| Wessex | 588 | 665 | 692 | 648 | 686 | 607 | 692 | 788 | 737 |
| Oxford | 402 | 351 | 352 | 423 | 483 | 428 | 454 | 524 | 519 |
| South Western | 727 | 658 | 700 | 711 | 797 | 741 | 823 | 928 | 817 |
| West Midlands | 950 | 984 | 949 | 1,123 | 1,126 | 1,120 | 1,309 | 1,236 | 1,011 |
| Mersey | 394 | 457 | 456 | 475 | 547 | 504 | 582 | 598 | 591 |

*Total weekly death registrations of those age 60 and over by health region of residence, November and December 1995*

*Weekly death registrations.*

*Week ending:*

| *Health region of residence* | *3 November 1995* | *10 November 1995* | *17 November 1995* | *24 November 1995* | *1 December 1995* | *8 December 1995* | *15 December 1995* | *22 December 1995* | *29 December 1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Western | 822 | 852 | 919 | 916 | 881 | 928 | 1,017 | 1,089 | 905 |
| Wales | 571 | 591 | 622 | 648 | 688 | 659 | 694 | 779 | 737 |
| Other[1] | 46 | 70 | 62 | 80 | 126 | 139 | 121 | 197 | 195 |
| Total | 9,271 | 9,604 | 9,839 | 10,336 | 10,550 | 10,668 | 11,668 | 12,557 | 11,210 |

[1] Other includes deaths to non-residents of England and Wales and deaths which have not yet been coded.

## Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have been held between his Department and local authority associations concerning the Children Act 1989 and its implementation for the need of asylum seekers' children following the implementation of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [11079]

**Mr. Bowis:** The implications of the benefit changes of asylum seekers and their children were discussed as part of a regular series of meetings between my officials and officers of the local authority associations. Discussions have continued informally. Department of Health and Department of the Environment officials are meeting the local authority associations to discuss details of a special grant which will assist local authorities with any unavoidable additional costs arising under homelessness legislation of the Children Act.

## Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the mobile telephones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11010]

**Mr. Horam:** There have been five instances of cloning in the Department in 1995.

## Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish details of the consortia that have been successful in private finance initiative bids. [11211]

**Mr. Horam:** The main contractors, where their details are available, who have successfully bid for private finance initiative schemes with a capital value over £1 million are shown in the table. Information on smaller schemes is not available centrally.

*List of approved private finance schemes by region—main contractors*

| *Scheme* | *Contractor* |
|---|---|
| *Northern and Yorkshire* | |
| Royal Victoria: magnetic resonance imager | GVD Finance (Siemens Group) |
| Yorkshire RHA: clinical waste incinerator | YWE (Yorkshire Water Enterprises) |
| St. James's University Hospital: combined heat and power plant | YCL Ltd. (Yorkshire Cogan Ltd.) |
| Tees Health Authority: residential accommodation for elderly and elderly mentally ill | ANS Ltd. (Associated Nursing Services) |
| South Tyneside: pathology services | Cleveland Medical Laboratories Ltd. |
| Royal Victoria Infirmary: car park | Centreland Group/Gordon Durham/Dent |
| United Leeds Teaching Hospital: power station | ULTH Charitable Trust/Medley |
| *Trent* | |
| Leicester Mental Health: office accommodation | Raynsway Properties Ltd. |
| Doncaster Health Care NHS Trust: clinical waste incinerator | Motherwell Bridge Envirotec Ltd. |
| *Anglia and Oxford* | |
| North Bedfordshire Health Authority: residential accommodation for elderly mentally ill | Health and Care (UK) Ltd. |
| Royal Berks. and Battle: car park etc. | Proteam (Hemdean Investments and Lovell Construction) |
| South Buckinghamshire: new district general hospital | Healthcare Group (Taylor Woodrow, Nexus, NWS Bank, Granada TFM, CODA, Hoare Lea and Partners, Waterman Partnership, Northcroft) |
| *North Thames* | |
| Ealing Hammersmith and Hounslow: office accommodation | Sun Life Properties |
| New River Health Authority: office accommodation | Markheath PLC |
| Kensington Chelsea and Westminster: staff accommodation | Higgs and Hill |
| Brent and Harrow: residential accommodation elderly mentally ill | CHS Ltd. |
| Herts. Health Agency: office accommodation | Possfund Custodian Trustees |
| Hillingdon Health Agency: office accommodation | Hayes Cottage Nursing Home Ltd. |
| North Herts. NHS Trust: pathology services | UCL Engineering |
| Havering Hospital NHS Trust: estates services | Honeywell Control Systems Ltd. |
| *South Thames* | |
| South-East London Commissioning Agency and Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham FHSA: office accommodation | Parks Incorporated |

*List of approved private finance schemes by region—main contractors*

| *Scheme* | *Contractor* |
|---|---|
| Kings Healthcare: clinical waste incinerator | Clinical Waste Ltd. |
| South-East Kent Health Authority: clinical waste incinerator | Dyvells |
| East Sussex Health Authority: nursing homes | ANS Ltd. |
| Kent and Canterbury Hospital: staff accommodation | Bradford and Northern Housing Association |
| Frimley Park Hospital: magnetic resonance imager | Lister Bestcare |
| Epsom General Practitioner Fundholders: day surgery unit | EMP (Environmental and Medical Products) Ltd. |
| Eastbourne Hospitals: clinical waste incinerator | Clinical Waste Ltd. |
| Merton Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority: residential accommodation for elderly mentally ill | Haven Healthcare PLC |
| Mid Sussex (Princess Royal Hospital): magnetic resonance imager | The Diagnostic Co. Ltd. (now Westminster Healthcare) |
| St. Peters Hospital: housing redevelopment and management | Landmark Housing Association/Hunter and Partners architects/Bird and Bird legal |
| *South and West* | |
| Plymouth and Torbay Health Authority: clinical waste incinerator | South and West Water PLC and Hull Waste Co. |
| Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch: clinical waste incinerator | Whiterose Environmental |
| *West Midlands region* | |
| Alexandra Healthcare: clinical waste incinerator | Medical Waste International Ltd. |
| Birmingham Heartlands: car park | Transcare |
| Herefordshire Community Health: office accommodation | Belmont Abbey |
| *North-West* | |
| Oldham Hospital NHS Trust: clinical waste incinerator | White Rose Environmental |
| Bolton Health Authority: clinical waste incinerator | White Rose Environmental |
| North Manchester NHS Trust: magnetic resonance imager | Lister Bestcare |
| Royal Liverpool University Hospital: car park | Transcare Health Ltd./Team Services UK Ltd. |
| Aintree Hospitals: patient hotel | St. Andrews Homes/Sedex House |

## NHS Staff Salaries

**Mr Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the salary costs of employing *(a)* general and senior managers, *(b)* administrative and clerical staff and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff in each year since 1989–90. [11212]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is contained in table 7.9 of "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England," produced annually by the Department of Health, copies of which are available in the Library. Provisional figures for 1994–95 are shown in the table.

*Hospital and Community Health Service expenditure 1994–95*

| | £000 |
|---|---|
| General and senior managers | 723,361 |
| Nurses and midwives | 6,184,015 |
| Administrative and clerical | 1,582,129 |

*Source:*
1. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.
2. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

## Under-age Working

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inspections of work places have been undertaken in each year since 1979; and how many have revealed under-age working. [10774]

**Mr. Bowis:** The information is not available centrally.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to the need for further protection for children against illegal employment; and if he will make a statement. [11002]

**Mr. Bowis:** I consider that the current legal system for protecting children who choose to work is adequate. Enforcement of the law in this area is a matter for local authorities.

# FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

## Departmental Officials

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *408*, (1) if he will place in the Library a list of all those of his Department's officials who have disclosed a current interest, indicating where they are based and the industry and the nature of the interest they have; [10476]

(2) how many of his Department's officials have a current interest which they have disclosed; how many are based overseas; and how many have an interest with a business concern that is associated with the arms trade. [10475]

**Mr. Hanley:** We are unable to provide the information without incurring disproportionate cost.

## Tibet

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of China about religious freedom in Tibet and about the refusal of the Chinese authorities to recognise the Tibetan candidate for Panchen Lama; and if he will make a statement. [10424]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about the situation in Tibet during his discussions with the Chinese Prime Minister, and with the Chinese Foreign Minister, during his visit to Peking earlier this month.

We regret that the Chinese Government and the Tibetan religious leaders have been unable to reach agreement on the selection of the new Panchen Lama. We will continue to urge the Chinese authorities to enter into a dialogue with the Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, without preconditions, and to ensure the adequate protection of the distinct cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious identity of the Tibetans.

### Pakistan (Murder)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest information he has received from the Pakistani authorities in respect of the investigation into the murder of Mohammed Afzal in Jaurah village, Pakistan on 4 October 1992. [10876]

**Mr. Hanley:** The Pakistani authorities have provided no further information about their inquiries into the murder of Mohammed Afzal. Since Mr. Afzal was a dual national they are not compelled to do so.

### Gulf States (Human Rights)

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning abuse of human rights in *(a)* Saudi Arabia, *(b)* Bahrain, *(c)* Oman and *(d)* other Gulf states during 1995; and if he will make a statement. [11090]

**Mr. Hanley:** We have received a number of representations from various groups and individuals concerning human rights in the Gulf countries.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *589*, who provided external legal advice for Ministers in the Department in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10924]

**Mr. Hanley:** The names of the individuals and their legal advisers are confidential to them.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the responsibilities of the staff employed in his Department in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10988]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The responsibilities of staff in the FCO employed on matters relating to the inquiry are to provide Ministers and officials with advice on matters arising from the inquiry, and to liaise with the inquiry.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions staff employed in his Department in relation to the Scott inquiry have had on matters related to the Scott inquiry with persons *(a)* employed by and *(b)* working as consultants for Conservative central office; and what subjects were discussed. [10989]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* None.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10071]

**Mr. David Davis** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* It is the Government's policy that EC directives should not be gold plated by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [10059]

**Mr. David Davis** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments. Work on this is being co-ordinated by the deregulation unit of the Cabinet Office.

### Official Gifts

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the official gifts received by Ministers in his Department in 1994–95. [10162]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 May 1995 by the then Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), *Official Report*, column *532*.

### Heads of Mission (Official Uniform)

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those missions where official uniforms are worn on ceremonial occasions by the head of missions. [10240]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Official uniforms are worn on ceremonial occasions by the heads of mission in:

Bangkok, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brussels (embassy), The Hague, Holy See, Luxembourg, Madrid, Rabat, Tokyo, Mbabane.

Governors wear uniform on ceremonial occasions in the following territories:

Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland and Dependencies, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Montserrat, St. Helena and dependencies, Turks and Caicos Islands.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms

disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees; [10951]

(2) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10952]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, is fully committed to the private finance initiative and is exploring the use of private capital for projects in a number of areas, including the home and overseas estate, information technology and other technical equipment. None of these projects has yet reached the tender stage.

### Gultasab Hussain

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is to be taken on the application made in Islamabad by Gultasab Hussain—Ref. Imm/c 8645; and H.O. H366271—to join his wife in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [10996]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* I have asked the high commission at Islamabad for details and will arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit as soon as possible.

### Civil Personnel (Costs)

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 December to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), *Official Report*, column *576*, if he will publish the total estimated salaries and associated expenses of civil personnel in his Department located in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the United Kingdom for the latest available year; and if he will make a statement. [9359]

**Mr. Hanley:** The cost of salaries, including national insurance and superannuation, for staff in the FCO diplomatic wing, Overseas Development Administration and executive agencies in 1994–95 was:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| England | 125,223,000 |
| Scotland | 9,250,000 |
| Total | 134,473,000 |

There are no staff located in Wales or Northern Ireland.

### China

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Beijing. [10356]

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *10*.

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of hon. Members who have made representations to him concerning the television programme "The Dying Rooms". [10328]

**Mr. Hanley:** Those hon. Members who have made representations to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary have done so in confidence on behalf of constituents. It would be a breach of that confidence to provide the list requested.

Questions have been tabled in the House by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill, (Mr. Alton), and in another place by Lord Braine of Wheatley. Early-day motion 245, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), also addressed this subject.

### China and Iran (Entry Clearance)

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords are not allowed to enter China and Iran; and if he will make a statement. [10470]

**Mr. Hanley:** We are not aware of any bans on hon. Members entering China or Iran. We do our best to assist with the travel plans of hon. Members, but entry clearance to the People's Republic of China and to the Islamic Republic of Iran is ultimately a matter for the authorities of those countries.

### Saudi Arabia

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of democracy in Saudi Arabia. [11019]

**Mr. Hanley:** The Government of Saudi Arabia have taken significant steps in recent years to expand the consultative process. We welcome this progress.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings have been held with representatives of the Government of Saudi Arabia concerning human rights; and if he will make a statement. [11021]

**Mr. Hanley:** We and our European Union partners discuss human rights regularly with the Saudi Arabian Government.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with the Government of Saudi Arabia concerning the asylum request of Dr. al-Masari; and if he will make a statement. [10847]

**Mr. Hanley:** The presence and activities of Dr. al-Masari in the United Kingdom have been raised by the Saudi authorities on a number of occasions. The Saudis have been told that Her Majesty's Government disapprove of Dr. al-Masari's activities, but that he would be treated strictly in accordance with UK and international law.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the mobile telephones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11011]

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) on 7 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *340*. The overall incidence of cloning of phones issued to the diplomatic wing is listed:

1988–1993 = none

1994 October = 2 phones

1995 January = 1 phone

1995 February = 1 phone

1995 March = 4 phones

1995 April = 1 phone

1995 May = 1 phone

1995 June = 2 phones

1995 July to present = none

No mobile phones used by the aid wing have been cloned.

### World Service (Oman Transmitter)

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the impact on the BBC World Service of using the private finance initiative in the construction of the Oman transmitter; and what proposals he has to deal with the consequences of such a proposal. [11245]

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *560-61*. The impact on the BBC World Service of successfully applying the private finance initiative would be positive and the consequences would be a matter for discussion with them. The project referred to by the hon. Member is still the subject of detailed negotiations.

### Sierra Leone

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the feasibility of holding free and fair elections in Sierra Leone on 26 February. [10471]

**Mr. Hanley:** We have welcomed the assurance by the new Head of State that he intends to maintain the election timetable. Provided progress is maintained, we shall continue to provide support for the democratic transition.

### Cameroon

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the accession of Cameroon to the Commonwealth. [10472]

**Mr. Hanley:** The Government welcome Cameroon's entry into the Commonwealth. We look forward to Cameroon's contribution to the full range of Commonwealth activities.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Executive Agencies

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [9145]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** Responsibility for this matter is delegated to agency chief executives and I have asked them to reply to the hon. Member direct.

*Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

ACTION TO SAFEGUARD THE PROVISION OF PRE-RETIREMENT COURSES

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses. The Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

CSL has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Establishments Group of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Under this MOU the Ministry's Welfare Branch is required to invite CSL staff aged 58 years and over to attend pre-retirement courses at some stage during their last two years of employment. Whilst staff are encouraged to attend such courses there is no compulsion to do so. There are no proposals at present to alter these arrangements.

In cases of Voluntary Early Retirement or Severance the Department has negotiated with consultants to provide counselling and career services and with financial advisers to provide independent advice to Agency staff. Again this is on a voluntary basis and there is no compulsion on staff to take advantage of the services offered.

*Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on action being taken by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (known as the Central Veterinary Laboratory until 30 September 1995) to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses.

MAFF provides pre-retirement courses which staff from the Veterinary Laboratories Agency attend as appropriate, and for which the Agency repays the service provider.

*Letter from C. J. Lawson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

In my Chief Executive's absence, the Minister has asked me to reply to your question about pre-retirement courses for staff of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). This is an operational matter for which my chief executive is responsible. *(9145)*

The VMD has a formal agreement with the Establishments Group of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for the provision of personnel services. Under this agreement the Welfare branch of the Ministry is required to invite all VMD staff aged 57 or over (or otherwise if appropriate) to "Preparation for Retirement" seminars. This arrangement works well and VMD staff have benefited from the pre-retirement courses run by the Ministry. There are no proposals to change this arrangement.

*Letter form G. K. Bruce to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question about the provision of pre-retirement courses for staff within the Agency. *(9145)*

PSD has a Service Level Agreement with its parent Department—the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. Under this agreement the Welfare Branch of the Ministry is required to invite

all PSD staff aged 57 or over (or otherwise if appropriate) to "Preparation for Retirement" seminars. This arrangement works well and I am not aware of any proposal to change it.

*Letter from P. Needham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to you concerning your Parliamentary question (PQ384) in which you asked what action heads of his Department's Executive Agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses.*(9145)*

ADAS will continue to offer pre-retirement courses as appropriate.

*Letter from J. McNeill to Mr. M. Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service, your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerning pre-retirement courses has been passed to me for reply with regard to this Executive Agency.*(9145)*

As you may know, the Meat Hygiene Service was established on 1 April 1995. The Agency is committed to the providing staff with suitable preparation for retirement and intends to make use of MAFF's training facilities in this respect, as the need arises.

## Official Hospitality

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much was spent on official hospitality by agencies associated with his Department in *(a)* 1993–94 and 1994–95; what is projected for 1995–96. [9167]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter is delegated to agency chief executives and I have asked them to reply to the hon. Member direct.

*Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question concerning hospitality.[9167]

The following amounts have been spent on official hospitality for the three years concerned:

| | | £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | Actual expenditure | 380 |
| 1994–95 | Actual expenditure | 422 |
| 1995–96 | Projected expenditure | 1,400 |

*Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 23 January 1996:*

EXPENDITURE ON OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to provide information for his executive agencies on official hospitality expenditure in each financial year since 1993/94. The Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

Total expenditure for each of the years in question is as follows:

1993/94: £4.7K

1994/95: £10.4K

1995/96: £23.0K (estimated)

The Agency was significantly enlarged in April 1994 following the merger with the MAFF Food Science Laboratories at Norwich and Aberdeen, and this is reflected in increased expenditure from 1994/95.

*Letter from P. Needham to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to you concerning your Parliamentary question (PQ385) in which you asked how much was spent on official hospitality by agencies associated with his Department in *(a)* 1994–95 and 1994–95; and what is projected for 1995–96.

The costs incurred by ADAS on official hospitality for each of the last two years are as follows:

1993/94: £14,197

1994/95: £20,086

There is no projected figure available for 1995/96.

*Letter from J. McNeill to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 23 January 1996:*

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service, your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerning official hospitality has been passed to me to reply with regard to this Executive Agency.

As you may know, the Meat Hygiene Service was established on 1 April, 1995. Therefore, there was no such expenditure in the year 1993/94. In 94/95, prior to the Agency's launch, £10,580 was spent on hospitality and current projections for this financial year are for a total of circa £7,000.

*Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on official hospitality by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for each year since 1993/94, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.(9167)

Expenditure on official hospitality, which principally covers buffet lunches for industry liaison meetings and advisory groups, was as follows:

1993/94: £1,034.63

1994/95: £1,817.26

It is anticipated that expenditure in 1995/96 will not exceed £1,000.

*Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question concerning spending on official hospitality in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (known as the Central Veterinary Laboratory until 30 September 1995).(9167)

The amounts spent on official hospitality in 1993/94 and 1994/95 were £16,720 and £12,076 respectively. I will write to you next week with projected figures for 1995/96.

*Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 23 January 1996:*

I promised to write this week with the projected figures for spending on hospitality in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) for 1995/96.

The VLA was established on 1 October 1995, from the merger of the existing Central Veterinary Laboratory with the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was part of the State Veterinary Service. To provide this information it was necessary to incorporate expected spending from October 1995 to March 1996 by the former VI Service.

Full year spending on official hospitality in the Agency is projected to be £16,400.

## Intervention Beef

**Dr. Strang:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is his estimate of the average cost in the United Kingdom of storing 1 tonne of intervention beef for one year, including the depreciation of the value of the beef; [9468]

(2) what is his estimate of the average cost in the United Kingdom of storing 1 tonne of intervention beef for one year, excluding the depreciation of the value of the beef; [9467]

(3) what is his estimate of the difference between the value of a tonne of beef taken into intervention in the United Kingdom, and the value of that beef upon leaving intervention after one year in intervention. [9469]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Intervention Board to reply to the hon. Member direct.

*Letter from G. Trevelyan to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions (9467, 9468 and 9469) tabled for answer on Wednesday 17 January 1996:

"To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the average cost in the United Kingdom of storing one tonne of intervention beef for one year, excluding the depreciation of the value of the beef. (9467)

To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate for the average cost in the United Kingdom of storing one tonne of intervention beef for one year, including the depreciation of the value of the beef. (9468)

To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the difference between the value of a tonne of beef taken into intervention in the United Kingdom and the value of that beef upon leaving intervention after one year in intervention. (9469)"

Intervention beef is stored in commercial cold stores. The rates paid by the Agency are determined by open competition and can vary in line with changes in the demand for cold storage. The average costs of storing intervention beef for one year, including inspection, receipt, handling and delivering out charges is about £120 per tonne (excluding VAT).

For budgetary purposes the EC Regulations require the book value of beef taken into intervention to be depreciated on entry by 60% of its purchase price to bring it more into line with the foreseeable price at which it might subsequently be sold. Beef is purchased in the form of fresh carcasses which have a higher market value than the stored frozen product. Currently depreciation on entry would be £1,759 on a tonne of beef purchased at £2,932. Decisions are taken by the Commission at the end of each of their financial years, ending 15 October, as to whether further changes in the valuation of stocks are needed to reflect market price movements. It is not possible to predict the extent to which this may give rise to further costs in the form of depreciated stock values.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the House of Commons Library and the Public Information Office.

### Whales

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received on the under-reporting of whale species by the former Soviet Union. [10150]

**Mr. Baldry:** At the meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in Mexico in 1994 the Russian Federation gave details of the inaccurate catch reporting by the former Soviet Union. Revised historical catch data were submitted to the scientific committee at the IWC meeting in Dublin in 1995 and further revised information is expected to be submitted to the scientific committee at this year's meeting of the IWC in Aberdeen.

### Set-aside Payments

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of set-aside payments are made after the date recommended by the European Commission. [10682]

**Mr. Baldry:** So far as possible, MAFF aims to make main payments under the arable area payments scheme between 16 October and 31 December, as required by European Community regulations. This year some 83 per cent. of claims were paid in that period. I regret the delay to the remainder, which was caused by the need to validate claims to the exacting standards required under the Community rules. Payment of these claims will be made as soon as possible.

### Egg Imports

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many eggs were imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and how many of those were successfully sold as British after grading. [11213]

**Mr. Baldry:** Total imports of poultry eggs in shell-fresh, preserved or cooked, not for hatching were as follows:

| | *Million dozen* |
|---|---|
| 1990 | 57.2 |
| 1991 | 34.2 |
| 1992 | 24.8 |
| 1993 | 20.7 |
| 1994 | 32.2 |
| 1995[1] | 16.7 |

[1] Year to September inclusive (provisional figure).

No records are kept on the destination of imported eggs once they have entered the UK, but we understand that the majority go for processing into egg products. We are not aware that imported shell eggs have been passed off as British.

## TRANSPORT

### National Rail Timetable

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that Railtrack should be required to continue to publish a national rail timetable. [8491]

**Mr. Watts:** It is a condition of Railtrack's network licence that it must publish, or procure the publication of, a national timetable of railway passenger services unless the Rail Regulator consents otherwise.

### Railways (Public Service Obligation Grant)

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what revenue subsidy was paid through the PSO grant to each of the rail services comprising *(a)* Great

Western Intercity, *(b)* South West Trains and *(c)* London Tilbury and Southend in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) the last year in which British Rail was wholly responsible for these services. [8492]

**Mr. Watts:** The year 1993–94 was the last year in which support payments to British Rail were made entirely under the PSO grant provisions; in 1994–95 payments were made under both the PSO provisions and under section 52 of the Railways Act 1993. In 1993–94, InterCity services received no PSO grant. Network SouthEast—formerly responsible for the services now operated by South West Trains and London Tilbury and Southend—received no PSO grant in support of revenue, but received some £372 million of PSO grant in support of investment.

Grant payments in 1994–95, the last year in which BR will have been wholly responsible for these services, are not comparable with those in 1993–94, because the basis for payment was changed, as a result of restructuring the railway industry. In 1994–95, Great Western received £57.5 million, South West Trains £93.7 million and London Tilbury and Southend £30.7 million. These figures included administered profits of £3 million, £3.7 million and £900,000 respectively.

### Local Authority Transport Packages

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total bid for transport packages by local authorities for the year 1996–97; how much in total has been allocated in response to these bids; and how much is represented by *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans sanctions. [8525]

**Mr. Norris:** Local authorities outside London bid a total of £685.586 million for major highway schemes, major public transport schemes and minor work in packages.

Some £78.7 million in supplementary credit approval has been allocated towards minor works in the 53 packages that were accepted for funding in 1996–97. In addition, £115.227 million has been allocated in that year towards major schemes in areas with approved packages, of which 50 per cent. is grant and 50 per cent. credit approval.

### Traffic Signs (Environmental Impact)

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if roads circular 3/95 "Traffic Signs to Tourist Attractions and Facilities in England" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", produced by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the appraisal. [10612]

**Mr. Watts:** The policy advice in circular roads 3/95 was developed in accordance with the guidance in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment". The circular itself makes it clear that consideration of environmental factors is an on-going process in signing policy decisions. We will consider whether to publish additional material in the light of developments.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of roads circular 3/95 "Traffic Signs to Tourist Attractions and Facilities in England". [10615]

**Mr. Watts:** Arrangements for monitoring are still under discussion with other interested Government Departments, including the Department of the Enviornment.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what alternative courses of action from those listed in roads circular 3/95 "Traffic Signs to Tourist Attractions and Facilities in England" were considered in the environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [10613]

**Mr. Watts:** The purpose of the circular is to develop existing traffic signing policy and practice in an environmentally acceptable way. It empowers local authorities to take appropriate decisions in individual cases in the light of local circumstances, bearing in mind environmental and other factors.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how roads circular 3/95 "Traffic Signs to Tourist Attractions and Facilities in England" was modified by the results of the environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [10614]

**Mr. Watts:** Following public consultation, the circular was modified to give greater prominence to environmental factors.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the mobile phones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11014]

**Mr. Norris:** Eleven mobile phones have been cloned as follows:

| | *Number* | *Date* |
|---|---|---|
| Central Transport Group | 4 | January 1995 |
| | 1 | May 1995 |
| | 1 | November 1995 |
| Highways Agency | 3 | September 1995 |
| Driving Standards Agency | 1 | April 1995 |
| Coastguard Agency | 1 | April 1993 |

### National Rail Information System

**Mr Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what obligations *(a)* franchisees already appointed and *(b)* potential franchisees are under (i) to participate in and (ii) to fund, a national rail information system; and if he will make a statement. [11519]

**Mr. Watts:** Existing and potential franchisees are already required to participate in a national railway information scheme. All train-operating companies on the

domestic passenger railway are members of a contractually binding scheme, administered by the Association of Train Operating Companies, which requires them, among other things, to provide the full range of information contained in the national railway timetable. The scheme ensures the continuation of the existing network of railway telephone enquiry bureaux—TEBs—sets demanding standards for improving their performance, and requires TEBs to provide impartial information to passengers. TEBs are funded by train operators under arrangements specified in the scheme.

British Rail is examining ways of increasing the capacity of the national telephone enquiry bureaux network. It will finalise its recommendations in due course.

### Rail Users' Consultative Committees

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many complaints were received by the rail users' consultative committees concerning quality of service in each of the past 12 months. [11520]

**Mr. Watts:** The information is not available in the form requested. The number of complaints about quality of service received by the RUCCs in the first three quarters of 1995 is as follows:

1st quarter: 2,592 complaints

2nd quarter: 2,209 complaints

3rd quarter: 3,322 complaints.

Figures for the last quarter of 1995 are not currently available.

### Seat Belts

**Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice the Department of Transport has offered to drivers of vans with regard to the wearing of seat belts; and what additional publicity on the need to wear seat belts and the value of doing so is planned. [11247]

**Mr. Norris:** Van drivers, like all drivers, are advised to wear seat belts whenever they are in their vehicles, using the legal exemptions only as far as necessary. The message is simple: seat belts save lives. We are planning a further publicity campaign for March to emphasise this fact.

**Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the latest available annual figures for the number of deaths, serious injuries and slight injuries to van drivers and passengers; what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of seat belts in reducing injury to van occupants; what is the current seat belt wearing rate for van drivers and passengers; and what percentage of journeys made by van is exempt from the requirement that their occupants must wear seat belts because the vehicle is engaged in local deliveries. [11248]

**Mr. Norris:** Some 53 drivers and 11 passengers were killed in light goods vehicles in 1994. Some 734 drivers and 303 passengers were seriously injured and 4,552 drivers and 1,901 passengers were slightly injured in these vehicles in that year. The proportion of these not wearing seat belts is not known. A survey in October 1995 showed that 65 per cent. of drivers and 56 per cent. of van passengers were wearing belts. We do not know, however, how many of those not wearing belts were carrying out local deliveries and therefore exempt. Clearly, seat belts play a vital role in saving drivers and passengers in vans, as in other vehicles, from death and serious injury.

### Kerbside Emission Tests

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many kerbside emission tests have been undertaken by the Vehicle Inspectorate in each of the last three years; and how many notices have been issued to drivers as a result of these tests. [11243]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from R. J. Oliver to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of kerbside emission tests in each of the last years and how many notices have been issued.

Information is not held which differentiates between checks carried out as the roadside and those done, for instance, at operators' premises. The attached table shows the total number of special checks for emissions and the total number of prohibitions issued in each of the last three years.

The reason for the increase in prohibition rates between 1992/3 and 1994/5 is due mainly to the introduction of objective measurement of diesel smoke.

*Number of emission inspections and prohibitions issued for the last three years*

| | 1994–95 | | 1993–94 | | 1992–93 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Inspections* | *Prohibitions* | *Inspections* | *Prohibitions* | *Inspections* | *Prohibitions* |
| HGV | 12,959 | 450 | 10,589 | 219 | 5,706 | 37 |
| PSV | 7,292 | 184 | 5,165 | 145 | 4,647 | 77 |
| Cars and light commercial vehicles | 70,899 | 2,580 | 33,103 | 223 | 4,759 | 23 |

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees; [10972]

(2) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in

cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10973]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Attracting private finance for infrastructure investment affects policy work throughout the Department and the related expenditure on running costs cannot be estimated in isolation.

Departmental expenditure on external consultants engaged in work related to tendering private finance projects over the period in question is as follows:

*Expenditure (£ thousand)*

| | *(a) 1995–96 prices* | *(b) Cash terms* |
|---|---|---|
| (i) Legal fees | 5,950 | 5,850 |
| (ii) Publicity costs | 50 | 50 |
| (iii) Accountancy fees | 700 | 700 |
| (iv) Management consultancy fees | 5,650 | 5,600 |

### Transport Blueprint

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which individuals and organisations have responded to the consultation exercise instigated by his Department to produce a transport blueprint for the next century; if he will make the responses publicly available; and what plans he has to issue a Green Paper on these issues. [11241]

**Sir George Young:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the replies given to him on 7 November, *Official Report*, column *755*.

### Motorway Services

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current cost of managing the freeholds of motorway service areas. [11192]

**Mr. Watts:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *498–99*.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to ensure that motorway service stations provide *(a)* adequate toilet facilities 24 hours a day and *(b)* disabled toilet facilities. [11631]

**Mr. Watts:** The operator of any motorway service area signposted from the motorway is required to provide a range of specified facilities 24 hours a day. The requirements include sufficient free toilets to cater reasonably for the amount of traffic using the motorway and facilities for disabled people. The Highways Agency investigates any report that these facilities are not being provided and, where necessary, takes action to ensure that the position is remedied.

### Rail Privatisation, (Isle of Wight)

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy in respect of the franchising of rail services on the Isle of Wight; and if he will make a statement. [11228]

**Mr. Watts:** The island line has been vested as an autonomous wholly owned subsidiary of the British Railways Board and will be franchised in accordance with the franchising director's timetable in due course.

### Minibuses

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions exist to ensure that the safety of minibuses conforms to an agreed standard, with particular reference to safe seating. [11097]

**Mr. Norris:** All minibuses are subject to the general safety requirements of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. Minibuses first used on or after 1 April 1988 must comply with the seating standards laid down in schedule 6 to these regulations.

I intend to lay regulations in February which will require minibuses used specifically for the carriage of children to be fitted with a minimum of a lap belt on a forward facing seat for each child carried.

### Technology Foresight Panel

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the recommendations of the technology foresight panel on transport; if he will list the organisations involved; and what funding his Department is providing. [11317]

**Mr. Norris:** My Department welcomes the findings of the technology foresight initiative, particularly the recommendations of the transport panel. The Department's research activities already reflect a reasonable alignment with the transport panel's recommendations, and will develop taking its findings fully into account.

The Department aims to lend support as far as possible to the panel's two infrastructure projects: the informed traveller and urban clear zones. My officials are actively pursuing, with the members of the transport panel, how these projects can best be supported.

My Department will be announcing shortly a new LINK research programme which will reflect the technology foresight recommendations. In addition, my Department is participating with other public and private sector organisations in a project which has been submitted for support under the foresight challenge scheme—launched by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology on 25 September 1995. However, I am not yet in a position to list any organisations or the resources involved.

### Channel Tunnel Rail Link

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the result of the channel tunnel rail link competition; and if an international and domestic station will be built at Stratford as part of the channel tunnel rail link project. [10879]

**Mr. Watts:** We expect to make an announcement soon about the choice of private sector promoter for the channel tunnel rail link project. We hope to make an announcement about a station at Stratford to a similar time scale.

### Railway Freight

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number and locations of railway freight handling facilities in and around London which *(a)* can handle containers and *(b)* are warehouses where goods carried by train can be broken down and forwarded by road. [10881]

**Mr. Watts:** This information is not held centrally.

### Lorry Drivers (EC Sight Testing Regulations)

**Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about new EC sight testing regulations for lorry drivers; if under these regulations moderately sighted drivers wearing glasses would be permitted to drive; and if he will make a statement. [10672]

**Mr. Norris:** In response to a public consultation on implementing the eyesight requirements of the second EC directive on driving licences, a wide range of representative bodies and individuals offered comments. The directive introduces a higher standard of vision without glasses for lorry, and bus drivers who need to wear them for driving, in that both eyes must have an uncorrected acuity equivalent to at least 3/60 on the Snellen scale, rather than, as at present, one eye only. On that basis, the overwhelming majority of moderately sighted drivers wearing glasses would continue to be able to drive.

### Driving Licences

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to make driving licences issued in the Republic of South Africa directly exchangeable for licences issued by the Drivers and Vehicle Licensing Agency. [10681]

**Mr. Norris:** We shall shortly be consulting on proposed changes in the law which would enable most South African driving licences to be exchanged for British ones. Subject to a satisfactory outcome, we expect these changes to come into force later this year.

### Vehicle Excise Duty Evasion

**Sir John Gorst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions for vehicle excise duty evasion there were in 1994 and 1995 in the Greater London area. [10833]

**Mr. Norris:** The information requested is as follows:

*1994–95*

(a) prosecutions—43,229, (b) successful convictions 40,396.

*1995–96 (April—December)*

(a) prosecutions—34,190 (b) successful convictions 32,063.

### Light Rapid Transit Schemes

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what budget provisions exist for light rapid transit schemes in 1994–95; and what is planned for 1995–96. [11038]

**Mr. Norris:** There is no specific provision for the funding of light rapid transit schemes; these schemes are funded from the local transport capital budget, in competition with other types of local transport scheme. Some £60.2 million was allocated to light rapid transit schemes in 1994–95, and £67.7 million in 1995–96.

### Buses (North-west Region)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what support his Department has given for the greater use of buses in the North-west region. [11039]

**Mr. Norris:** In the local transport settlement for 1996–97 my Department has allocated £9 million to the Greater Manchester transport package, and a total of £1.05 million to packages in Macclesfield, Northwich, and Preston and South Ribble. All these proposals put emphasis on measures to promote the use of buses. We shall continue to fund these initiatives in future as far as resources allow.

### Mersey Docks and Harbour Company

**Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the size of Her Majesty's Government's shareholding in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company; and if he will make a statement. [10332]

**Mr. Norris:** The Government hold 12,411,795 ordinary shares in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. This shareholding is one of a number of residual holdings held by the Government in privatised companies. Her Majesty's Treasury announced on 19 September 1995 that it had appointed a financial adviser in connection with proposals, in 1995–96 and 1996–97, of residual equity holdings in these privatised companies. No decision has yet been taken on the timing or method of sale of the Government's shareholding in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company.

**Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial support Her Majesty's Government have given to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company since 1989. [10333]

**Mr. Norris:** No direct financial support has been given by the Government since the financial reconstruction of the company in 1989.

However, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company is in receipt of grant aid from several schemes with the backing of the European regional development fund. Since 1989, some £13.3. million has been made available to the company for various infrastructure and regeneration projects.

### Railtrack (Station Sales)

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it remains his policy that Railtrack should dispose of 13 independent stations; and if he will make a statement. [10310]

**Mr. Watts:** No. All stations owned by Railtrack, including the 14 major stations which it operates, will pass into the private sector with the company when it is floated in May.

### Porous Asphalt

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the use of porous asphalt for road surfacing motorways and A roads. [9904]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1996:*

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to increase the use of porous asphalt for road surfacing motorways and 'A' roads.

The Highways Agency has developed with industry a general specification to permit the use of porous asphalt. Its adoption is encouraged where conditions are suitable and where the benefits can be shown to outweigh the higher costs associated with its use.

## Coastguard Agency

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what proposals he is considering for further efficiency cuts in the Coastguard service; [9557]

(2) which Coastguard offices or stations are under consideration for closure. [9558]

**Mr. Norris:** No further efficiency measures for the Coastguard agency, other than those contained in the agency's published 1995–96 business plan, have been decided. The process of considering the 1996–97 budget is currently under way.

## Driving Standards Agency

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what has been the change in the number of unprocessed applications at the Driving Standards Agency over the last two years; [10491]

(2) what has been the average waiting time for tests from the Driving Standards Agency on a monthly basis over the last two years in each region; [10493]

(3) what assessment has he had made of the effect of the recent reduction in the number of Driving Standards Agency regional offices from 10 to five on service levels to the public; [10437]

(4) how many people have applied for driving tests in each month of the last two years at the Driving Standards Agency; [10438]

(5) how many driving tests have been cancelled by the Driving Standards Agency at short notice in the last year; [10556]

(6) what have been the annual funding and staffing levels at the Driving Standards Agency since it was established; [10492]

(7) how much compensation has been paid to people whose driving tests have been cancelled in each of the last five years. [10436]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from B. L. Herdan to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 23 January 1996:*

DRIVING STANDARDS AGENCY SERVICES—PQS 680, 683, 688, 696, 698, 699 AND 705

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Questions about the Driving Standards Agency's services.

*PQ Numbers 680 and 696/95/96: Numbers of applications and unprocessed applications over the last two years*

We have taken the reference to unprocessed applications to mean those who have applied for but not yet received a driving test. The table at Annex A shows the monthly level of applications for tests and the numbers awaiting a test at the end of each month over the last two years.

*PQ Number 683/95/96: Average waiting times*

Annex B shows the monthly average waiting time for each region over the same period. The more recent data reflects the merging of regions into our new 5 Area structure. Wales and Western were merged first; the Eastern regions (Nottingham and Cambridge) were merged with West Midlands; North West was merged with North East and the majority of South East was merged with Metropolitan (although some south eastern centres are now managed from Birmingham and some from Cardiff). We are pursuing a number of measures to improve service levels.

*PQ Number 688/95/96: Effect of reducing regional offices*

We recognise that the reorganisation changes have resulted in a number of temporary problems. These include a backlog of postal applications, misdirected mail, and poor telephone answering performance. These have been exacerbated by extremely high demand on the telephones because of the increase in queries about the new theory test and vocational test changes.

Additional staff together with new and more efficient telephone systems are now in place which provide much better management information. We are setting higher service standards in next year's business plan and are confident that once the transition period is over the service offered by the 5 offices will be superior to that offered previously by the ten.

*PQ Numbers 698 and 705/95/96: Short notice cancellations and compensation levels*

Annex C shows the numbers of driving tests we have had to cancel at short notice, other than when the weather was too poor to enable a test to be conducted, over the last year. The following table summarises the compensation paid to customers whose tests were cancelled at short notice:

£

| *Year* | *Compensation* |
|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 264,665 |
| 1991–92 | 244,468 |
| 1992–93 | 186,912 |
| 1993–94 | 205,853 |
| 1994–95 | 124,435 |
| 1995–96 | [1]79,021 |

[1]The figure for the current year shows the amounts paid for the nine months to 31 December 1995.

*PQ Number 699/95/96: Funding and staffing levels*

The Agency is a non statutory on-Vote trading body whose current expenses are not classified as public expenditure. Its full costs are recovered through fees and charges and it has been producing audited commercial style accounts since 1992–93. The following table shows the Agency's net resource costs in cash prices and the numbers of full time equivalent staff employed for the five years since the Agency was established. The figures for the current year are our latest forecasts of outturn.

| *Year* | *Costs £000s* | *Staffing* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 49,914 | 2,105 |
| 1991–92 | 51,808 | 2,192 |
| 1992–93 | 50,786 | 1,898 |
| 1993–94 | 48,064 | 1,805 |
| 1994–95 | 48,505 | 1,789 |
| 1995–96 | 50,288 | 1,811 |

## SCOTLAND

### Bail Hostels

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to establish a bail hostel in each sheriffdom in Scotland. [7752]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Accommodation for persons on bail is currently available in the sheriffdoms of Glasgow and Strathkelvin, Lothian and Borders, Grampian, Highlands and Islands, and Tayside, Central and Fife. There are plans to establish further provision within the sheriffdom of Tayside, Central and Fife. There are no plans to establish a bail hostel in every sheriffdom.

### National Museums and Galleries

**Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the attendance figures for 1995 reported by the national museums and galleries in Scotland, broken down into the individual institutions but including their substations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1994. [9016]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The information is as follows:

| | *1995* | *Percentage change since 1994* |
|---|---|---|
| National museums of Scotland | 1,114,587 | -0.5 |
| National galleries of Scotland | 901,783 | +2.0 |

Figures for the national museums of Scotland relate to the Royal Museum of Scotland, the Museum of Antiquities, the Scottish Agricultural Museum, the Scottish United Services Museum, the Museum of Flight, the Museum of Costume and the Gasworks Museum. The national galleries of Scotland figures relate to the National Gallery of Scotland, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, National Galleries of Scotland exhibitions held in the Royal Scottish Academy and, for the first time, Duff house in Banff.

### Health Boards (Competitive Tendering)

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been issued by his Department to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* health board and NHS trusts in Scotland on when they should enter into a competitive tendering exercise before awarding contracts for goods or services. [9850]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The Scottish Office Environment Department has issued a number of guidance circulars to local authorities on compulsory competitive tendering. In particular, circular 13/93 offers advice on the avoidance of anti-competitive behaviour. Circular 13/95 provided guidance on compulsory competitive tendering during local government reform.

Comprehensive guidance on market testing for NHS services in Scotland issued from the management executive of the NHS in Scotland to health boards and national health service trusts on 6 October 1993. This consolidated all earlier guidance which had issued since 1987 when competitive tendering was introduced in the national health service in Scotland. The guidance addresses all aspects of market testing involving non-clinical services. Separate guidance which issued in 1992 covers the circumstances in which health boards and national health service trusts are required to use contracts negotiated centrally by the supplies division of the Common Services Agency for goods, services and equipment.

Local authorities and health boards and national health service trusts must also have regard to the EC procurement directives.

### Child Offenders

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of children made subject to a supervision requirement by a children's hearing, having been referred for a commission of an offence, reoffend within two years of the making of the order where the child remains in the community for two years after leaving a children's home or residential school. [10645]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** This information is not maintained in the form requested.

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what percentage of cases referred by the police to a reporter on the grounds that a child has committed an offence are the grounds for referral accepted at a children's hearing. [10644]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Currently 30 per cent. of all cases referred to the reporter on the grounds that the child has committed an offence are subsequently referred to children's hearings. In 75 per cent. of the cases considered by hearings the grounds are accepted.

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the average cost of a children's hearing per case referred *(a)* on offence grounds and *(b)* on non-offence grounds; [10646]

(2) what is the average cost per case from referral until completion of cases referred to a reporter on offence grounds including the cost to the police, the reporter's department, social services, education and the children's hearing. [10647]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Cost information is not collected in the form requested.

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average time taken between a referral by the police to a reporter on the grounds that a child has committed an offence and the case being dealt with by a children's hearing *(a)* where the grounds for referral are accepted and *(b)* where the grounds for referral are not accepted. [10643]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** This information is not maintained in the departments of reporters to children's panels.

## Private Prisons

**Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the site for the new private prison; and if he will make a statement. [10299]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** No final decision about the site for the new privately financed prison has yet been made and a number of options are still under consideration. I expect that an announcement will be made in the near future.

## Residential Mobile Homes

**Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to assess the impact of the park home owners charter and to carry out more thorough research into the use of residential mobile homes in Scotland and the effectiveness of the legislative framework governing residential mobile homes. [10418]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** Research to assess the working of the park home owners charter in Scotland, England and Wales has been commissioned by the Department of the Environment from the university of Birmingham. The research findings are expected to be made available in the next few months. The need for further research into the use of residential mobile homes in Scotland will be considered in the light of these findings.

## Local Government Finance

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the housing revenue account capital budget borrowing consent element for each council in Scotland in 1995–96. [10716]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The information requested is set out in the table.

*Local authority housing capital allocations: 1995–96—net borrowing consent housing revenue account*

| | *HRA £ (million)* |
|---|---|
| *Borders* | |
| Berwickshire | 0.063 |
| Ettrick and Lauderdale | 0.794 |
| Roxburgh | 1.484 |
| Tweeddale | 0.609 |
| *Central* | |
| Clackmannan | 0.467 |
| Falkirk | 4.338 |
| Stirling | 3.710 |
| *Dumfries and Galloway* | |
| Annandale and Eskdale | 0.943 |
| Nithsdale | 2.782 |
| Stewartry | 0.181 |
| Wigtown | 1.177 |
| *Fife* | |
| Dunfermline | 2.234 |
| Kirkcaldy | 1.629 |
| North-East Fife | 0.153 |
| *Grampian* | |
| Aberdeen | 0.577 |
| Banff and Buchan | 0.648 |
| Gordon | 2.337 |
| Kincardine and Deeside | 1.670 |
| Moray | –1.549 |
| *Highland* | |
| Badenoch and Strathspey | 0.433 |
| Caithness | 1.082 |
| Inverness | 2.686 |
| Lochaber | 2.120 |
| Nairn | 0.263 |
| Ross and Cromarty | 2.915 |
| Skye and Lochalsh | 1.077 |
| Sutherland | 0.946 |
| *Lothian* | |
| East Lothian | 1.955 |
| Edinburgh | 19.844 |
| Midlothian | 2.964 |
| West Lothian | 0.399 |
| *Strathclyde* | |
| Argyll and Bute | 0.754 |
| Bearsden and Milngavie | 0.979 |
| Clydebank | 3.926 |
| Clydesdale | 0.874 |
| Cumbernauld and Kilsyth | 0.271 |
| Cumnock and Doon Valley | 0.967 |
| Cunninghame | 3.611 |
| Dumbarton | 4.049 |
| East Kilbride | 0.571 |
| Eastwood | 0.741 |
| Glasgow | 60.609 |
| Hamilton | 0.521 |
| Inverclyde | 5.048 |
| Kilmarnock and Loudoun | 2.460 |
| Kyle and Carrick | 0.448 |
| Monklands | 4.350 |
| Motherwell | 5.886 |
| Renfrew | 10.066 |
| Strathkelvin | 2.399 |
| *Tayside* | |
| Angus | 0.897 |
| Dundee | 9.757 |
| Perth and Kinross | 1.225 |
| *Island areas* | |
| Orkney | –0.043 |
| Shetland | 2.949 |
| Western Isles | 2.636 |
| Scotland | 186.882 |

## Crofter Building Grants and Loan Scheme

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year from 1989–90 to 1994–95 (i) how many *(a)* new homes and *(b)* improvements were provided through the crofter building grants and loan scheme and (ii) what levels of (A) grants and (B) loans were provided through the scheme. [10904]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The information is set out in the table.

*Number of applications approved*

| *Financial year* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) New houses | 109 | 126 | 122 | 148 | 143 | 132 |
| (b) Improved houses | 237 | 210 | 156 | 179 | 16 | 139 |

The levels of assistance available under the scheme were increased on 16 May 1990.

*Levels of grant and loan assistance*

| | *Former maximum (pre 16 May 1990* £ | *Present maximum* £ |
|---|---|---|
| *New houses:* | | |
| Grant | 8,700 | 11,500 |
| Loan | 13,500 | 17,500 |
| *Improve houses:* | | |
| Grant | 1,500 | 2,000 |
| Loan | 8,000 | 10,500 |

## Housing Finance

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Scottish Homes budget in 1995–96 for publication and promotion. [10714]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** It is £800,000.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the proposed housing revenue account capital budget borrowing consent minimum and maximum levels for each council in Scotland in 1996–97; [10719]

(2) if he will list the resource planning assumptions for each council in Scotland for its 1996–97 housing revenue account capital budget. [10715]

**Mr. Robertson:** No decisions have been taken yet on the housing revenue account capital budget borrowing consent levels for individual councils in Scotland for 1996–97. These will depend on the final estimates of capital receipts which authorities are expected to achieve in 1996–97 which are currently the subject of consultation.

The information on resource planning assumptions for each council in Scotland for 1996–97 is set out in the table.

*HRA resource planning assumptions*

*£ million*

| Authority | 1996–97 lower provision[1] | Central provision | Upper provision |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aberdeen City | 11.1 | 12.2 | 13.1 |
| Aberdeenshire | 10.1 | 10.3 | 11.1 |
| Angus | 3.5 | 4.1 | 4.4 |
| Argyll and Bute | 2.8 | 3.7 | 4.0 |
| Clackmannan | 2.7 | 3.3 | 3.6 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 8.6 | 9.3 | 10.0 |
| Dundee City | 12.3 | 13.5 | 14.5 |
| East Ayrshire | 6.5 | 7.4 | 8.0 |
| East Dunbartonshire | 2.3 | 3.0 | 3.2 |
| East Lothian | 4.7 | 5.2 | 5.6 |
| East Renfrewshire | 0.9 | 1.9 | 2.0 |
| Edinburgh City | 22.4 | 24.1 | 26.0 |
| Falkirk | 9.7 | 10.8 | 11.6 |
| Fife | 13.0 | 13.9 | 15.0 |

*HRA resource planning assumptions*

*£ million*

| Authority | 1996–97 lower provision[1] | Central provision | Upper provision |
|---|---|---|---|
| Glasgow City | 64.4 | 69.6 | 75.0 |
| Highland Region | 14.2 | 14.7 | 15.8 |
| Inverclyde | 6.4 | 7.4 | 8.0 |
| Midlothian | 3.9 | 4.4 | 4.7 |
| Moray | 3.4 | 3.9 | 4.2 |
| North Ayrshire | 6.2 | 6.7 | 7.2 |
| North Lanarkshire | 24.5 | 26.7 | 28.8 |
| Orkney | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Perthshire and Kinross | 4.5 | 5.2 | 5.6 |
| Renfrewshire | 14.0 | 14.4 | 15.5 |
| Scottish Borders | 4.2 | 4.9 | 5.3 |
| Shetland | 3.1 | 3.4 | 3.7 |
| South Ayrshire | 5.0 | 5.6 | 6.0 |
| South Lanarkshire | 8.9 | 10.4 | 11.2 |
| Stirling | 5.5 | 6.1 | 6.6 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 9.0 | 9.3 | 10.0 |
| West Lothian | 5.3 | 6.2 | 6.7 |
| Western Isles | 2.4 | 2.8 | 3.0 |
| Scotland | 295.8 | 325.0 | 350.0 |

[1] Represents 70 per cent. forward commitment.

## Pregnant Women Prisoners

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if pregnant women prisoners are handcuffed while in labour and during childbirth; and if he will make a statement; [9024]

(2) if he will make a statement about the supervision of pregnant women prisoners; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidelines issued to the Prison Service on this issue. [9025]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The subject of the questions relate to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 23 January 1996:*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your two Questions about the handcuffing and supervision of pregnant women prisoners.

All security category A and B prisoners, including women prisoners, who are required to be taken outside the prison are subject to security precautions including the use of handcuffs. However women prisoners would not be handcuffed whilst in labour, and staff would be expected, with the approval of the prison Governor, to have regard to individual circumstances in the supervision which would apply.

## Fishing (Norwegian Territorial Waters)

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 2 November, *Official Report*, column *461*, what were the total landings of fish caught in Norwegian territorial waters by *(a)* United Kingdom-registered fishing vessels and *(b)* other

European Union fishing vessels; and what were the species of fish included in these landings in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1994. [9413]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The table shows landings by UK vessels from the Norwegian exclusive economic zone by species for 1992, 1993 and 1994. Information from other member states in the same form is not available.

*Landings by UK vessels from the Norwegian exclusive economic zone*

| Species | Liveweight (tonnes) 1992 | 1993 | 1994 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bass | 0.0 | — | — |
| Blue mouths | — | — | 0.0 |
| Blue ling | 1.9 | 0.2 | — |
| Bream | 6.8 | — | 0.4 |
| Brill | 15.4 | 13.3 | 8.4 |
| Catfish | 663.7 | 671.9 | 528.6 |
| Cod | 12,351.6 | 15,164.2 | 18,710.5 |
| Conger eel | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Cuttlefish | 0.0 | 0.1 | — |
| Dabs, other | 8.9 | 25.2 | 20.5 |
| Dory or John dory | — | 0.0 | — |
| Dogfish, spurdog | 730.1 | 304.1 | 86.6 |
| Flounders or flukes | — | 0.1 | — |
| Gurnard and latchet | 1.2 | 2.0 | 1.0 |
| Haddock | 7,978.8 | 11,638.7 | 14,939.6 |
| Hake | 86.1 | 51.6 | 41.5 |
| Halibut | 34.4 | 24.3 | 35.0 |
| Halibut, Greenland | 4.0 | 2.2 | 16.3 |
| Herring | 102.6 | 0.2 | 398.4 |
| Lemon soles | 571.4 | 500.6 | 518.2 |
| Ling | 458.5 | 579.3 | 418.4 |
| Mackerel | 0.5 | 968.6 | 0.7 |
| Megrims | 24.7 | 17.7 | 20.0 |
| Monks or anglers | 638.0 | 727.1 | 770.0 |
| Mullet, grey | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Mullet, red | 0.0 | 0.0 | — |
| Nephrops (Norway lobster) | 22.0 | 59.9 | 59.7 |
| Octopus | — | 0.1 | — |
| Pilchards | — | 0.0 | — |
| Plaice | 4,088.5 | 4,010.2 | 3,696.7 |
| Pollack | 566.1 | 566.8 | 313.1 |
| Queen scallops | 0.1 | — | — |
| Roundnose grenadier | — | 0.0 | — |
| Redfish | 224.5 | 482.7 | 123.0 |
| Saithe | 2,284.5 | 1,444.4 | 1,495.1 |
| Sandeels | 143.0 | — | 1,194.9 |
| Scallops | 2.5 | — | 0.0 |
| Sharks | 0.9 | 0.7 | 0.8 |
| Shrimps | — | 10.9 | — |
| Skates and rays | 29.4 | 20.6 | 13.1 |
| Soles | 10.5 | 10.6 | 0.5 |
| Tope | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 |
| Torsk (tusk) | 23.9 | 16.4 | 28.5 |
| Turbot | 101.2 | 103.8 | 118.5 |
| Whiting | 2,748.2 | 1,999.1 | 1,483.5 |
| Whiting, pout | 0.0 | 0.0 | — |
| Witches | 177.8 | 163.6 | 182.7 |
| Mixed or other demersal | 65.5 | 54.4 | 58.5 |
| Whelks | 0.7 | 5.2 | 1.6 |
| Clams (mixed) | — | — | 0.0 |
| Crabs, cancer pagurus | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| Squid, loligo | 7.0 | 3.3 | 0.1 |
| Other crustaceans | — | 0.1 | — |

*Landings by UK vessels from the Norwegian exclusive economic zone*

| Species | Liveweight (tonnes) 1992 | 1993 | 1994 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Livers | — | 0.6 | 0.1 |
| Roes | 46.7 | 53.1 | 16.9 |
| Total | 34,221.7 | 39,698.3 | 45,301.8 |

## Student Grants

**Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many postgraduate social work students have received grants at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Scotland in each of the years 1990 to 1995. [10775]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** None. The responsibility for providing student support for Scottish domiciled students undertaking postgraduate studies in social work was transferred to the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work with effect from academic year 1990–91. This enabled the council to operate a uniform UK-wide policy in its area of responsibility.

**Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the regulations on the award of student grants in Scotland. [10777]

**Mr. Robertson:** Grants to Scottish domiciled students undertaking full-time courses of higher education are offered under the Students' Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 1991 (SI 1991 No. 1522), as amended. The regulations are made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under powers contained in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

**Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans there are to bring the criteria for award of student grants for postgraduate students in Scotland in line with the provisions for England and Wales. [10778]

**Mr. Robertson:** For subjects where awards for postgraduate study in England and Wales are subject to national criteria, the arrangements in Scotland are already broadly in line, subject to minor variations to meet Scottish circumstances. Where the award in England and Wales is at the discretion of the local education authority, arrangements can vary and alignment is not possible.

**Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance is available to postgraduate students in Scotland; and what plans there are to extend the availability of the student loans scheme to postgraduate students. [10776]

**Mr. Robertson:** The standard rates of means-tested maintenance allowance for non-loan-bearing postgraduate courses in the academic year 1995–96 are:

£2,690: for students living in a hall of residence or in lodgings and attending establishments outside the London area.

£3,295: as above, but attending an establishment in the London area

£1,965: for students living at their parents' home.

Additional weeks' allowances are payable for attendance exceeding 30 weeks and three days. Tuition fees are also payable without means testing.

There are no plans to extend the availability of loans to postgraduate students other than those undertaking PGCE courses who already qualify, and receive the lower undergraduate maintenance rates. Unlike those at undergraduate level, postgraduate rates of maintenance grant have been uprated annually in line with inflation in recent years.

**Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the criteria for the award of student grants in Scotland relating to postgraduate students. [10779]

**Mr. Robertson:** To be eligible for an award a student must generally have been ordinarily resident in the British islands for at least three years preceding 31 August of the year in which the course, or continuous series of courses, starts and also be ordinarily resident in Scotland on 30 June of that year.

Under the postgraduate students' allowances scheme, an award may be offered to an eligible student who has completed a first degree or comparable course and who then wishes to take a short, usually one-year, course of professional or vocational training. Not all postgraduate diploma courses are covered by the scheme and, outwith the fields of science and technology, engineering and teacher training, the numbers of awards available are limited by quota and eligible students compete for assistance. There are also restrictions related to previous study at postgraduate level.

Under the Scottish studentship scheme, support is offered to a limited number of eligible students who wish to undertake postgraduate higher degree study in the arts and humanities. Applicants must hold either a first class or a very good second class honours degree. The number of applications received significantly exceeds the studentship awards available each year and the successful candidates are selected on merit by a committee of academics appointed from Scottish universities.

These arrangements are set out more fully in the booklet "Student Grants in Scotland—A Guide to Postgraduate Allowances." I am sending a copy to the hon. Member and copies have been placed in the Library.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the mobile telephones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11006]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information is set out in the table:

| *Year* | *Instances of cloning* | *Dates* |
|---|---|---|
| 1994 | 4 | [1] December |
| | | 02 December |
| | | [2] 20 December |
| 1995 | 14 | [1 2] January 1995 |
| | | 01 May |
| | | 03 May |
| | | [2] 06 May |
| | | 10 May |
| | | 13 May |
| | | 16 May |
| | | 19 May |
| | | [1] June |
| | | [1] September |
| | | 06 September |
| | | 14 December |

[1] Day unrecorded.
[2] Two clonings on same date.

There were no instances of cloning in the previous six years.

### Rural Scotland White Paper

**Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will invite representatives of the Scottish Crofters Union to join the Scottish National Rural Partnership to discuss his White Paper "Rural Scotland: People, Prosperity and Partnership"; and if he will make a statement. [10685]

**Mr. Kynoch:** To date, invitations to serve on the Scottish National Rural Partnership have been limited to organisations with a national remit or, in the case of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, to the two bodies which, taken together, have the national remit. However, my right hon. Friend would be prepared to consider any request from the Scottish Crofters Union to join the Scottish National Rural Partnership.

### Forth Road Bridge

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on which date the capital cost of the Forth road bridge is expected to be paid off; and if he will make a statement on *(a)* his intentions for tolling thereafter and *(b)* the future allocation of toll revenues. [11517]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The Forth Road Bridge Order Confirmation Act 1958 provides for income from bridge tolls to be used to service and repay loans, including those in respect of the capital cost of the bridge, and to pay for its operation, maintenance and repair. It also provides for tolling to continue until adequate provision is made for the latter. The capital cost of the bridge has been fully paid off.

The tolling period was extended in 1993 to 28 May 1998 to provide for essential strengthening and other maintenance works. The Forth transport working group, comprising representatives of the Forth Road Bridge joint board, Fife and Lothian regional councils and the Scottish Office, is examining future tolling arrangements as part of a wider consideration of transport issues across the Forth. The group will report to the Secretary of State and the convenors of the regional councils in due course.

### NHS (Public Relations Officers)

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many public relations officers are employed by the NHS management executive in Scotland; and what was the annual expenditure by the NHS management executive for each financial year since 1987 on *(a)* public relations, *(b)* communications and *(c)* marketing. [11164]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** There are no public relations officers employed by or in the NHS management executive in Scotland. A team of three whole-time equivalent information officers in the Scottish Office's information directorate reporting to a chief press officer provide advice and support to Ministers, the management executive and the remainder of the Scottish Office Department of Health on issues relating to health and to the national health service. There is no identifiable expenditure by the NHSME since 1987 which is readily attributable to *(a)* public relations, *(b)* communications and *(c)* marketing.

## Monofilament Nets

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the areas he has identified as unsuitable for the use of monofilament nets for *(a)* conservation reasons and *(b)* because the area is used for sports diving. [11159]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** No such areas have been identified.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many responses to the recent consultation on the carriage of monofilament gill nets recommended that the use of such nets should be monitored to assess their impact on marine wildlife. [11156]

**Mr. Robertson:** Five respondents made such a recommendation.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with representatives of scuba divers in relation to ending the ban on the carriage and use of monofilament nets. [11158]

**Mr. Robertson:** Since announcing the outcome of consultations on the proposed ending of the ban on large mesh monofilament gill nets, I have received representations from diving interests, whose views have been noted.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which organisations and individuals were consulted prior to changing the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of the Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986; and how many responses were *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against changing the legislation. [11160]

**Mr. Robertson:** The following organisations and individuals were consulted on the proposed derogation to the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of the Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986:

The Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland
The Atlantic Salmon Trust Ltd.
The Tay Salmon Fisheries Co. Ltd.
Fishmongers' Company
Salmon and Trout Association (Scottish Council)
Scottish Natural Heritage
The Salmon and Trout Association
The Forth Fishery Conservation Trust
Association of Scottish District Salmon Fishery Boards
River Tweed Commissioners
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)
Hook Towe
Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Sea Fish Industry Authority
Mallaig and North West Fisherman's Association
Shetland Fishermen's Association
Forth Fishermen's Association
Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association
Scottish Whitefish Producers Organisation
Herring Buyers Association
Aberdeen Fish Producers Organisation Ltd.
North East of Scotland Fish Producers Organisation
Fife Fish Producers Organisation Ltd.
Orkney Fishermen's Association
Western Isles Fishermen's Association
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Scottish Fishermen's Organisation
Shetland Fish Producers Organisation
Ullapool Boat Owners' Association
Scottish Fish Merchants's Federation
British Boatbuilders' Association
Fishing Co-operative
Fish Traders' Association
Highlands and Islands Fishermen's Association (SG)
Eyemouth and District Fishermen's Association
Clyde Fishermen's Association
J and W Stuart
A W Harkiss
Duthie Trawlers
Sicor International Ltd.
Seawire Services Ltd.
Jackson Trawls Ltd.
Harvest Trawls
Pisces
Seaway Nets
Calley Nets
Scotnet
T Nets
Faithlie Trawls
Catchmore Macduff Ltd.
Alf Wallace Nets
John Noble Esq.
LHD Net Mending
Oceansafe
Whalsay Trawl Nets
Nautilus Consultants
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Skye and Lochalsh Fishermen's Association
Shetland Fish Processors Association
Arbroath Fishermen's Association
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency
Fife Fishermen's Association
Shetland Fish Products Ltd.
Macduff Shipyards Limited
Aberdeen Fish Curers and Merchants Association Ltd.
Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link
World Wide Fund for Nature
Anglo-Scottish Fish Producers Organisation
Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association Ltd.
Loch Linnhe Fishermen's Association
UFS Ltd.
Grampian Seafood Project

West of Scotland Fish Producers' Organisation

Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation

North Irish Sea Fishermen's Federation

Association of Sea Fisheries Committees

Fleetwood Fish Producers Organisation

Cornish Fish Producers Organisation

UK Association of Fish Producers Organisation

Fish Producers Organisation Ltd.

UK Association of Frozen Food Producers

Grimsby Fish Producers Organisation

Mudeford and District Fishermen's Association

Lowestoft Fish Procedures Organisation Ltd.

Southern Commercial Fishermen

South Western Fish Producers Organisation

Fishermen's Federation of Northumberland

Yorkshire and Anglia Fish Producers Organisation

Ken Bell International Ltd.

States of Guernsey SFC

States of Jersey, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Isle of Man

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

English Nature

Wildlife and Countryside Link

Twenty-seven responses were received, of which 16 were in favour of the proposed change, five were not opposed to it but had some qualifications, and four were opposed to it in varying degrees. Two respondents offered no view.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what measures he has instigated to prevent large-mesh monofilament nets presenting a threat to marine wildlife; [11163]

(2) what monitoring will be established to assess the impact of large-mesh monofilament nets upon marine wildlife in Scottish waters. [11157]

**Mr. Robertson:** Arrangements for monitoring the by-catch of cetaceans in fishing nets are already in place and these will be extended to any large-mesh monofilament gill nets.

### Porpoises

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures his Department is taking to meet its commitments to protect the harbour porpoises in Scottish waters *(a)* under the biodiversity action plan and *(b)* under the habitats directive. [11162]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The harbour porpoise is a protected species under relevant provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, which make provision for the implementation of Council direction 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. The report of the biodiversity action plan steering group submitted to the Government in December 1995 contains a suggested action plan for the conservation of the harbour porpoise. The Government will be responding to this report in the spring.

### Ambulance Service

**Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements exist to provide for the public accountability of the Scottish ambulance service for its management policies and practices and to ensure that its employees are not subjected to victimisation. [11204]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The chairmen and boards of NHS trusts are accountable to the Secretary of State via the management executive of the NHS in Scotland. Each trust is responsible for managing its own industrial relations and other personnel matters.

A copy of the policy and procedures for the resolution of differences between the Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust and its employees is in the Library of the House. Disputes which cannot be resolved through this mechanism may be pursued through other appropriate channels, including industrial tribunals.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Rail Privatisation

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in introducing a private element into the management and operation of Northern Ireland Railways; and if he will make a statement. [11250]

**Mr. Moss:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 18 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *355*. Consultants commissioned by the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company have, this month, presented their final report dealing with the sale of non-core businesses and opportunities for market testing and contracting out of Northern Ireland Railway's activities. The Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company will now take forward the consultant's recommendations.

### Public Meeting Halls (Attacks)

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the Orange halls, *(b)* the churches and church halls indicating the denomination, *(c)* the Gaelic Athletics Association premises and *(d)* other halls, which suffered from (i) arson and (ii) other attacks which resulted in damage in each of the last two years, indicating in each case (1) the date, (2) the location of the premises, (3) the cost of repairing the damage and (4) if compensation was paid. [11004]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Compensation Agency has been able to produce lists of claims lodged on Church properties, orange halls and GAA properties damaged giving date of incident, cause and the amount of settlement. Copies of the lists have been placed in the Library.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Building Regulations

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has given to the Building Regulations Advisory Committee on the likely timetable for implementation of proposed amendments to part M of the Building Regulations. [10265]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** Papers setting out my Department's views on a programme of work on various aspects of the building regulations, including part M, were discussed by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee at meetings in June and October last year. These papers included possible implementation dates taking into account, among other things, the time needed for consultation and analysis. Decisions on the timetable for individual items will depend on the rate of progress achieved at each stage.

### Water and Sewerage

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many non-domestic customers in each of the water and sewerage areas pay separate bills for sewerage on the basis of the rateable value of their premises. [9943]

**Mr. Clappison:** This information is not held centrally.

### Homelessness

**Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current estimate of the total number of homeless people in England. [10754]

**Mr. Clappison:** Local authorities in England provide data to my Department about their activities under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 on the quarterly PI(E) return. Summary figures based on these returns are published in a quarterly information bulletin entitled "Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England". The latest bulletin was released on 11 December and gives figures up to the third quarter of 1995; a copy is in the Library.

### Housing Stock

**Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the total housing stock in England is derelict or uninhabitable. [10755]

**Mr. Clappison:** The 1991 English house condition survey found 7.6 per cent. of dwellings in England to be unfit for human habitation under section 604 of the Housing Act 1985, as amended by schedule 9 to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Some 3 per cent. of these unfit dwellings were derelict at the time of the survey.

### Conservation

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what procedures are followed when an application for a drought order is made which could potentially damage a special protection area designated under the European birds directive. [10241]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* In England and Wales, the National Rivers Authority is notified of applications for drought orders. Under section 17 of the Water Resources Act 1991 it must, except in an emergency, consult the relevant nature conservation agency if the proposal is likely to damage the special features of a site of special interest, including all special protection areas.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what procedures are in place to review existing abstraction licences which could be potentially damaging to *(a)* a special protection area designated under the European birds directive and *(b)* a special area of conservation designated under the habitats directive. [10243]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* In England and Wales the National Rivers Authority has a statutory duty under section 17 of the Water Resources Act 1991 to consult the nature conservation agencies before carrying out or authorising any works, operations or activities which appear to the authority to be likely to affect adversely those sites of special interest which have been notified to the authority by one of the statutory notifying authorities. All special protection areas and, in future, special areas of conservation will be notified as such sites.

In August 1995, the NRA and English Nature signed a memorandum of understanding regarding a joint approach to river sites of special scientific interest, covering the production of a conservation strategy and consenting, licensing, protocol. This will also apply other habitats, SPAs and in due course, SACs. In addition, English Nature has agreed to provide a priority list of SPAs and SACs potentially vulnerable to certain activities, including the effect of abstraction. This will be used by the NRA in a planned programme for reviewing existing abstraction licences.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legal instruments are in place which require an assessment of environmental impacts of *(a)* new abstraction licences, *(b)* variations to existing abstraction licences and *(c)* a drought order. [10242]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* In England and Wales, the National Rivers Authority is the competent authority for issuing or varying abstraction licences and will comment as necessary on applications for drought orders. Relevant legislation includes the Water Resources Act 1991 sections 2(2), 4, 15, 16 and 19. In some cases, development proposals including abstractions fall within the remit of the environment assessment regulations and in these instances a full environmental statement will be required.

Where the environmental assessment regulations do not apply, the NRA requires an environmental report when it considers that the proposed abstraction would have more than a negligible impact.

In the case of new abstractions of variations to existing abstractions which may damage the special features of a site of special interest, the NRA is required under section 17 of the Water Resources Act 1991 to consult the relevant nature conservation agency. Under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 the NRA, as a competent authority, is required to review

authorisations, including abstraction licences, which might affect the integrity of special protection areas and special areas of conservation.

### Wild Animal Imports

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what number and species of terrapins have been imported under the provisions of the convention on international trade in endangered species since 1990. [10154]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Only one species of terrapin listed in CITES has been imported into the United Kingdom since 1990. Two hundred specimens of Pelomedusa subrufra—Marsh terrapin—were imported in 1991, and 10 in 1995.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dangerous wild animals as defined by statute were imported into the United Kingdom during 1995; and how many exotic animals and reptiles were imported. [10156]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* In 1995, 2,250 live specimens of species listed on the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, as amended, were imported into the United Kingdom.

Total figures for the import of exotic species are not available. In 1994—the latest year for which data are available—43,495 specimens of live animals, including reptiles, listed under the convention on international trade in endangered species were imported into the UK.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many American box turtles were imported into the United Kingdom in 1995. [10155]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Six Coahuila box turtles—Terrapene coahuila—were imported into the United Kingdom in 1995.

### Recycling Projects (Local Authorities)

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was made available to local authorities through supplementary credit approvals with respect to recycling projects in each year since 1991–92, and the amount which is forecast to be made available to local authorities in each of the next three years. [10351]

**Mr. Curry** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Provision for the recycling supplementary credit approval programme was £12 million for 1991–92, £15 million for each of the next three years, and is £16.4 million for 1995–96. Planned provision for 1996–97 is £10 million. In addition, from next year local recycling initiatives are likely to benefit from expenditure by environmental trusts established in consequence of the landfill tax as well as from increased industry funding as a consequence of the producer responsibility for packaging initiative. With regard to 1997–98 and beyond, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained in his statement on the rate support grant on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 1338, we will shortly be consulting on the scope for bringing challenge funding more broadly to bear on local authority capital spending in future years, including SCAs for recycling. This should give greater scope for authorities that are keen to make major investment in recycling infrastructure, alongside the growing activities of industry and voluntary groups.

### Sewerage and Water Service Bills

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what impact the last revaluation of rateable values of non-domestic premises for unified business rate purposes has had on bills for sewerage, drainage and water issued by sewerage undertakers in areas where sewerage and water services are provided by separate companies. [10457]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Most sewerage undertakers use the general rating valuation list as at 31 March 1990 for charging unmeasured non-domestic premises. For those few companies that use the unified business rate as a basis of charging for water, sewerage and drainage, the impact on bills would vary from customer to customer.

### Drought (Yorkshire)

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now publish the inspector's report of the public inquiry held into the drought in Yorkshire in November. [10769]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Copies of the inspector's report are available by applying to the Government office for Yorkshire and Humberside, PO Box 213, City house, New Station street, Leeds LS1 4JU.

### River Derwent Emergency Drought Order

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the environmental impact on the Lower Derwent valley of the proposed River Derwent emergency drought order. [10734]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The hearing arranged to consider the application and the objections to it was postponed at Yorkshire Water's request. When the hearing takes place, the environmental impact will be one of the issues to be considered by the inspector in preparing his report.

### Minerals Planning Guidance

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how the final draft minerals planning guidance note 1 "General Considerations and the Development Plan System" was modified by the results of the environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [10605]

(2) if the final draft minerals planning guidance note 1 "General Considerations and the Development Plan System" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in his Department's document "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"; and if he will publish the appraisal; [10603]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the final draft minerals

planning guidance note 1 "General Considerations and the Development Plan System"; [10606]

(4) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the final draft minerals planning guidance note 1 "General Considerations and the Development Plan System" were considered in the environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [10604]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" sets out an approach whereby environmental effects can be taken into account in policy development, while recognising that this will vary from case to case depending on the complexity and significance of the impacts. Minerals planning guidance note 1, general considerations and the development plan system, sets out the Government's policy on various issues concerning planning for minerals in England, including how policies for mineral extraction can be more consistent with the principles of sustainable development. This is being revised and developed following widespread consultation on a draft. It seeks to strike a balance between the aim of ensuring a supply of minerals and the need to protect the environment and conserve minerals as far as possible.

The final draft consultation document includes many modifications to the first draft reflecting the views expressed by environmental organisations and others. I do not intend to publish a separate environmental appraisal in addition to the draft advice already published and the final guidance when completed. The Government will monitor the effectiveness of the policy guidance through regular liaison with minerals planning authorities and other bodies and the Deparment's research programme.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if *(a)* the forthcoming housing discussion paper, *(b)* draft planning policy guidance note "Countryside and the Rural Economy", *(c)* the forthcoming annual review of the United Kingdom sustainable development strategy and *(d)* the forthcoming draft planning policy guidance note 1 "General Policy and Principles" will be subject to an environmental appraisal in accordance with the guidance contained in his document "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"; and if he will make a statement. [10617]

**Mr. Clappison:** *(a)* No. The housing discussion paper is a consultation document. *(b)* and *(d)* environmental impacts are being fully considered during the revision of PPG7, "The Countryside and the Rural Economy", and PPG1, "General Policy and Principles". *(c)* No. "This Common Inheritance: UK annual report 1996" will not itself set new policies. I fully endorse the need for environmental impacts to be taken into account in the development of new policy.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the White Paper "Making Waste Work" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in his Department's document "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"; and if he will publish the appraisal; [10599]

(2) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the White Paper "Making Waste Work"; [10602]

(3) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the White Paper "Making Waste Work" were considered in the environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [10600]

(4) how the White Paper "Making Waste Work" was modified by the results of the environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [10601]

**Mr. Clappison:** It would not have been appropriate to undertake an environmental appraisal, using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", in relation to the White Paper "Making Waste Work". The White Paper sets out our strategy for achieving more sustainable waste management and includes a range of waste management practices. It emphasises that the choice of a waste management method for a particular waste stream will be guided by the principle of using the best practicable environmental option which would take into account both the environmental and economic costs and benefits of different methods of waste management.

Indeed, such an appraisal could be undertaken only on the basis of reliable statistical information which is equally true of monitoring environmental impacts. The White Paper acknowledges that much of the necessary information is not readily available or is available with insufficient precision to enable reliable estimates to be made. An important part of the waste strategy is, therefore, to ensure that better information relating to waste is available and the White Paper sets out how this will be achieved.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the forthcoming rural White Paper, annual review, will be subject to an environmental appraisal in accordance with the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", published by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the environmental appraisal. [10616]

**Mr. Clappison:** A progress report on the commitments contained within the rural White Paper, "Rural England: A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside", will be produced later this year. Environmental impacts will be taken into account in following up the commitments contained within the White Paper.

## Local Government Finance

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many councils will have to reduce their capital spending as a result of the new rent capping proposals. [10507]

**Mr. Clappison:** If local authorities budget sensibly, they should be able to maintain their existing revenue contributions to housing revenue account capital expenditure.

**Mr. Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the amount of credit approvals to fund local authority capital spending on housing in each of the last five years; what is his forecast for 1996–97 and 1997–98; and if he will express each statistic in *(a)* real terms and *(b)* as a percentage change on the previous year. [10500]

**Mr. Clappison:** The figures are provided in the table.

| Year | Local authority credit approvals (cash £ million) | Local authority credit approvals at 1994–95 prices (£ million) | Percentage change on the previous year (in cash terms) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 (outturn) | 1,441 | 1,572 | — |
| 1992–93 (outturn) | 1,194 | 1,252 | –17 |
| 1993–94 (outturn) | 1,120 | 1,141 | –6 |
| 1994–95 (outturn) | 872 | 872 | –22 |
| 1995–96 (est outturn) | 869 | 846 | 0 |
| 1996–97 (plans) | 789 | 747 | –9 |
| 1997–98 (plans) | 752 | 695 | –5 |

These figures exclude credit approvals for the estate action scheme, which has been subsumed into the single regeneration budged; the scheme has been grant-funded since 1995–96. The supplementary credit approvals issued to provide cover for specified capital grants are also excluded.

**Mr. Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much revenue local authorities will lose in 1996–97 following the introduction of the new housing revenue account subsidy system. [10503]

**Mr. Clappison:** Local authorities which budget within the Government's guideline rent increases will be unaffected by the new arrangements to limit rent rebate subsidy.

### Rent Capping

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation was held with local authorities with respect to the new rent capping proposals. [10502]

**Mr. Clappison:** Our proposals for the limitation of subsidy on rent rebate costs in 1996–97 were circulated for consultation to the relevant local authority associations and to all local authorities on 21 November 1995. We asked for comments by 15 December.

### Housing Benefit (Council Tenants)

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council tenants in the United Kingdom currently claim housing benefit. [10504]

**Mr. Clappison:** When claiming housing revenue account subsidy, local authorities in England supply my Department with information about the number of council tenants in receipt of rent rebate. Based on these returns, there are an estimated 2,394,000 council tenants in England in receipt of housing benefit in 1995–96. My Department does not receive any information about the number of claimants in the other parts of the United Kingdom.

### Rent Increases

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the 1996–97 guideline rent increases expressed in *(a)* real terms and *(b)* as a percentage increase on the 1995–96 amount. [10505]

**Mr. Clappison:** There is no real terms increase in the 1996–97 average guideline rent per dwelling compared with 1995–96. In cash terms, the increase is 2.75 per cent.

### Air Quality Assessments

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what consultation he has had with local authority associations as to the capacity of their members to carry out the necessary assessments of air quality to comply with part IV of the Environment Act 1995; [10772]

(2) by what date he expects local authorities to complete assessments of air quality in their areas to comply with the air quality provisions in part IV of the Environment Act 1995. [10773]

**Mr. Clappison:** My Department, together with the Scottish Office and Welsh Office, established a working group last November, with representatives of the local authority associations, to advise on implementation and operation of the local air quality duties under the Environment Act 1995. The working group is considering the timing of reviews and assessments and developing the necessary guidance for local authorities, before the commencement of the relevant sections of the Act.

### Asylum Seekers (Benefits)

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the dates and attendance of all meetings between his Department and local government associations concerning the costs of implementing the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [11000]

(2) what is his estimate of the costs to local government of the implementation of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [11001]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** This subject was discussed at a meeting on 6 December 1995 between my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration and the Association of London Government, and with all the local authority associations at the Housing Consultative Council on 7 December. My officials will be having further discussions with the local authority associations in the near future, to help us to identify these costs and to decide what financial assistance to make available to local authorities.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the mobile phones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last four years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11015]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The information available to my Department suggests that 13 mobile phones have been cloned during the past four years. The precise dates when cloning took place are not available.

### Local Government Reorganisation

**Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what bids he has received from authorities that have been, or are to be, reorganised on 1 April 1995, 1996 or 1997 for reorganisation costs. [11068]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *923*.

### Drought Orders

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of state for the Environment (1) how much notice water companies are required to give to the public of an application for a drought order; [10849]

(2) what provisions govern the publicity given to an application for a drought order. [10850]

**Mr. Clappison:** Applicants for drought orders are required under schedule 8 to the Water Resources Act 1991 to serve notices on a range of specified persons and cause notice of the application to be published in one or more local newspapers and in the *London Gazette*.

**Mrs. Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, columns *10–11*, what is the latest position in respect of drought orders *(a)* applied for, *(b)* under consideration, *(c)* refused, *(d)* agreed and *(e)* withdrawn, by region. [10851]

**Mr. Clappison:** The figures since August 1995 by National Rivers Authority regions are as follows:

| | *(a)* | *(b)* | *(c)* | *(d)* | *(e)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northumbria and Yorkshire | 30 | 2 | 0 | 24 | 4 |
| North-west | 26 | 2 | 0 | 24 | 0 |
| South Western | 15 | 5 | 0 | 7 | 3 |
| Southern | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Severn Trent | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Thames | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Anglian | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

**Mrs. Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation with other statutory or voluntary agencies is required before a water company makes applications for a drought order. [10852]

**Mr. Clappison:** The proceedings on applications for drought orders, as set out in schedule 8 to the Water Resources Act 1991, require the applicant to cause notice to be served on the National Rivers Authority and every local authority, other than county councils, and water undertaker whose area would be affected by the order. It is the Department's practice to consult both the NRA and English Nature on each application.

### Leaseholders (Estate Action)

**Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he intends to take to help leaseholders of local authorities facing bills for estate action repairs and improvements where these costs are also met by Government-funded schemes. [11822]

**Mr. Clappison:** We have today invited comments on proposals to remove this anomaly. We propose to require local authorities, and other social landlords, to reduce charges for works to the extent that these are funded by central Government—for example, under the single regeneration budget challenge fund. For schemes already in process or completed—for example, under estate action—when the measure comes into effect, we propose to permit landlords to reduce charges. I have placed in the Library a copy of our consultation paper "Leaseholders of local authorities, housing action trusts, urban development corporations, registered housing associations and other registered social landlords: proposals to reduce charges for estate repairs and improvements funded by central government." We have invited comments by the end of February, as we wish to introduce our proposals at the earliest suitable legislative opportunity. The Welsh Office will be consulting similarly in Wales.

### Hydrofluorocarbons

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in the negotiation of voluntary agreements with industry on the use of hydrofluorocarbons. [11823]

**Mr. Gummer:** The Government have today concluded separate voluntary agreements with the four principal users of hydrofluorocarbons—the aerosols, air conditioning and refrigeration, fire and foams industries. These are the first agreements of their kind in Europe, and reflect the Government's desire to achieve environmental objectives through voluntary action by industry, rather than regulation, wherever possible.

The agreements recognise that in certain applications, HFCs are important alternatives to chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons which are ozone-depleting substances. HFCs are, however, greenhouse gases with a high global warming potential. The agreements with the industries concerned therefore ensure that, where HFCs are used, emissions to the atmosphere are minimised; and that they are not used where emissions are unavoidable, if safe, practical and more environmentally acceptable alternatives are available.

Under the UN framework convention on climate change, the United Kingdom is committed to returning its emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000. Although currently emitted in smaller quantities than some other greenhouse gases, HFCs are significant due both to their high global warming potentials and to the potential increase in their use as replacements for ozone-depleting substances. These agreements will lead to a reduction in HFC emissions and so contribute to the UK climate change programme.

### NRA (Prosecutions)

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each prosecution by the National Rivers Authority against the privatised coal companies since coal privatisation, indicating *(a)* the date of infringement, *(b)* the date of prosecution, *(c)* a summary of the nature of the offence and *(d)* any resultant conviction. [9509]

**Mr. Gummer** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* No prosecutions have been brought by the National Rivers Authority against the privatised coal companies.

## WALES

### Disabled Pupils

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are in place to ensure that the inaccessibility of school transport is not a restricting factor in integrating disabled children into mainstream schools; and if he will make a statement. [9248]

**Mr. Richards:** Local education authorities have responsibility for identifying and assessing children with special educational needs. They have a qualified duty to ensure that children with special educational needs are educated in mainstream schools. They also have to comply with parental preference for a maintained school, subject to it being appropriate for the child and compatible with the efficient use of resources. If LEAs identify a particular need appropriate to a child's education, which may include school transport outside the authority's normal arrangements, they have to ensure that suitable provision is made.

### Disability Discrimination Act 1995

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what guidance he intends to issue to health authorities and trusts about the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement; [9242]

(2) what guidance he intends to issue to local authorities about the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement; [9246]

(3) what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9231]

**Mr. Hague:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *417*. I will ensure that my Department and any bodies for which it is responsible are made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

### Community Health Councils

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to enable members of town and community councils to be represented on community health councils as of right. [9546]

**Mr. Richards:** Current legislation does not provide for town and community councils to be represented on community health councils as of right.

Primary legislation allows for at least one half of a community health council's membership to be made up of local authority nominees: these nominees can be drawn from any organisation, including town and community councils.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many community and town councillors sit on community health councils in Wales. [9547]

**Mr. Richards:** This information is not held currently.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the community health councils in Wales. [9548]

**Mr. Richards:** This information can be found in the 1995 health services year book prepared by the Institute of Health Services Management. A copy is in the Library.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy in respect of consultation on community health council matters where town and community councils are concerned. [9549]

**Mr. Richards:** There is no central policy for consulting on community health council matters directly with town and community councils. It is for the representative local authority to consult locally with its constituent councils on CHC matters.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the prospects for community health councils with respect to the impending changes in health authority organisation. [9550]

**Mr. Richards:** An important function of the new health authorities will be to act as the major local NHS presence, keeping in touch and working with local people and organisations to develop local services at a pace and in ways that local people will accept. As one of the most effective local representatives of the patient interest, CHCs fulfil the vital role of ensuring that the new commissioners are made fully aware of the need to make services more responsive to local needs and patient views.

A copy of briefing paper No. 4, "A Fresh Start for Community Health Councils", drafted by an NHS Wales working group will be placed in the Library. This offers a more detailed assessment of how the role of CHCs may need to develop over the coming years.

### Teachers (Retirement and Redundancy)

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many teachers in each local education authority have taken early retirement *(a)* on grounds of ill health and *(b)* for other reasons in each of the last five years; and how many of those have subsequently returned to teaching; [9716]

(2) how many teachers in each local education authority have had their employment terminated by voluntary redundancy agreements in each of the last five years; and how many of these have subsequently returned to teaching. [9704]

**Mr. Hague:** I will write to the hon Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

## Homelessness

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the reasons for homelessness among those households accepted as homeless by local authorities in Wales who were in priority need by reason of old age, in each quarter in 1993 and 1994, and in the first two quarters of 1995. [10264]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The information requested is provided in the following table.

*Reasons for homelessness for those households accepted as homeless in Wales, in priority need by reason of age*

*Number of cases*

| | 1993 | | | | 1994 | | | | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Reason for homelessness* | *January–March* | *April–June* | *July–September* | *October–December* | *January–March* | *April–June* | *July–September* | *October–December* | *January–March* | *April–June* |
| Breakdown of relationship with parents | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Breakdown of relationship with relatives/friends | 14 | 21 | 19 | 13 | 17 | 17 | 23 | 12 | 12 | 9 |
| Breakdown of relationship with spouse/cohabitee—violent | 1 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Breakdown of relationship with spouse/cohabittee—non violent | 12 | 7 | 10 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Action by mortgagee | 9 | 11 | 7 | 10 | 6 | 10 | 7 | 15 | 9 | 6 |
| Sale of owner occupied property | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 5 |
| Rent arrears, LA/HA/other public sector | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Rent arrears, private sector | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Other reason for loss of rented accommodation | 36 | 18 | 19 | 22 | 28 | 26 | 22 | 22 | 23 | 25 |
| Fire, flood, storm etc. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 13 | 16 | 14 | 15 | 15 | 20 | 21 | 15 | 15 | 26 |
| Total | 96 | 80 | 81 | 78 | 90 | 91 | 89 | 78 | 77 | 82 |

*Source:* Local authority returns.

### Cardiff Bay Opera House

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations, on how many occasions, and on which dates he has had with the members of the Millennium Commission on the proposed Cardiff Bay opera house. [11210]

**Mr. Hague:** I have had no such consultations. The chairman of the commission notified me, shortly before the public announcement, of the conclusions the commission had reached about the opera house application.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions consultants working for the Millennium Commission on the proposed Cardiff Bay opera house have contacted his Department. [11209]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

### Cancer Registration

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of Wednesday 17 January, *Official Report*, column *559*, if he will ensure that the new management of the Cancer Registry provides up-to-date cancer registration statistics. [11214]

**Mr. Hague:** The invitation for proposals to manage the Cancer Registry issued to Velindre and the combined centres set out clear performance targets that the successful organisation will be expected to meet. These targets include a timetable by which the backlog of registrations should be cleared and a future maximum operational delay of one year for registration data.

### Red Squirrels

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his assessment of the red squirrel population over the last decade and the measures he proposes to promote re-population of red squirrels; and if he will make a statement. [8918]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The red squirrel has continued to decline throughout Wales, as it has throughout southern Britain, over the past 10 years. Remnant populations are now confined to a few large conifer forests on the mainland and on Anglesey. This decline is at least partly attributed to the continued spread of the non-native grey squirrel. The Countryside Council for Wales, in partnership with the Forestry Commission research division, Forest Enterprise and Forestry Authority are continuing to research the habitat requirements of both red and grey squirrels in Clocaenog forest, Clwyd to identify ways in which conifer plantations can be managed to promote red and minimise grey squirrel populations. The same organisations are also considering a method of enhancing red squirrel populations on Anglesey, which involves reducing grey squirrel populations.

### Wild Birds

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the latest populations of wild bird species; what were the equivalent figures for 1985 and 1990; if he will indicate the estimated total and percentage change in each case; and if he will make a statement. [9023]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The most recent estimates of the populations of wild birds are presented in "The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988–91", Gibbons, Reid and Chapman, 1993. Earlier estimates were published in "The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland", Sharrock 1976. Trends in populations of wild birds are addressed in "Population trends in British Breeding Birds", Marchant et al, 1990.

Information on how the size of wild bird populations changes over time is collected and reported annually through specially designed monitoring schemes, including the breeding birds survey, the wetland bird survey and the common birds census.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the mobile telephones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last five years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11013]

**Mr. Hague:** One, on a number of occasions during August and September 1995.

### Nurses (Training)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average amount of time nurses undergoing project 2000 training are available for national health service hospital duty as a percentage of the figure for whole-time trainee nurses in employment; and if he will make a statement. [11206]

**Mr. Hague:** Forty per cent.

### Hospitals (Emergency Admissions)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many days each acute hospital in Wales was closed to emergency medical admissions in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [11207]

**Mr. Hague:** This information is not held centrally.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued to the health authorities and national health service acute hospital trusts on assessing the need for emergency medical admissions beds; what representations he has received in relation to the joint meeting of these trusts with their commissioning authorities on 17 January; and if he will make a statement. [11208]

**Mr. Hague:** Recognising the likely pressure on Welsh hospitals from emergency medical admissions over the Christmas and early new year period, my Department asked senior NHS managers and health care professionals to develop an action plan aimed at minimising the risk of disruption to patient services.

An outline plan was developed before Christmas and senior managers met on 17 January to review its implementation. My officials are in regular contact with

those co-ordinating action in the NHS and are monitoring the position closely.

I have not received any representation on this issue following the meeting on 17 January 1996.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Child Rearing Costs

13. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the relative costs of bringing up children by lone-parents and by couples. [8801]

**Mr. Burt:** There is no consistent evidence that the financial requirements of a lone-parent household in bringing up a child are different from those of a two-parent household, with the exception of a potentially greater need to pay for child care when the lone parent is in employment.

### Seasonal Workers (Benefits)

14. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to make the eligibility rules for income support and family credit for seasonal workers fully compatible. [8803]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The eligibility rules for seasonal workers in income support and family credit are compatible with the aims of the respective benefits. Where possible, the eligibility rules for these benefits are aligned.

### Housing Benefit

15. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received on the subject of the recent changes to the system of payment of housing benefit; and if he will make a statement. [8804]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** We have received a number of representations regarding the changes which came into effect on 2 January. They were the subject of consultation with local authority associations and the Social Security Advisory Committee last year. The outcome of the SSAC consultations was published in Cm 2902 in July 1995.

22. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has had following the announcement of the change to housing benefit rules. [8812]

**Mr. Evans:** There have been a number of representations to the Secretary of State on these changes. However, the proposals are still subject to consultation with local authority associations and the Social Security Advisory Committee. The committee's report will be published in March and my response to it will be published in a Command Paper later this year.

25. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the estimated cost of young people leaving local authority care who will require shared accommodation as a result of changes in housing benefit for the under 25-year-olds; and if he will make a statement. [8816]

**Mr. Evans:** No separate estimate has been made. Under the proposed changes, young people who have been in the care of local authorities are to be treated no differently from other young people living independently.

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost of housing benefit paid to homeless families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in the last year for which figures are available. [9260]

**Mr. Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. It is estimated that the cost of housing benefit paid to homeless families housed by local authorities as boarders, in 1994–95, was approximately £9 million.

*Notes:*

1. Homeless is defined as those families accepted as homeless by the local authority and placed in accommodation by the local authority and paying rent to the local authority.

2. Families are defined as single people or couples with children.

3. Bed-and-breakfast accommodation is not directly identified by departmental statistics; the estimate relates to those counted as boarders—i.e. rent includes an amount for meals.

*Source:*

The annual 1 per cent. sample of housing benefit cases.

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in respect of each of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom and for the United Kingdom as a whole his estimate of the total cost to local authorities of administering the new rules on housing benefit introduced in January 1995; and if he will make a statement. [8782]

**Mr. Evans:** The information is set out in the table and relates to Great Britain only. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is responsible for the administration of housing benefit in Northern Ireland.

*Estimate of local authorities' administration costs for 1995–96 arising from housing benefit changes introduced January 1996*

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| England | 6.00 |
| Wales | 0.25 |
| Scotland | 0.75 |
| Total GB | 7.01 |

1. Totals include first year set up costs.
2. Individual figures do not sum because of rounding.

### Benefit Payment Card

16. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce a benefit payment card. [8805]

**Mr. Heald:** We intend to start phasing in the replacement of order books and girocheques with benefit payment cards in the autumn.

### Benefit System Reform

17. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from political parties over the past three months concerning reforms of the benefit system. [8806]

**Mr. Lilley:** Opposition parties have criticised all the reforms of the social security system which I have announced over the last three months, as they have opposed all my previous reforms, which will save more than £5 billion by the end of the century and more than £15 billion in the longer term.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what effect he estimates his social security reforms will have had on public spending by the year 2050 in 1994–95 prices. [9472]

**Mr. Burt:** The major reforms announced in the last three years are expected to reduce public spending by about £15 billion per year in the longer term. It is estimated that this long-run figure will be reached by around 2030.

### Fraud

18. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is assessing to combat fraud; and if he will make a statement. [8807]

**Mr. Heald:** I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland).

### Child Support Agency

19. **Mr. Win Griffiths :** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases are being dealt with by the CSA. [8808]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The Child Support Agency is currently working on 833,000 cases.

21. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to review the current operation of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement. [8811]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The performance of the Child Support Agency is continually reviewed against agreed targets.

**Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the co-operation of the Child Support Agency with the parliamentary commissioner in his investigation into the working of the agency. [9541]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 22 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency co-operation with the Parliamentary Commissioner.

All Agencies of the Department of Social Security (DSS) liaise with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (PCA) through the Department's DSS PCA Focal Point. The Child Support Agency has a dedicated PCA Unit which deals with all complaints and correspondence with the PCA. This PCA Unit works closely with colleagues at the DSS PCA Focal Point.

In addition to the PCA Select Committee's strict and short deadlines for Departments to respond to new complaints referred by the PCA, the DSS is the only Department to have additional agreed deadlines with the PCA for the other stages of his investigation process. Since its inception the Child Support Agency has met all the deadlines on all the cases referred to it.

The Agency (and the Department) has a very clear policy in its dealings with the PCA: if mistakes have been made, this is explained clearly and objectively to the PCA and appropriate apologies given.

The PCA has previously commented to the PCA Select Committee that he has very good liaison with the DSS and singled out the work of the Department, through the offices of the Focal Point, for their excellent work.

I hope this is helpful.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *324*, on computer services, on what basis the Child Support Agency's operational accounting system records the amount of down time; what factors led him to give information for only 17 weeks; what has been the amount of down time up to the present for each week since 7 June 1994; and what procedures were in place to carry out the tasks carried out by the operational accounting system before 7 June 1994. [10357]

**Mr. Mitchell:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 11 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *324*.

Service availability of the Child Support Agency's operational accounting system is recorded and reported on a weekly basis.

Information was given for the whole of the period since the system went live. The answer states that there has been 100 per cent. availability except for the 17 weeks tabulated. The table shows the availability in those 17 weeks.

Before 7 June 1994, the CSA obtained management information either clerically, or by special scans of the child support computer system database.

### Funded Pension Schemes

20. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the aggregate level of funded pension schemes in the United Kingdom; and what is the level in other EU countries. [8809]

**Mr. Heald:** In 1993, the total value of funds in funded pension schemes in the United Kingdom was nearly £600 billion. This is substantially more than the latest estimate of £480 billion for all the other countries in the European Union.

### Income Support

23. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current cost of income support. [8813]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The estimated cost of income support is £16 billion for the current year.

### State Pension

24. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration he has given to relating the state pension to the inflation rate and average earnings. [8814]

**Mr. Heald:** I have no plans to change the current legislation, which provides for the annual uprating of the state pension in line with the rise in prices.

### Pensions (Rebate Contributions)

26. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the percentage of people who bought appropriate pensions in 1987–88 who have made full rebate contributions in each subsequent year. [8817]

**Mr. Heald:** Nearly half the people who started an appropriate personal pension with effect from 1987–88 have received a rebate of contributions in each year up to 1992–93, the latest year for which figures are available. Approximately 80 per cent. of those people who took out an appropriate personal pension with effect from 1987–88 and who still held it in 1992–93 received rebates for at least four of the six years involved.

### Benefit Costs

27. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of all social security benefits paid out in 1978–79; what is the estimated outturn this financial year; and what is the relationship between these figures after allowing for inflation. [8818]

**Mr. Lilley:** Spending this year is estimated to be £87.1 billion compared to £49.2 billion in 1978–79, in today's prices. This represents average real growth of 3 per cent. a year over the period.

### Cold Weather Payments

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for each week since 1 December 1995, for each Benefits Agency area, *(a)* the average minimum daily temperature, *(b)* if cold weather payments were triggered and *(c)* how many people received payments. [9623]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 18 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list, for each week since 1st December 1995, for each Benefit Agency (BA) area, (a) the average minimum daily temperature, (b) if Cold Weather Payments (CWPs) were triggered and (c) how many people received payments.

Data relating to average minimum daily temperature is collected by weather stations. A weather station covers a geographical area within which there can be several BA Districts. Information on temperatures for each BA area is not available.

Statistics on the number of CWPs made for each month is placed in the House of Commons Library. The data for December 1995 will be available by 26 January 1996.

Information on the areas triggered is provided at Annex A and copies will be placed in the Library.

I hope you find this reply helpful

### Claimants (Peterlee and Seaham)

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many single parents are currently claiming benefits in the areas covered by the Peterlee and Seaham benefit offices; [9502]

(2) how many people in the areas covered by the Seaham and Peterlee offices are in receipt of *(a)* state retirement pension, *(b)* incapacity benefit *(c)* income support, *(d)* family credit and *(e)* disability living allowance, broken down into its various components. [9500]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will reply to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many single parents are currently claiming benefits and how many people are in receipt of *(a)* State Retirement Pension (RP), *(b)* Incapacity Benefit (IB), *(c)* Income Support (IS), *(d)* Family Credit (FC) and *(e)* Disability Living Allowance (DLA), broken down into its various components, in the areas covered by the Peterlee and Seaham benefit offices.

The information requested is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is shown at Annexe A. The number of people claiming IS and DLA for Peterlee and Seaham could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The North Durham District includes the areas of Durham, Chester-le-street, Peterlee, Seaham and Stanley. The number of single parents currently in receipt of IS in the North Durham District is 6,258. Details of claims from single parents to other benefits is not available. The total number of people receiving IS in the District is 39,116, at November 1995.

I hope you find this reply helpful

### Reduced Earnings Allowance

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Benefits Agency will begin its exercise to identify and review cases where retirement allowance is mistakenly being paid in place of reduced earnings allowance; how long he expects this review to last; how many cases, approximately, he expects to be involved; and how quickly any arrears will be paid to claimants. [8952]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of retirement allowance, payable under the industrial injuries scheme, is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when the Benefits Agency will begin its exercise to identify and review cases where Retirement Allowance (RA) is mistakenly being paid in place of Reduced Earnings Allowance (REA); how long he expects this review to last; how many cases, approximately, he expects to be involved; and how quickly any arrears will be paid to claimants.

The Benefits Agency is currently trawling all their Industrial Injuries Benefit cases, approximately 4 million, to identify all RA and REA customers who have attained pension age since April 1989 when RA was introduced. The trawl which started in December 1995 is due to be finished by the end of February 1996. Once amending legislation is in place all identified cases will then be examined and where necessary referred to independent Adjudication Officers who will review the benefit entitlement.

The review exercise will be undertaken as soon as possible. Approximately 8,500 RA and 19,000 REA cases will need to be re-examined. It is not possible to say, at this stage, when this exercise will be completed but the situation will be closely monitored.

Arrears of benefit will be paid to each customer whose case is favourably reviewed as soon as the mandatory overlapping benefit enquiries have been undertaken.

I hope this reply is helpful.

### Incapacity Benefit

**Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the progress of the updating of the "Incapacity Benefit: Medical Advisers Guide" to incapacity benefit. [9540]

**Mr. Burt:** The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 22 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on the progress of the updating of the Incapacity Benefit: Medical Advisors Guide to Incapacity Benefit.

The Medical Advisers' Guide to Incapacity Benefit is currently being brought up to date. A revised version will be available from April 1996.

I hope this reply is helpful.

### Pension Contributions

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the total number of the work force who are currently members of (i) State earnings-related pension scheme, (ii) company pension schemes and (iii) personal pension schemes, *(b)* the average percentage of the wage or salary being paid into each scheme and *(c)* the average length of time in years for which these contributions have been made. [7591]

**Mr. Heald:** The following are the latest figures available for the numbers of individuals falling into each category at some time during the year in question, with one exception—see footnote 2. In certain cases some people may, in the course of a year, be in more than one type of scheme and so the numbers in separate schemes cannot be sensibly totalled. Nor can they be compared to numbers in employment or the work force, measured at a single point in time. This is because more people will work at some time during the year than will be working at any single point in time.

The cumulative number of people who paid some class 1 national insurance contributions at the not-contracted-out rate over the year 1992–93 was 9.1 million. Of those, the number whose earnings factor was equal to or above the annual lower earnings limit is 6.5 million[1]; these will accrue entitlement to additional pension as will a number of people whose earnings factor was just below the LEL, provided they reach state pension age before April 2000.

Individuals reaching state pension age from April 1999 onwards may also receive an enhancement to their entitlement to additional pension in respect of periods of caring responsibilities and incapacity since 1978.

In 1991, 10.7 million people were members of occupational pension schemes[2]. This figure includes members of both contracted-in and contracted-out schemes.

In 1992–93, the latest year for which all the relevant data is available, 5.7 million employees were members of appropriate personal pension schemes[3] and 600,000 self-employed people held non-appropriate personal pensions[4]. There were also 1.1 million self-employed holders of retirement annuity contracts[4]. In addition, 2.5 million non-appropriate personal pension arrangements[5] were held by employees, some of whom may also have held an appropriate personal pension or a number of non-appropriate arrangements.

Information relating to the average percentage of the wage or salary paid into each type of scheme and the length of time for which contributions have been made is not available.

1. Source 1 per cent. sample from the National Insurance Recording System.
2. Source: GAD 1991 survey of occupational pension schemes which records membership at points in time rather than cumulatively over a year.
3. Source: 1 per cent. sample from the national insurance recording system.
4. Source: Inland Revenue survey of personal incomes.
5. Source: Inland Revenue tax returns from all providers.

In certain cases some people may, in the course of a year, be in one or more types of schemes and so the numbers in separate schemes cannot be sensibly totalled.

### Mental Illness

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *795*, on sick days related to mental illness, if he will estimate the value of benefits in each year since 1979. [7789]

**Mr. Burt:** The information requested is not available.

### Voluntary and Charitable Payments

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the increase from £10 to £20 in the disregard for voluntary and charitable payments. [8503]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The increase in the disregard on charitable and voluntary payments is likely to be achieved at negligible cost.

### Child Support Appeal Tribunals

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action his Department is taking to improve the average clearance time at child support appeal tribunals. [9103]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** In conjunction with the independent tribunal service, we are continually looking for ways to improve the clearance time on appeals. For example, the Child Support Agency has set up a central unit to deal with appeals which in the second half of 1995 processed twice as many appeals as in the first half.

### Pensioners (Consumer Durables)

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the lowest income quintile of pensioner households had access to a *(a)* fridge or fridge/freezer, *(b)* car or van, *(c)* freezer or

fridge/freezer, *(d)* telephone and *(e)* television in (i) 1975 and (ii) 1995. [10206]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

*Estimated percentages of pensioner benefit units in the bottom quintile of the income distribution possessing various durable goods*

*Percentage*

| *Durable goods* | *1979* | *1993* |
|---|---|---|
| (a) Fridge or fridge/freezer | 81 | 97 |
| (b) Car or van | 26 | 34 |
| (c) Freezer or fridge/freezer | 23 | 70 |
| (d) Telephone | 45 | 88 |
| (e) Television | 91 | [1]98 |

*Notes:*

[1] This figure is for 1992 as the data is not available from the Pensioners' Incomes Series 1993.

1. A pensioner benefit unit is defined as a single person over state pension age or a couple where the husband, or head, is over state pension age.
2. The earliest date for which information is available is 1979.
3. The latest date for which information is available is 1993.
4. The information is based on pensioner benefit units rather than pensioner households.

*Source:*

Analysis of the 1979, 1992 and 1993 Family Expenditure Surveys and Pensioners' Incomes Series.

## War Pensions

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the representations his Department received during 1995 from individual war pensioners, their associations, charities, local authorities and other politicians on the issue of disregard of war pensions by local authorities. [9973]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available in the format requested. In 1995, this Department received a number of such representations. From the information that is available, this included some 60 letters from hon. Members and some 144 letters from members of the public, local authorities and other interested parties.

## Pensioners (Income Support)

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners claiming income support in 2025 and 2035, assuming that the income support level remains at its current proportion of average earnings; [10511]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners in 2025 and 2035 who will have a state earnings-related pension scheme entitlement or other second-tier pension entitlement which, in combination with their basic pension entitlement, will leave them with an income below current income support levels, assuming that the basic state pension and the level of income support remain constant in real terms; [10513]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners claiming income support in 2025 and 2035, assuming that income support levels remain constant in real terms; [10510]

(4) what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners in 2025 and 2035 who will have a state earnings-related pension scheme entitlement or other second-tier pension entitlement of under £20 in 1996 prices; [10512]

(5) what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners claiming income support over the period of the Government Actuary's quinquennial review of the national insurance fund; and what assumptions he has used to make this estimate. [10514]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available in the format requested. However, some information is now available from the departmental pensioner incomes simulation model, which projects changes in pensioner incomes to the year 2025. The results from the model are heavily dependent on the economic and behavioural assumptions used, and should be treated as a broad indication of the likely order of magnitude of any figures given, and should in addition be rounded heavily[1]. Details of the methodology and assumptions used in the model, and a brief overview of basic results, will appear in a technical paper released in the coming months.

In 2025, assuming that basic state pension and the level of income support remain constant in real terms at 1994 prices, PENSIM projects that approximately 1.5 million pensioner benefit units[2] will have a SERPS pension entitlement or other second-tier pension entitlement which, in combination with their basic pension entitlement, will leave them with a pension income below income support levels.

However, due to income from other source, such as earnings and investment income, and other income support rules, such as capital limits, PENSIM estimates that in 2025 there will be approximately 0.5 million pensioner benefit units in receipt of income support. In 2010 PENSIM estimates there will be approximately 1 million pensioner benefit units in receipt of income support, assuming that income support levels remain constant in real terms.

If income support levels had been uprated to remain at the same proportion of average earnings as in 1994, PENSIM projects that in 2025 there would be approximately 1.5 million pensioner benefit units in receipt of income support.

PENSIM can be used to estimate relative changes over time but cannot produce robust estimates of absolute values. It cannot therefore be used to estimate the number of pensioners in 2025 who will have a SERPS pension entitlement or other second-tier pension entitlement of under £20 in 1996 prices.

*Notes*

[1] All figures rounded to the nearest 500,000.

[2] Pensioner benefit unit is defined as a single pensioner over state pension age in 2025, or a couple with at least one partner over state pension age.

### National Insurance Fund Subsidy

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the level of annual subsidy to the national insurance fund in each year since 1985 to *(a)* meet spending commitments and *(b)* compensate for those who have taken out private pension insurance. [10845]

**Mr. Heald:** The amounts paid to the national insurance fund for each year in the period from 1985–86 to 1994–95 are shown in the table. These payments are a general contribution to the fund and are not attributed to any particular aspect of its expenditure.

*Payments into the national insurance fund[1] 1985–86 to 1994–95*

| *Year* | *Amount £ million* |
|---|---|
| 1985–86 | 2,163 |
| 1986–87 | 2,412 |
| 1987–88 | 2,135 |
| 1988–89 | 1,653 |
| 1989–90 | nil |
| 1990–91 | nil |
| 1991–92 | nil |
| 1992–93 | nil |
| 1993–94 | 7,589 |
| 1994–95 | 6,280 |

[1] Treasury supplement until 1988–89; Treasury grant from 1993–94.

### State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the total number of people in SERPS for each year since 1985 and for each year the number *(a)* entering, *(b)* leaving and *(c)* re-entering the scheme. [10846]

**Mr. Heald:** Information relating to the number of people in the state earnings-related pension scheme for each year since 1985–86 to 1992–93 is given in the table. Information relating to the number of people who entered, left, and re-entered SERPS is not currently available and I will write to the hon. Member with these details shortly.

| *Year* | *Number of people (millions)* |
|---|---|
| 1985–86 | 10.2 |
| 1986–87 | 10.4 |
| 1987–88 | 7.2 |
| 1988–89 | 7.6 |
| 1989–90 | 7.5 |
| 1990–91 | 7.5 |
| 1991–92 | 6.7 |
| 1992–93 | 6.5 |

1. Figures are for UK and rounded to nearest .1 million.
2. Figures for 1987–88 are provisional.
3. Figures for 1992–93 are not complete as some employers' tax returns may not yet have been input to the national insurance recording system.
4. *Source:* 1 per cent. trawl of NIRS.
5. Excludes appropriate personal pension holders.

The table gives the numbers of people who have a qualifying year for additional pension purposes by virtue of having paid some class 1 national insurance contributions at the not contracted-out rate during the year with relevant earnings greater than or equal to the lower earnings limit applicable to that year.

### State Pension (Earnings Link)

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of restoration of the link with earnings of the state pension from April 1996: and if he will make a statement. [10848]

**Mr. Heald:** It is estimated that restoring the link with earnings in uprating retirement pension in 1996–97 would increase pension expenditure by £10.1 billion.

### Habitual Residence Rule

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have been denied benefits under the habitual residence rule; and what number were *(a)* British citizens and *(b)* foreign nationals. [9348]

**Mr. Roger Evans** *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The information requested is set out in the table and covers the period August 1994 to November 1995. It relates only to income support; housing benefit figures will not be available until December 1996 at the earliest.

| | *Fail* |
|---|---|
| EEA nationals | 11,946 |
| British citizens | 7,489 |
| Others | 13,835 |
| Total | 33,270 |

The Benefits Agency has placed figures relating to the habitual residence test in the Library since April 1995.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Wednesday 24 January 1996*

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Small Claims Limit

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice he received on his proposal to raise the small claims limit in housing cases other than possession proceedings from £1,000 to £3,000 for representatives of consumers and the legal profession. [10261]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The Lord Chancellor received responses from representatives of housing advice groups, including the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Law Centres Federation and Shelter, from consumer groups such as the National Consumer Council, from the legal professions, including the Law Society and the Housing Law Practitioners' Association, and from members of the judiciary.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Civil Servants (Opposition Contacts)

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Prime Minister if he has now authorised confidential pre-election contacts between senior civil servants and Opposition spokesmen. [12001]

**The Prime Minister:** The Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), has now asked me to authorise the conventional pre-election contacts between senior civil servants and Opposition spokesmen and I have done so. The purpose of these contacts is to allow Opposition spokesmen to inform themselves of factual questions of departmental organisation and to inform senior civil servants of any organisational changes stemming from Opposition policies in the event of a change of Government. Such meetings are confidential on both sides.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs; [10977]

(2) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private fiance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10976]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answers given yesterday by the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Executive Agencies

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies; and if he will make a statement. [9148]

**Mr. Hanley:** I have asked the chief executives of the National Resources Institute and Wilton Park executive agencies to reply to the hon. Member's question.

*Letter from Richard Latter to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:*

Wilton Park arranges its pre-retirement courses for staff utilising the good offices of the FCO Training Department.

*Letter from Anthony Beattie to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 19 January 1996:*

In your question addressed to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs you asked what action the heads of his executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses. It has been agreed that I should provide this information in respect of NRI.

Pre-retirement seminars organised by ODA are offered to NRI staff nearing retirement age. Provision of courses or seminars by a third party (as is presently being done for staff leaving NRI under a current severance/early retirement programme) would be arranged if ODA facilities were not available.

### Chernobyl Explosion (Compensation)

**Mr. Jopling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what approaches have been made to the Governments of the former Soviet Union, under the principles of the polluter pays, to seek compensation for the effects in the United Kingdom of the Chernobyl explosion. [11154]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Just after the 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, on 10 July 1986, we notified the Soviet Union that we were reserving the right to file claims for damage which had occurred in the United Kingdom.

However, we came to the conclusion that it was unrealistic to expect the Soviet Union to honour such claims.

It was not possible to base a claim for compensation against the Soviet Union on relevant international conventions, in particular the 1968 Vienna convention on civil liability for nuclear damage, as it was not a party to

these conventions. The Soviet Union now no longer exists. The Russian Federation and Ukraine are considering accession to the 1968 Vienna convention. However, any such accession would not have retrospective effect.

We are participating in the work in progress internationally to achieve an enhanced global regime for nuclear liability. We expect that this issue will be discussed during the G7/G8 nuclear safety summit in Moscow in April.

### Pakistan

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Pakistan in respect of the abuse of human rights in Pakistan; and if he will make a statement. [10358]

**Mr. Hanley:** We regularly raise our concerns about humans rights issues with the Government of Pakistan and will continue to do so.

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people have been killed in Karachi and Sindh in Pakistan in the past two years; and if he will make a statement. [10360]

**Mr. Hanley:** The figures we have from the Pakistani authorities for people killed in the last two years are:

| | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|
| Sindh (including Karachi) | 2,112 | 2,823 |
| Karachi | 919 | 1,847 |

We have consistently stressed the importance of respect for human rights and have urged all parties to refrain from violence and to negotiate a sustainable political settlement.

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent arrest by the Pakistan security forces of the secretary-general of Human Rights International. [10361]

**Mr. Hanley:** Dr. Halepota, the secretary-general of Human Rights International, who is a dual British-Pakistani national, was detained by the Pakistani police on 28 November 1995. Under international law, we are not entitled to afford protection to a dual national in the country of his or her second nationality. However, on humanitarian grounds our high commission made informal representations to the Pakistani authorities. Dr. Halepota was deported to the UK on 5 January.

## TREASURY

### Tax Returns

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number and proportion of taxpayers aged 65 years or over who complete tax returns. [7648]

**Mr. Jack:** It is estimated that in 1995–96 there will be around 10 million people aged 65 or over, about 3 million of whom will pay income tax. It is estimated that around 750,000 or 7.5 per cent. of the total will complete tax returns.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he has undertaken with the Plain English Society on the self-assessment tax forms currently being proposed; what has been the response; and if he will place a copy of all correspondence in the Library. [8319]

**Mr. Jack:** The Inland Revenue has won several plain English awards for its forms over the years and has been in correspondence with the Plain English Campaign about obtaining a crystal mark accreditation for the new self-assessment tax return. It continues to consult extensively with prospective users about the wording of the return and has invited PEC to contribute to that consultative process.

It would not be appropriate for me to place copies of the correspondence on this in the House Library without the consent of the parties to it.

### Incomes (Budget Effects)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* single persons, *(b)* married couples and *(c)* married couples with two children he estimates will benefit by £9 per week net following his Budget; and what considerations underlay his estimate that taxpayers would benefit by this sum. [9779]

**Mr. Jack:** As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear in his Budget statement, a married couple with two children and one earner on average earnings gain around £190 per year from the Budget tax changes, including the effect of changes to indirect tax. Taking higher earnings into account, the same family should be around £450 per year better off next year, after tax and inflation.

### Sunday Trading

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total value of receipts from sales generated through Sunday trading *(a)* to retailers and *(b)* to the Treasury; and if he will make a statement. [10431]

**Mr. Jack:** No such estimates have been made. It would be extremely difficult to isolate the effects of Sunday trading from the many other factors that influence retail sales and tax revenues. However, it is clear that many people have welcomed the opportunity to shop on Sunday, and that retailers judge it worth their while to trade on Sundays.

### Disabled People (VAT)

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the Customs and Excise head office directive on the charging of VAT on computers and printers supplied to registered disabled people. [10918]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I have placed in the Library a copy of the Customs notice, "VAT reliefs for people with disabilities," which is freely available in local VAT offices. Customs head office has not issued any general directive on the liability of computers and printers for disabled people.

### Taxpayers (Lancashire)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number and percentage of standard rate and higher rate taxpayers in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the United Kingdom for the most recent year for which figures are available. [10872]

**Mr. Amory:** The table provides estimates for 1993–94, the latest year for which information can be provided:

*Basic and higher rate taxpayers 1993–94*

| | *Taxpayers liable at basic rate but not higher rate* | | *Taxpayer liable at higher rate* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Thousands* | *Percentage*[1] | *Thousands* | *Percentage*[1] |
| Lancashire | 413 | 73.0 | 25 | 4.5 |
| United Kingdom[2] | 18,090 | 72.3 | 1,740 | 7.0 |

[1] Of total number of taxpayers, including those liable only to the lower rate of tax.
[2] Includes members of HM forces, the Merchant Navy, civil servants serving overseas and non-residents liable to UK tax who cannot be allocated to regions.

### Income Tax (Relief and Allowances)

**Mr. Timms:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers there are with income tax reliefs and allowances in excess of *(a)* £7,000, *(b)* £8,000, *(c)* £9,000, *(d)* £10,000, *(e)* £11,000 and *(f)* £12,000 (i) including and (ii) excluding profit-related pay. [11191]

**Mr. Jack:** Available information was given in my reply to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *83*.

### Tax Yields

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of taxation taken as *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax, *(c)* capital gains tax, *(d)* VAT and *(e)* other taxes in 1979–80, 1985–86 and 1995–96. [11125]

**Mr. Jack:** The table gives the requested figures. The figures for 1995–96 are Budget forecasts.

*Income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax, VAT and other taxes as a percentage of total taxes and NICs*[1]

| *Year* | *Income tax* | *Corporation tax* | *Capital gains tax* | *VAT* | *Other taxes*[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 28¾ | 6¾ | ½ | 11½ | 52¼ |
| 1985–86 | 24¼ | 7 | ½ | 13¾ | 54½ |
| 1995–96 | 27 | 9¾ | ¼ | 16½ | 45¼ |

[1] Total taxes and NICS includes council tax for 1995–96 for consistency with earlier years.
[2] Other taxes include excise duties, stamp duty, council tax and NICs.
Totals may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10073]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Treasury's policy continues to be not to gold plate EC directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the UK. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [10061]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

### National Helpline

**Ms Primarolo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the national Customs, Inland Revenue and Contributions Agency helpline will be launched; when and where he made announcements about the launch; what will be the start-up costs and running costs; if all the required new technology needed is in place; and what pilot studies have been undertaken indicating *(a)* the period covered, *(b)* the cost, *(c)* the numbers using the helpline and *(d)* if his Department has evaluated the results. [10535]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Our proposals for a national telephone helpline to give advice to employers on PAYE and national insurance contributions issues and to VAT traders were announced by the Deputy Prime Minister at a press conference on 19 September. The conference was held in response to the first report of the deregulation task force, chaired by the right hon. Francis Maude, and coincided with a joint press release from the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, the Department of Social Security and the Contributions Agency which gave more detail on the helpline. This confirmed that a helpline would be piloted in Scotland from October 1995, with the aim of extending it to cover the whole country in October 1996. A press conference hosted by officials from Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the CA was also held in Glasgow on the same day to give more details on the pilot.

The pilot has been running successfully since 2 October and is being closely monitored by all three Departments. The helpline has attracted more than 12,500 calls; the final cost of the pilot will be dependent on the volume of calls received over the year. The final scope and design of the national helpline is not yet settled; decisions will be made in the light of the pilot which, as well as testing systems, is also taking soundings from businesses on how helpful they are finding the service. The final costs and technological requirements will depend on the design chosen.

### Environmental Appraisal

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the White Paper, "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money" were considered in the environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [10608]

(2) if the White Paper, "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", produced by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the appraisal; [10607]

(3) how the White Paper, "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money" was modified by the results of the environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [10609]

(4) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the White Paper, "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money". [10610]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The White Paper, "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money", was not subject to an environmental appraisal. There are no plans to monitor the environmental impact.

### Duty-free Sales (Eurostar)

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take the legislative steps necessary to allow duty-free sales to Eurostar passengers at *(a)* Waterloo station, *(b)* Ashford station and *(c)* on board trains; and if he will make a statement. [11518]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* No. International convention precludes the sale of duty-free goods on international rail journeys both on trains and at stations. The United Kingdom, and our European Union partners, have accepted recommendations of the Customs Co-operation Council to that effect. There are, for example, no duty-free sales for trains travelling between Dublin and Belfast, or between Paris and Bonn.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Fatal Accident, Yorkshire

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will review the Crown Prosecution Service decision in respect of prosecution of the operator of the truck with defective brakes which killed six people at Sowerby bridge in Yorkshire. [11093]

**The Attorney-General:** On 1 December 1995, the divisional court refused an application for judicial review of the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service not to prosecute any individual or company for manslaughter arising out of the accident at Sowerby bridge. In doing so, the court commented on the evidence. Once the transcript of the judgment is received a decision can be made on what further action, if any, should be taken.

### British Bus (Fraud Investigation)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Attorney-General if British Bus is the subject of a Serious Fraud Office investigation. [10936]

**The Attorney-General:** The Serious Fraud Office is investigating possible offences relating to the conduct of certain directors of British Bus.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Construction Industry

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received as to employment prospects in the construction industry in 1996. [10276]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I regularly meet senior representatives of the construction industry to discuss a range of issues including their concerns about workload and employment prospects. My Department prepares jointly with the industry a twice yearly "State of the Industry" report which is next due for publication on 29 February.

### Pollution (Manchester)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to reduce pollution in the Greater Manchester area. [10301]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Government have put in place a number of mechanisms to control pollution which apply throughout the country. The Environment Act 1990 introduced two systems for controlling polluting emissions from industry: integrated pollution control, which limits emissions to all environmental media from large installations; and local authority air pollution control, covering emissions to air from small and medium enterprises. Both these systems apply best available techniques not entailing excessive cost, and authorisations are reviewed periodically. The main control on air pollution from domestic sources is the smoke control areas system, introduced in the Clean Air Act 1956. Emissions from the transport sector are mainly controlled through European Community legislation, and we shall be negotiating new vehicle emission and fuel quality standards for the year 2000 and beyond in the Council of Ministers this year.

The Environment Act 1995 introduced a duty on local authorities to assess and review air quality in their areas, and to establish local air quality management areas where standards or objectives are being or are likely to be breached. In such areas, authorities must draw up action plans to help bring ambient pollution down to acceptable levels. The Government are currently developing

guidance for local authorities to help them discharge those duties.

As regards water quality, in 1994, for the north-west as a whole, 84 per cent. of river and canal length was classed as good or fair compared to 74 per cent. in 1990. More specifically, the Government have sponsored the Mersey basin campaign, a major initiative to clean up the rivers, canals and estuary of the Mersey basin. Increasingly stringent controls have been applied to both direct industrial and sewage discharges and the pollution load in rivers flowing into the estuary has been reduced by 80 per cent. over the last 25 years.

### House Building (Manchester)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the house building industry in the Greater Manchester area. [10300]

**Mr. Clappison:** The value of new orders for house building in the Greater Manchester area in 1994, the last complete year for which statistics are available, was £61 million local authority and housing association and £250 million private. This compares with £24 million and £100 million respectively in the first half of 1995.

The value of new orders for private housing in Great Britain in the three months to November 1995 was 1 per cent. higher than in the previous quarter. The Government welcome this small improvement and continue to promote economic policies based on low inflation, sustainable growth and sound public finances which will encourage a return of consumer confidence and help ensure the long-term health of the housing market. The affordability of housing for purchase is excellent, with mortgage rates at their lowest for 30 years.

### Service Charges

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to monitor the value for money of service charges in the public and private sectors; and if he will make a statement. [10297]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Government have no plans to monitor the value for money of service charges in the private sector. We have, however, received many representations on the subject and I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on 18 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *668*.

The Department commissioned research into council leaseholders' service charges in 1994 and the findings have been published. This included information about the level of service charges and the attitude of leaseholders to them. We are considering further research.

### Metropolitan District Employees

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many full-time equivalent employees there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head of population in the service of each metropolitan district. [10430]

**Mr. Curry:** The available information is as follows. The levels of employment in individual authorities are not directly comparable because of variations in, for example, population structure and social characteristics, the extent of the use of private firms and contractors and the level of work undertaken for other authorities and public bodies on an agency basis.

| | *Staff at June 1995* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Whole-time equivalents* | *Staff per thousand population* |
| Barnsley | 8,056 | 35.6 |
| Birmingham | 35,755 | 35.5 |
| Bolton | 9,335 | 35.2 |
| Bradford | 16,133 | 33.5 |
| Bury | 5,097 | 28.0 |
| Calderdale | [1]— | [1]— |
| Coventry | 10,953 | 36.2 |
| Doncaster | 9,753 | 33.3 |
| Dudley | — | — |
| Gateshead | 8,269 | 40.9 |
| Kirklees | 12,530 | 32.4 |
| Knowsley | 5,491 | 35.7 |
| Leeds | 23,964 | 33.1 |
| Liverpool | — | — |
| Manchester | 20,726 | 48.1 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | — | — |
| North Tyneside | — | — |
| Oldham | 7,435 | 33.7 |
| Rochdale | 7,010 | 33.8 |
| Rotherham | 8,250 | 32.2 |
| Salford | 9,210 | 39.9 |
| Sandwell | 10,543 | 35.9 |
| Sefton | — | — |
| Sheffield | 17,169 | 32.4 |
| Solihull | 5,536 | 27.4 |
| South Tyneside | 5,828 | 37.2 |
| St. Helens | 5,961 | 32.9 |
| Stockport | 7,588 | 26.0 |
| Sunderland | 11,010 | 37.0 |
| Tameside | 6,963 | 31.4 |
| Trafford | 5,753 | 26.4 |
| Wakefield | 11,822 | 37.3 |
| Walsall | 8,908 | 33.8 |
| Wigan | 8,238 | 26.6 |
| Wirral | 10,121 | 30.4 |
| Wolverhampton | 9,206 | 37.6 |

[1] Data not available.

*Source:*
Joint Staffing Watch, June 1995. Figures are for staff in general services—i.e. excluding law and order services.

### Aquifers

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many aquifers currently supplying wholesome water have been sterilised following industrial or agricultural pollution or as a result of a traffic or railway accident in the last 30 years. [10633]

**Mr. Clappison:** This information is not held centrally. However, relevant National Rivers Authority monitoring data are recorded on public registers in each of the authority's regions.

### Disabled People (Access)

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation he has recommended *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* local authorities to carry out with organisations representing disabled people

regarding (i) the construction of access for disabled people to new buildings and (ii) making access easier for disabled people to older buildings. [10527]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** Users and owners of buildings, including Government Departments, normally seek to make them accessible in accordance with recognised standards and guidelines, produced in consultation with organisations representing disabled people. Formal guidance is given in the approved document supporting part M of the Building Regulations 1991 and in the British Standards Institution's code of practice for access for the disabled to buildings, BS 5810, both of which were subject to consultation.

Following Department of the Environment circular 10/82, general advice on access issues is also available from local authorities, many of whom have appointed access officers specifically for the purpose. They liaise with access groups representing local disabled people.

Regulations and guidance on implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, including access to existing buildings, will be subject to consultation with organisations representing disabled people by the Departments responsible for implementing the various parts of the Act.

## Negative Equity

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the total value of negative equity in homes in *(a)* England and *(b)* the north-west in each year since 1992 at current prices. [10871]

**Mr. Clappison:** Estimates of negative equity are sensitive to the underlying assumptions made, such as changes in house prices. Using the Department's house price index, adjusted for the mix of different dwelling types, it is estimated that the total value of negative equity in homes in *(a)* England and *(b)* the north-west in each year since 1992 at current (1995) prices is as follows:

*£ million*

| | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* |
|---|---|---|---|
| (a) England | 4,893 | 5,230 | 3,116 |
| (b) North-West | 2 | 29 | 5 |

Estimates for 1995 are not yet available.

These estimates provide only a very broad idea of the value of negative equity. The suitability of the assumptions used in compiling estimates of negative equity is currently under review.

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households are currently in negative equity in each London borough. [10885]

**Mr. Clappison:** Estimates of negative equity are not available for individual London boroughs.

## Housing Costs

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average household rent in *(a)* privately rented, *(b)* council and *(c)* housing association dwellings in each London borough. [10889]

**Mr. Clappison:** The average weekly local authority and housing association rents in London boroughs in March 1994, the latest date for which figures for individual London boroughs are available for both local authorities and housing associations, were as follows:

*£ per week*

| | *Local authority* | *Housing association* |
|---|---|---|
| Barking and Dagenham | 32.27 | 53.47 |
| Barnet | 48.66 | 42.34 |
| Bexley | 43.13 | 44.60 |
| Brent | 50.18 | 45.36 |
| Bromley | 40.47 | 47.50 |
| Camden | 48.35 | 46.48 |
| City of London | 46.57 | n/a |
| Croydon | 50.94 | 53.50 |
| Ealing | 63.90 | 43.86 |
| Enfield | 46.75 | 47.93 |
| Greenwich | 41.70 | 44.08 |
| Hackney | 46.42 | 40.87 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 46.70 | 38.76 |
| Haringey | 52.49 | 39.08 |
| Harrow | 56.88 | 43.73 |
| Havering | 36.91 | 42.67 |
| Hillingdon | 59.48 | 44.57 |
| Hounslow | 37.59 | 43.00 |
| Islington | 47.07 | 42.39 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 56.40 | 37.49 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 60.27 | 46.23 |
| Lambeth | 40.71 | 37.39 |
| Lewisham | 41.35 | 38.71 |
| Merton | 49.21 | 47.80 |
| Newham | 37.00 | 43.45 |
| Redbridge | 61.32 | 45.56 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 48.24 | 47.56 |
| Southwark | 44.36 | 39.92 |
| Sutton | 42.28 | 39.65 |
| Tower Hamlets | 35.78 | 40.13 |
| Waltham Forest | 39.89 | 43.28 |
| Wandsworth | 55.64 | 44.69 |
| Westminster | 59.65 | 42.18 |
| London | 45.65 | 42.74 |

The average rent figures are not directly comparable as they take no account of differences in the composition of stock, eg. size and type of dwellings, their age and condition.

*Source:*

Local authorities—housing subsidy claim forms.
Housing asscoiations—HAR 10/1 (not grossed for missing data).

Figure for average private sector rents are available only from sample surveys which are not large enough to produce reliable figures for individual local authorities. The average weekly private sector rent in London in 1993–94, from the survey of English housing was £89; this figure, which covers all types of tenancy, is subject to sampling variability.

**Mrs. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is *(a)* the average mortgage level and *(b)* the number of households with mortgages in each London borough. [10887]

**Mr. Clappison:** Estimates from the survey of English housing indicate that in London as a whole the average mortgage payment was £330 a month in 1994–95 and that

just over 1 million households were buying with a mortgage. These estimates are subject to sampling variability. Estimates are not available for individual boroughs.

### Repossession

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many repossessions there were in each London borough in each year since 1992. [10886]

**Mr. Clappison:** Data are not held centrally on the number of repossessions in each London borough.

### Producer Responsibility Group on Packaging

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the current members of the producer responsibility group on packaging. [11180]

**Mr. Clappison:** The producer responsibility group presented its final report to Government in November 1994 and subsequently disbanded. At present, many businesses in the packaging industry are members of the Valpak working representative advisory committee—V-WRAG. Industry has also proposed that a committee be set up to advise the Secretary of State on the drafting and implementation of the regulations on producer responsibility for packaging, and on arrangements for carrying out review of the legal obligation. The Government intend to make an announcement on this shortly.

### London Residuary Body

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sums remain to be distributed by the London residuary body to the London boroughs; and what residual rights and liabilities remain to be transferred. [10164]

**Sir Paul Beresford** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* I understand that the London residuary body intends to distribute in early March some £6.2 million in revenue balances to the London boroughs and to the City of London. We are currently consulting the London boroughs on proposals to wind up the residuary body by 31 March 1996, to transfer responsibility for producing the LRB's final report and accounts to the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and to transfer all other remaining rights and liabilities to the London borough of Bromley as lead borough. Under these proposals, which would be effected by order, Bromley would be responsible for distributing among the London boroughs and the City any sums received by it as lead borough.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the emoluments paid to each board member of the London residuary body in the year 1995–96 to date; and what plans there are to scale them down. [10158]

**Sir Paul Beresford** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Between 1 April and 30 September 1995 the chairman of the London residuary body was paid £7,908 and the three other board members were each paid £4,775. The board was reappointed on 1 October and thereafter remuneration has been paid on the basis of one day a month at a rate of £370 per day for the chairman and £225 per day for each board member.

Rather than scaling down expenditures, we are consulting the London boroughs on proposals to wind up the residuary body by 31 March 1996.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10069]

**Mr. Gummer** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* My Department's policy is not to gold plate EC directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the UK. Officials are required to draw Ministers' attention to any elements of proposed regulations which go further than the EC directive concerned strictly requires, and I am exploring ways of ensuring that implementing regulations clearly explain which elements derive from the directive and, where relevant, why additional elements have been included. The presumption is always against any addition. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [10051]

**Mr. Gummer** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Official guidance on gold-plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments. In addition, the Health and Safety Executive has already issued an instruction to its staff that other options should always be considered before the possibility of new regulations or approved codes of practice are considered, and that where such regulations or codes are proposed to Ministers they should be accompanied by a memorandum explaining any points where the requirements go beyond any EC directive. A copy of instruction, "General Administrative Procedures (GAP) No. 8—A Short Guide to Regulating in HSE", is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of local authorities run their housing rent accounts on a surplus; and if he will list those authorities. [10506]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* Based on returns submitted to the Department, local authorities' housing revenue account opening balances for 1994–95 totalled £745 million. Their end-year balances totalled £756 million; 46 per cent. of authorities increased their balances during the year. Those authorities are as follows:

Alnwick
Arun
Aylesbury
Barking and Dagenham
Barnet

Basildon
Bath
Bedford
Berwick upon Tweed
Bexley
Blaby
Boston
Bournemouth
Bradford
Braintree
Bridgnorth
Brighton
Broxbourne
Burnley
Bury
Calderdale
Cannock Chase
Canterbury
Caradon
Carrick
Castle Morpeth
Castle Point
Chelmsford
Kensington and Chelsea
Chester
Chesterfield
Chester le Street
Colchester
Corby
Craven
Crewe and Nantwich
Dacorum
Derbyshire Dales
Dudley
Ealing
East Hertfordshire
East Lindsey
East Staffordshire
East Yorkshire
Eden
Elmbridge
Enfield
Epping Forest
Erewash
Forest Heath
Forest of Dean
Fylde
Glanford
Great Yarmouth
Greenwich
Harborough
Haringey
Harlow
Harrogate
Harrow
Hartlepool
Hastings
Havering
Hillingdon
Hinckley and Bosworth
Holderness
Horsham
Hounslow
Huntingdonshire
Isles of Scilly
Kettering
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
Kingswood
Kirklees
Lambeth
Lancaster
Leeds
Leicester
Lewes
Luton
Macclesfield
Maidstone
Manchester
Melton
Mid Suffolk
Middlesbrough
Milton Keynes
Newcastle upon Tyne
Newham
North Norfolk
North Wiltshire
Nuneaton
Oadby and Wigston
Oxford
Penwith
Plymouth
Redditch
Reigate and Banstead
Richmond upon Thames
Richmondshire
Rochdale
Rochford
Rossendale
Rother
Rugby
Runnymede
Rushcliffe
Rutland
South Derbyshire
Salford
Salisbury
Sandwell
Scarborough
Scunthorpe
Slough
Solihull
South Cambridgeshire
South Herefordshire
South Holland
South Kesteven
South Lakeland
South Norfolk
South Northamptonshire
Southend-on-Sea
Southwark
Spelthorne
St. Albans
St. Edmundsbury
Tameside
Tandridge
Teesdale
Teignbridge
Test Valley
Tewkesbury
Thanet
Tunbridge Wells
Tynedale
Uttlesford
Wakefield
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Wansbeck
Watford
Waveney
Wealden
West Oxford
West Wiltshire
Westminster
Wigan
Winchester
Windsor and Maidenhead
Worcester
Worthing

### Housing Allocations

**Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he plans to use the regulation-making powers on housing allocations contained in part VI of the Housing Bill. [12185]

**Mr. Curry:** I have placed in the Library of the House today a copy of a consultation paper that invites views on the content of regulations about the allocation of housing accommodation by local authorities. The Government are committed to ensuring that social housing goes to those households with the greatest underlying needs, and the paper seeks views on ways to achieve this. It is proposed that the regulations should provide a framework within which each local authority would establish the allocation policy best suited to local needs.

## HEALTH

### Health Service Employees

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued to health authorities or NHS hospital trusts regarding priority treatment to *(a)* key and *(b)* other NHS employees. [10255]

**Mr. Malone:** Decisions on treatment must be based on clinical need. Guidance was issued to the national health service in June 1991 in executive letter EL(91)84, "Joint Guidance (NHSME/JCC) to hospital consultants on GP Fundholding", and EL(94)19, "Clinical Priority on Waiting Lists", copies of which are available in the Library, underlining the principle.

### Electric Wheelchairs

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of new electrically-powered wheelchairs supplied by the national health service in the Greater Manchester area over the past three years. [11033]

**Mr. Bowis:** The number of powered wheelchairs issued in the Greater Manchester area in each of the last three years is shown in the table. South Manchester health authority and South Manchester University Hospitals trust are the only Manchester authorities which have issued powered wheelchairs.

| | | *Number* |
|---|---|---|
| 1992–93 | South Manchester DHA | 467 |
| 1993–94 | South Manchester DHA | 551 |
| 1994–95 | South Manchester University Hospitals | 484 |

*Source:*
DH KO73 returns.

Boundary and organisational changes may mean that the data are not strictly comparable year on year.

### Nurse Training, Manchester

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was allocated to the training of nurses in the Greater Manchester area for the last year for which figures are available. [11034]

**Mr. Horam:** Manchester college of midwifery and nursing and the Northern college of nursing, midwifery and health studies are the major establishments training nurses in the Greater Manchester area. The table shows the contracts for the financial year 1995–96 that North-West regional health authority has with these two colleges.

| *College* | *Column 1* £ | *Column 2* £ | *Column 3* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Manchester | 7,894,967 | 1,780,789 | 4,200,000 |
| Northern | 7,182,052 | 1,497,164 | 3,777,629 |
| Total | 15,077,019 | 3,277,953 | 7,977,629 |

Manchester: Manchester college of midwifery and nursing.
Northern: Northern college of nursing, midwifery and health studies.
The figures in column 1 include the costs relating to:
(i) all Project 2000 and midwifery first registration training;
(ii) some traditional RGN training;
(iii) some second registration nursing programmes and all second registration midwifery;
(iv) some post basic programmes including the higher award.
Column 2 relates to payments to trusts, teacher development, redundancy provision etc.
Column 3 relates to student bursaries.

### Mental Illness

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *383*, to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on mental illness, if he will provide a regional breakdown of the figures. [11094]

**Mr. Bowis:** Regional information on the number of beds and on finished consultant episodes is contained in "Bed availability for England" and in "Ordinary and day case admissions for England", respectively, copies of which are available in the Library.

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the cost to Dorset social services of implementation of the care programme approach for the mentally ill in the next year; and what support it will receive from Government funding. [10737]

**Mr. Bowis:** The care programme approach is a key element in the delivery of local mental health services. Local agencies should collaborate to ensure its implementation. In the year 1996–97, Dorset social services will receive £93.8 million for personal social services. It will also receive an allocation of mental illness specific grant, from which this year it has received £589,000.

### Anti-malaria Treatment

**Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports he has received on adverse side effects arising from the new anti-malaria treatment Lariam, also known as Mefloquine; and if he will make a statement. [10664]

**Mr. Horam:** From 1990, when Lariam was marketed in the United Kingdom, to 19 January 1996, the Medicines Control Agency has received 605 reports of 1,561 reactions. However, the receipt of a report of a reaction does not necessarily mean that it has been caused by Lariam.

### Mental Health Services

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total budget of each health authority, indicating the percentage devoted to mental health services. [10740]

**Mr. Horam:** For details of the planned 1996–97 initial cash limits for the new health authorities, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 19 December at column *1138*. It is for health authorities to purchase health care for their resident population, taking account of local circumstances and characteristics and within the framework of national policies and priorities.

### Private Health Insurance

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of *(a)* people and *(b)* retired people taking out private health insurance in each of the last five years. [10750]

**Mr. Horam:** The available information is shown in the table. Separate information on retired people is not available.

*Thousands*

| | *United Kingdom* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Subscribers* | *Numbers covered* |
| 1990 | 3,613 | 7,558 |
| 1991 | 3,578 | 7,433 |
| 1992 | 3,527 | 7,190 |
| 1993 | 3,541 | 6,757 |
| 1994 | 3,584 | 6,809 |

*Source:*
Figures compiled by the Association of British Insurers to which figures for the Post office and Civil Service Sanatorium Society have been added.

### Meningitis

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to produce an educational video to be made available for general practitioners and school teachers to aid the early detection of meningitis. [10890]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department, working with the National Meningitis Trust, has produced an information leaflet about meningitis for parents and for young people entering further education. Copies of the leaflet are available through general practitioners surgeries and have been distributed through the college bags which are given to all new students. It is most unlikely that children who are ill with meningitis would be sent to school.

The National Meningitis Trust produced an information video, together with an information pack, in 1989; this pack was sent free of charge to every health education unit and public health department in the United Kingdom.

### GP Budgets

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if *(a)* family health services authorities and *(b)* health authorities are able to provide information to hon. and right hon. Members on (i) drug budgets by named general practitioner practices, (ii) staff budgets by named general practitioner practices, (iii) development budgets by named general practitioner practices, (iv) computer reimbursement by named general practitioner practices and (v) the amount of funding holding savings; and what they have been spent on by named general practitioner fundholding practice. [10746]

**Mr. Malone:** This is a matter for family health services authorities.

### Hospital Readmissions, Manchester

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the Greater Manchester area were readmitted to hospital within one month of their discharge in the last three years. [11035]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

### NHS Finance

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide an analysis of final allowed external finance limits compared with actual external finance limits outturn for each NHS trust for each year since 1991–92; [10932]

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authority planned 1996–97 initial revenue cash limits per head of population by health authority. [10920]

**Mr. Horam:** The information will be placed in the Library.

### Hepatitis

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the types of hepatitis that can be transmitted in blood for which the Blood Transfusion Service *(a)* tests and *(b)* does not test. [10753]

**Mr. Horam:** The National Blood Service tests donated blood for hepatitis B and C before use. New strains of hepatitis are identified from time to time. An expert advisory committee advises Ministers on whether suitable tests for these are available and should be introduced.

### Doctors (Alcohol)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues on the amount of alcohol doctors can drink while on duty. [10743]

**Mr. Malone:** None.

### Cancer Patients

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of terminally ill patients with cancer in acute hospital beds. [10763]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

### "NHS Magazine"

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS management executive has spent so far on producing the "NHS Magazine"; and how many copies have been produced and distributed. [11105]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, at columns *344-45* for information on production costs/gross revenues.

Information on the number of magazines produced and distributed is as follows:

Issue 1: 30,000

Issue 2: 35,000

Issue 3: 35,000

### Health Information Services

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *227*, if he will set out the differences between NHS guideline HSG(95)44 and guideline HSG(92)21. [11144]

**Mr. Horam:** The revised health service guidance, HSG(95)55, devolves responsibility for ensuring the provision of the freephone health information service to the new health authorities with effect from 1 April 1996. This is because of the abolition of regional health authorities, who are currently responsible for the provision of the service.

In addition, the guidance sets out a revised core mandatory service specification and performance indicators for the service.

Copies of HSG(95)44 will be placed in the Library.

### "Employment of Children"

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of all the submissions that he receives in respect of his document, "Employment of Children", at the end of the period for consultation. [11592]

**Mr. Bowis:** I have no plans to do so.

### Children Act 1989

**Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he has any plans to amend the Children Act 1989 following the ruling of the House of Lords on the appeal of Nottinghamshire county council; [11022]

(2) if he will make a statement on the implications for applications for care orders and related issues following the ruling of the House of Lords on the appeal by Nottinghamshire county council; [11023]

(3) what are the implications for the principle of the paramountcy of the child's welfare, set out in the Children Act 1989 of the decision of the House of Lords on the appeal by Nottinghamshire county council. [11024]

**Mr. Bowis:** The implications of the judgment are being considered, but preliminary indications are that it will not be necessary to amend the Children Act 1989 and that existing guidance on good practice is not affected by the judgment.

### Unregistrable Children's Homes

**Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *228*, what is the status of the advice given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to a director of social services in a letter dated 14 November 1995 on action to be taken in respect of poor practice in unregistrable children's homes. [11030]

**Mr. Bowis:** Common sense.

### Breast Screening

**Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage of women aged 50 years who have breast screening, broken down by *(a)* district health authority and *(b)* regional health authority. [11028]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

### Drug Addicts

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his calculation of the numbers of people who are addicted to *(a)* benzodiazapines, *(b)* other medicinal drugs, *(c)* heroin and *(d)* other illegal drugs. [11255]

**Mr. Bowis:** It is not possible to measure the exact extent of a covert activity such as drug misuse. The available information is given in the Department of Health's Statistical Bulletin, "Drug Misuse Statistics" and, with respect to heroin, other opiate drugs (some of which are medicinal drugs) and cocaine, in tables 1 and 2 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin, "Statistics of Drug Addicts notified to the Home Office", United Kingdom 1994. Copies of both these publications are held in the Library.

### Deaths (Winter Months)

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the ratio of deaths of those aged 60 years or above, occurring in December to March relative to the average figures for the following and preceding four months, by region, for each of the past five years; and if he will indicate the number of deaths involved in each case. [10552]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The information is shown in the table.

*Table 1: Excess winter deaths ratio[1], 1990–95[2], for those aged 60 and over by health region of usual residence*

| *Health region of usual residence* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern | 1.18 | 1.24 | 1.15 | 1.16 | 1.15 |
| Yorkshire | 1.24 | 1.26 | 1.16 | 1.20 | 1.17 |
| Trent | 1.23 | 1.25 | 1.17 | 1.19 | 1.18 |
| East Anglian | 1.26 | 1.19 | 1.18 | 1.22 | 1.18 |
| North-West Thames | 1.22 | 1.23 | 1.15 | 1.13 | 1.19 |
| North-East Thames | 1.21 | 1.23 | 1.16 | 1.20 | 1.19 |
| South-East Thames | 1.23 | 1.21 | 1.15 | 1.17 | 1.16 |
| South-West Thames | 1.24 | 1.22 | 1.18 | 1.12 | 1.18 |
| Wessex | 1.25 | 1.19 | 1.16 | 1.14 | 1.18 |
| Oxford | 1.24 | 1.19 | 1.14 | 1.17 | 1.17 |
| South Western | 1.25 | 1.22 | 1.13 | 1.15 | 1.17 |
| West Midlands | 1.26 | 1.21 | 1.16 | 1.14 | 1.14 |
| Mersey | 1.26 | 1.19 | 1.16 | 1.11 | 1.18 |
| North Western | 1.24 | 1.23 | 1.17 | 1.13 | 1.15 |
| Wales | 1.24 | 1.20 | 1.15 | 1.10 | 1.16 |

[1] Ratio of deaths occurring in December to March relative to the average figures for the following and preceding four months.
[2] Data for 1993–95 are provisional.

*Table 2: Death occurrences, 1990–95[1], for those aged 60 and over, by health region of usual residence*

| *Health region of usual residence* | *August to November 1990* | *December 1990 to March 1991* | *April to July 1991* | *August to November 1991* | *December 1991 to March 1992* | *April to July 1992* | *August to November 1992* | *December 1992 to March 1993* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern | 10,134 | 12,115 | 10,352 | 10,397 | 12,624 | 9,921 | 10,276 | 11,743 |
| Yorkshire | 11,255 | 13,946 | 11,298 | 11,312 | 13,884 | 10,777 | 11,341 | 13,218 |
| Trent | 14,317 | 17,751 | 14,486 | 14,024 | 17,556 | 14,061 | 14,518 | 17,064 |
| East Anglian | 6,154 | 7,189 | 6,237 | 6,313 | 7,539 | 6,396 | 6,144 | 7,376 |
| North-West Thames | 8,853 | 10,893 | 9,015 | 8,948 | 10,921 | 8,833 | 8,886 | 10,074 |
| North-East Thames | 10,661 | 12,820 | 10,479 | 10,597 | 12,815 | 10,294 | 10,390 | 12,158 |
| South-East Thames | 11,581 | 14,360 | 11,742 | 11,600 | 13,995 | 11,551 | 11,814 | 13,624 |
| South-West Thames | 9,191 | 11,460 | 9,248 | 9,104 | 11,062 | 8,992 | 9,046 | 10,724 |
| Wessex | 9,325 | 11,663 | 9,268 | 9,312 | 11,107 | 9,286 | 9,303 | 11,121 |
| Oxford | 5,970 | 7,542 | 6,230 | 6,180 | 7,342 | 6,169 | 6,346 | 7,186 |
| South Western | 10,560 | 13,444 | 10,939 | 10,942 | 13,163 | 10,680 | 11,068 | 12,488 |
| West Midlands | 15,194 | 19,225 | 15,428 | 15,253 | 18,377 | 15,175 | 15,597 | 17,970 |
| Mersey | 7,321 | 9,466 | 7,689 | 7,573 | 9,015 | 7,529 | 7,510 | 8,806 |
| North Western | 12,901 | 16,277 | 13,265 | 12,917 | 15,906 | 12,865 | 12,973 | 15,335 |
| Wales | 9,330 | 11,613 | 9,419 | 9,249 | 11,191 | 9,348 | 9,459 | 11,068 |

| | *April–July 1993* | *August–November 1993* | *December 1993–March 1994* | *April–July 1994* | *August–November 1994* | *December 1994–March 1995* | *April–July 1996* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern | 10,229 | 10,980 | 11,828 | 9,399 | 9,381 | 10,965 | 9,753 |
| Yorkshire | 11,423 | 12,010 | 13,931 | 11,184 | 11,229 | 13,149 | 11,200 |
| Trent | 14,629 | 15,668 | 17,836 | 14,370 | 14,235 | 17,022 | 14,621 |
| East Anglian | 6,372 | 6,703 | 8,790 | 7,683 | 7,571 | 8,972 | 7,637 |
| North-West Thames | 8,660 | 9,124 | 9,322 | 7,353 | 7,385 | 8,844 | 7,483 |
| North-East Thames | 10,487 | 11,043 | 12,796 | 10,309 | 10,521 | 12,482 | 10,433 |
| South-East Thames | 11,971 | 12,378 | 14,105 | 11,694 | 11,623 | 13,605 | 11,818 |
| South-West Thames | 9,070 | 10,009 | 10,772 | 9,218 | 9,030 | 10,748 | 9,114 |
| Wessex | 9,939 | 10,381 | 11,496 | 9,841 | 9,610 | 11,577 | 9,986 |
| Oxford | 6,289 | 6,569 | 7,542 | 6,317 | 6,139 | 7,321 | 6,328 |
| South Western | 10,976 | 11,961 | 13,125 | 10,929 | 10,776 | 12,848 | 11,250 |
| West Midlands | 15,474 | 16,938 | 18,374 | 15,262 | 15,517 | 17,976 | 16,012 |
| Mersey | 7,611 | 8,479 | 8,899 | 7,532 | 7,500 | 8,827 | 7,410 |
| North Western | 13,169 | 14,465 | 15,726 | 13,358 | 13,565 | 15,457 | 13,358 |
| Wales | 9,791 | 10,749 | 11,218 | 9,672 | 9,438 | 11,108 | 9,795 |

[1] Data for 1993–95 are provisional.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Works of Art (Royal Collection)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her latest estimate of when the compilation of the inventory of royal collection of works of art will be completed. [10636]

**Mr. Sproat:** The royal collection—which is a department of the royal household and is not a responsibility of my Department—is responsible for compiling the inventory of the works of art. However, I understand that the inventory is scheduled for completion by the end of 1997.

### Tourism (North-East)

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what measures are being taken by her Department to promote tourism in the north-east; [10916]

(2) what has been the level of funding of the Northumbrian tourist board over the last five years. [10915]

**Mr. Sproat:** Government support for tourism is channelled through the statutory British Tourist Authority—BTA—and English tourist board, ETB. Through the ETB, support is made available to the 11 non-statutory regional tourist boards, including the Northumbria tourist board, which helps them undertake a variety of marketing and development activities of benefit to the tourism industry in their regions.

The total funding made available to the Northumbria tourist board is as follows:

1991–92: £479,000

1992–93: £505,000

1993–94: £484,000

1994–95: £394,000

1995–96: £364,000[1]

[1] Figure for 1995–96 is an estimate as the Northumbria tourist board has until 31 March 1996 to complete the draw-down of funds from ETB.

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the value of tourism to the north-east of England in the last five years. [10917]

**Mr. Sproat:** The estimated value of tourism to the north-east of England in the last five years is:

*£ million*

| | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Staying visits:* | | | | | |
| UK residents | 225 | 255 | 275 | 310 | 355 |
| Overseas residents | 79 | 93 | 96 | 134 | 131 |
| *Day visits* | 176 | 220 | 289 | 305 | 312 |
| Total | 480 | 568 | 660 | 749 | 798 |

*Source:*

United Kingdom Tourism Survey, International Passenger Survey, Leisure Day Visits Survey 1988–89 and Day Visits in Great Britain Survey 1991–92.

### Churches

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will seek powers to enable her to intervene to protect the internal fabric of churches whose construction and decor is of architectural or historical importance. [10905]

**Mr. Sproat:** Since 1 October 1994, ecclesiastical exemption from statutory listed building and conservation area controls has been confined to specified denominations which have satisfactory internal procedures to protect listed churches and unlisted churches in conservation areas. The Government are monitoring the operation of the procedures and have undertaken to review the position formally after two years. In the meantime, my right hon. Friend retains power to remove the exemption in any in individual case and will consider doing so wherever necessary.

### Libraries (North-West)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many libraries in the north-west region have been closed since 1987. [11055]

**Mr. Sproat:** This information is not held centrally. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's public library statistics, copies of which are held in the House Library, provide information about the total number of libraries in each library authority at the end of every financial year. These do not, however, record the opening or closure of library facilities.

### National Lottery

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) which official of her Department is responsible for monitoring Oflot's compliance with guidance provided by her Department; [8612]

(2) which official of Oflot is responsible for ensuring that the Department is informed of any failure to observe guidance provided by the Department. [8611]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* None. Oflot is an independent, non-ministerial Government Department. As head of the Department, the director-general is responsible for compliance with various central guidance issued to Departments.

### Royal Parks

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what *(a)* number and *(b)* species of animals and birds were killed under licence in the royal parks during 1995. [10151]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its chief executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from V. Robertson to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 24 January 1996:*

In the absence of the chief executive, I have been asked by the Secretary of State for National Heritage to reply to your parliamentary question on the number and species of birds and animals that were killed under licence in the royal parks during 1995.

| | Greylag geese | Canada geese |
|---|---|---|
| Hyde park and Kensington gardens | 0 | 63 |
| St. James's park | 15 | 19 |
| Regent's park | 15 | 86 |

### Environmental Appraisal

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if the forthcoming heritage Green Paper will be subject to an environmental appraisal in accordance with the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", published by the Department of the Environment; and if she will publish the environmental appraisal. [10611]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* My right hon. Friend has considered the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" and is satisfied that an appraisal of the environmental effects in relation to the proposed heritage Green Paper is not appropriate at this time. The main purpose of the Green Paper will be to consult on a range of proposals for improving the statutory protection of the built heritage. We will keep this decision under review as appropriate.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Stamps (Direct Selling)

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of direct sales of postage stamps by the Royal Mail in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9489]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The Post Office advises me that the total actual and estimated values of direct sales of postage stamps by post, excluding philatelic items, by the Royal Mail in 1993, 1994 and 1995 are as set out in the table. Sales of postage stamps by post office outlets are also shown.

*£000*

| | Sales of postage stamps via post office outlets | Direct postal sales of postage stamps by Royal Mail |
|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 1,128,944 | 590 |
| 1994–95 | 1,126,216 | 3,087 |
| 1995–96 | [1]1,140,000 | [1]8,300 |

[1] Figures provided for 1995–96 represent estimated sales.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research he has *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* commissioned into the effect of directly selling postage stamps by post on the viability of sub-post offices throughout the British Isles; and if he will make a statement. [9487]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** None. Decisions on the methods by which postage stamps are sold to customers are the operational responsibility of Post Office management.

However, I understand that the Post Office considers it unlikely that direct sales of postage stamps by post, excluding philatelic items, which it is estimated will constitute approximately 0.6 per cent. of total postage stamp sales in 1995–96, will have any significant impact on the viability of the nationwide network of sub-post offices.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations he has received on the subject of direct postal selling of postage stamps to businesses by the Royal Mail; and if he will make a statement. [9488]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I am not aware of any representations made to my Department on the subject of direct postal selling of postage stamps to businesses by the Royal Mail.

### Overseas Investment

**Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the level of overseas investment in 1979; and what it is currently at constant prices. [9579]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information, in current prices, is set out in the table. Information in constant prices is not available.

*Book value of foreign direct investment*

*£ billion, current prices*

| | UK investment overseas | Overseas investment in the UK |
|---|---|---|
| 1979 | 31.4 | 22.0 |
| 1994 | 183.3 | 139.7 |

### Investment

**Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the annual level of investment in the United Kingdom in 1979; and what it is currently at constant prices. [9580]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Total fixed investment in the United Kingdom in 1979 amounted to £75.8 billion at 1990 prices. For the four quarters ending in September 1995, the latest period for which figures are available, the level of investment was £100.2 billion, a third higher than the 1979 level.

### Chocolate Exports

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much chocolate and chocolate products by *(a)* volume and *(b)* value was exported from the United Kingdom to (i) other EU states and (ii) elsewhere in each of the last five years; and if he will estimate how many United Kingdom jobs depend on these exports. [9944]

**Mr. Oppenehim:** Information on UK exports of cocoa, chocolate and their products[1] is given in the following table. In 1993, employment in the cocoa and chocolate manufacturing industry[2] was 25,500 in Great Britain. Estimates are not made of the number of jobs that depend upon chocolate and cocoa exports.

*UK exporters of cocoa, chocolate and their products*

| | *Thousand metric tonnes* | *£ million* |
|---|---|---|
| *1990* | | |
| EU | 55.8 | 115.7 |
| Others | 64.9 | 127.0 |
| Total | 120.7 | 242.7 |
| *1991* | | |
| EU | 66.1 | 143.7 |
| Others | 63.6 | 125.3 |
| Total | 129.7 | 269.0 |
| *1992* | | |
| EU | 73.4 | 165.7 |
| Others | 70.7 | 140.3 |
| Total | 144.1 | 306.0 |
| *1993* | | |
| EU | 76.7 | 179.8 |
| Others | 91.5 | 174.2 |
| Total | 168.3 | 354.0 |
| *1994* | | |
| EU | 82.3 | 194.7 |
| Others | 98.9 | 205.8 |
| Total | 181.2 | 400.5 |

*Source:*
Overseas Trade Statistics of the UK.
*Notes:*
[1] Cocoa, chocolate and their products are defined as Groups 072 and 073 of the Standard International Trade Classification(Revision 3).
[2] The cocoa and chocolate manufacturing industry is defined by subclass 15.84/1 of the Standard Industrial Classification (1992).

### Sydney Olympics

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what actions he is taking to ensure that British firms secure construction work for the Sydney olympics. [10029]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** My Department has established the Sydney olympics UK business task force to identify and disseminate business opportunities arising from the preparations for the Sydney games. Working with the UK and Australian public and private sectors, it is the job of the task force to ensure that UK industry is well positioned to win contracts in a range of areas, including construction.

### Overseas Exhibitions

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the overseas exhibitions for trade fairs displaying military, security, police or paramilitary services or products his Department has provided support or joint venture funding for British companies to attend or exhibit at since 1988; what has been the value of such DTI support; and which companies have received such funding. [10272]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The DTI provided support to United Kingdom firms to exhibit towards the cost of participation at the following overseas exhibitions in the form of grants towards the cost of participation:

| *Event* | *Number of firms* | *Support (£)* |
|---|---|---|
| Piraeus Defendory—October 1988 | 49 | 293,246 |
| Sydney Aussie Air—October 1988 | 9 | 67,144 |
| Essen Security—October 1988 | 20 | 22,877 |
| Paris Europrotection—November 1988 | 11 | 13,741 |
| Beijing Asiaindex—November 1988 | 21 | 89,855 |
| Bangkok Defence Asia—December 1988 | 18 | 81,614 |
| Dubai Air—January 1989 | 20 | 137,902 |
| Ankara Idea—May 1989 | 30 | 129,430 |
| Ottawa Armx—May 1989 | 21 | 58,959 |
| Paris Airshow—June 1989 | 79 | 165,334 |
| Washington Comdef—October 1989 | 26 | 163,028 |
| Canberra Aidex—November 1989 | 9 | 38,891 |
| Singapore Asian Aerospace—February 1990 | 60 | 277,828 |
| Madrid Sicur—March 1990 | 27 | 70,407 |
| Kuala Lumpur—March 1990 | 52 | 209,430 |
| Baltimore Copex—May 1990 | 21 | 20,660 |
| Piraeus Defendory—October 1990 | 32 | 174,131 |
| Paris Expoprotection—November 1990 | 17 | 27,448 |
| Essen Security—November 1990 | 20 | 18,153 |
| Washington Comdef—November 1990 | 12 | 34,131 |
| Bangkok Asia Defence—December 1990 | 12 | 56,332 |
| Miami Copex—February 1991 | 17 | 15,680 |
| Baltimore Copex—May 1991 | 15 | 14,052 |
| Singapore Security—May 1991 | 8 | 17,144 |
| Paris Airshow—June 1991 | 52 | 144,634 |
| Minneapolis Iacp—October 1991 | 6 | 4,775 |
| Dubai Air—November 1991 | 73 | 332,277 |
| Ankara Idea—November 1991 | 28 | 88,939 |
| Seoul Defence—November 1991 | 26 | 78,923 |
| Canberra Aidex—November 1991 | 16 | 52,731 |
| Utrecht Security—November 1991 | 14 | 13,651 |
| Riyadh Astex—December 1991 | 16 | 28,633 |
| Miami Copex—February 1992 | 11 | 21,386 |
| Singapore Asian Aerospace—February 1992 | 45 | 158,218 |
| Madrid Sicur—March 1992 | 11 | 21,386 |
| Kuala Lumpur Dsa—April 1992 | 63 | 171,331 |
| Baltimore Copex—May 1992 | 9 | 8,865 |
| Hong Kong Securtex—May 1992 | 12 | 33,008 |
| Bahrein Medef—May 1992 | 12 | 37,558 |
| Paris Eurosatory—September 1992 | 25 | 76,823 |
| Johannesburg Interbou—August 1992 | 10 | 20,841 |
| Paris Expoprotection—September 1992 | 14 | 37,636 |
| Piraeus Defendory—October 1992 | 13 | 65,972 |
| Essen Security—October 1992 | 15 | 18,859 |
| Riyadh Astex—October 1992 | 15 | 50,401 |
| Budapest Security—November 1992 | 6 | 9,978 |
| Abu Dhabi Defence—February 1993 | 77 | 281,963 |
| Singapore Security Asia—February 1993 | 10 | 30,012 |
| Baltimore Copex—May 1993 | 9 | 10,605 |
| Paris Airshow—June 1993 | 32 | 72,856 |
| Ankara Idef—September 1993 | 11 | 62,694 |
| Utrecht Security—October 1993 | 8 | 13,389 |
| Budapest Security—November 1993 | 9 | 18,946 |
| Dubai Air—November 1993 | 39 | 193,101 |
| Paris Milipol—November 1993 | 7 | 17,659 |
| Seoul Defence—November 1993 | 28 | 87,971 |
| Poznan Securex—January 1994 | 8 | 17,508 |
| Singapore Asian Aerospace—February 1994 | 54 | 247,078 |
| Madrid Sicur—March 1994 | 8 | 15,885 |
| Bangkok Securitex—June 1994 | 7 | 23,206 |
| Kuala Lumpur Dsa—April 1994 | 62 | 241,906 |
| Dubai Indepo—May 1994 | 10 | 26,506 |
| Hong Kong Securitex—June 1994 | 11 | 31,116 |
| Paris Eurosatory—June 1994 | 5 | 65,256 |
| Las Vegas Asis—September 1994 | 11 | 29,745 |
| Piraeus Defendory—October 1994 | 10 | 47,455 |
| Essen Security—October 1994 | 20 | 21,247 |
| Abu Dhabi Idex—March 1995 | 88 | 442,867 |
| Singapore Security Asia—April 1995 | 19 | 55,047 |
| Paris Airshow—June 1995 | 48 | 72,002 |
| New Orleans Asis—September 1995 | 13 | 30,505 |
| Bangkok Defence—September 1995 | 14 | 54,496 |
| Ankara Idef—September 1995 | 8 | 75,850 |
| Berlin Sitech—September 1995 | 10 | 14,246 |

| Event | Number of firms | Support (£) |
|---|---|---|
| Seoul Defence—September 1995 | 18 | 72,194 |
| Utrecht Security—October 1995 | 5 | 8,220 |
| Dubai Air—November 1995 | 27 | 149,093 |
| Paris Milipol—November 1995 | 12 | 30,396 |

The provisions of the Data Protection Acts precludes the release of information about individual firms.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what DTI support is provided to *(a)* the Defence Manufacturers Association and *(b)* Association of Police and Public Security Suppliers to support British companies to attend or exhibit at overseas military, security, police or paramilitary exhibitions. [10273]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Both associations are recognised sponsor organisations which may organise official groups of United Kingdom firms and are therefore eligible for support under the terms of the trade fairs support scheme and the outward mission scheme. Support under the former is in the form of grants towards the cost of participation and in the latter it is in the form of a travel grant.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Parliament of the Board of Trade what support or joint venture funding his Department has provided to British companies to attend or exhibit at the forthcoming Indepo, Dubai from 14 to 16 January; what is the value of such support; and to which companies it was given. [10274]

**Mrs. Oppenheim:** No DTI support was provided to any British companies exhibiting at Indepo Dubai which took place on 14 to 16 January 1996.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support or joint venture funding his Department has provided to British companies to attend or exhibit at the defence services Asia exhibition, Kuala Lumpur 1995; what was the value of such support; and to which companies it was given. [10275]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** There was no exhibition in 1995. The most recent exhibition took place in 1994. The DTI provided support for United Kingdom firms to exhibit in the form of grants towards the cost of participation. Support totalling £241,906 was provided to 59 exhibiting companies. The provisions of the Data Protection Acts precludes the release of information about individual companies.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support his Department provided in the last five years for British companies attending and exhibiting at Covert operations and police exhibition—COPEX—exhibitions throughout the world; what was the value of such support; and to which companies it was given. [10198]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The DTI provided support to United Kingdom firms to exhibit in the form of grants towards the cost of participation. Support totalling £81,641 was provided at six COPEX exhibitions throughout the world in the last five years. The provisions of the Data Protection Acts precludes the release of information about individual companies.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support or joint venture funding is being provided to British companies to attend or exhibit at the forthcoming COPEX Jordan scheduled for 26 and 27 March; at what cost; and to which companies. [10195]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** No DTI support is being provided to any British companies exhibiting at COPEX Jordan taking place on 26 to 27 March 1996.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support his Department provided for British companies attending and exhibiting at COPEX Miami in February 1991; what was the value of such support; and to which companies it was given. [10197]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The DTI provided support for United Kingdom firms to exhibit in the form of grants towards the cost of participation. Support totalling £15,680 was provided to 17 companies exhibiting at this event. The provision of the Data Protection Acts precludes the release of information about individual companies.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support or joint venture funding was provided to British companies which attended or exhibited at the international defence industry and civil aviation fair held in Turkey in November 1995; at what cost; and to which companies. [10196]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** This event took place in Ankara in September 1995. The DTI provided support for United Kingdom firms to exhibit in the form of grants towards the cost of participation. Support totalling £75,850 was provided to eight companies exhibiting at this event. The provisions of the Data Protection Acts precludes the release of information about individual companies.

### Insurance Claims (Settlements)

**Mr. Walden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps the Government have taken to encourage speedy settlements by insurance companies. [10307]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** None. This is a matter primarily for the insurance industry. The Association of British Insurers, the industry's principal trade association, has a code of practice which requires member insurers to settle valid claims without delay.

Dealing swiftly with claims is in the interest not only of policyholders but insurers. By settling claims quickly, they reduce their administrative costs. Failure to do so will encourage customers to turn to insurers offering better service.

### Exports to Saudi Arabia (Outstanding Debt)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates he has made of the total amount of debt outstanding for *(a)* six months and *(b)* 12 months in respect of (i) pharmaceutical products an (ii) other manufactured goods exported to Saudi Arabia. [10624]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The Export Credits Guarantee Department has no debts outstanding in respect of goods exported to Saudi Arabia. Short-term cover for goods such as pharmaceutical products is provided by the private sector and estimates of total debts outstanding are not available.

### Inward Investment

**Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current level of overseas investment in the United Kingdom; and what it was in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1990. [11062]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information, in current price terms, is as follows:

*Book value of overseas direct investment in the United Kingdom*

| | £ billion, current prices |
|---|---|
| 1979 | 22.0 |
| 1990 | 113.2 |
| 1994 | 139.7 |

### Retailers (European Exports)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to encourage British retailers to expand their activities into the rest of the European Union. [10901]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Through the "Business in Europe" service, this Department, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office commercial staff based in other member states, offer a wide range of information, advice and practical assistance to help firms do business in European Union countries. Many British retailers are already well established on the continent, and I encourage all UK companies, including retailers, to make full use of the support we can offer.

### Export Opportunities (California)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what programmes exist to enable United Kingdom companies to identify export opportunities in California. [10883]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Overseas trade services, administered jointly by my Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provide a wide range of support functions to UK exporters. This support is available to companies interested in opportunities in California where there are two commercial posts, in Los Angeles and in San Francisco, to offer help and assistance.

My Department's north America now campaign, which was launched in March 1993, provides additional support for companies interested in business opportunities in the United States. A team of export promoters seconded to the Department from the private sector is also available to give advice to exporters to the United States.

### Exports (US)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list, in the order of their introduction, all current initiatives which give information and assistance to companies which wish to export to the United States. [10882]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Overseas trade services, administered jointly by my Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provide a package of support measures to help exporters to all markets including the United States. These include help with market research, finding representatives in the United States, support at trade fairs, outward and inward trade missions and information on export opportunities. A team of export promoters seconded to my Department from UK industry is also available to help exporters.

In addition, my Department's north America now campaign provides additional help for UK companies seeking to do business in the United States. Seminars and clinics are held on a range of topics, both sectoral and cross-sectoral in nature, to alert UK companies to the opportunities in the market and the methods of doing business there. A range of publications is available to exporters and help is offered with finding strategic partners in north America.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notices and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and (b) ensuring new European directives are not gold plated; [10050]

(2) what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10070]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answers 22 January 1996]:* My Department's policy is not to gold plate EC directives by the additon of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the UK. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments. Any guidance prepared by my Department on this subject will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Export Credit Guarantees

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what levels of export credit guarantees have been provided in each of the last 10 years in respect of contracts with *(a)* Nigeria, *(b)* Saudi Arabia, *(c)* Oman and *(d)* Indonesia; and what amounts related to the sale of defence equipment. [9823]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The value of project and capital goods liabilities assumed in each of the named markets together with that element relating to defence equipment—shown in brackets—was as follows:

£ Million

| | *Indonesia* | | *Saudi Arabia* | | *Oman* | | *Nigeria* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1985–86 | 140 | (83) | 52 | (6) | 77 | (17) | 0 | — |
| 1986–87 | 73 | (51) | 0 | — | 66 | (37) | 23 | (0) |
| 1987–88 | 48 | (6) | 15 | (0) | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| 1988–89 | 67 | (3) | 450 | (450) | 0 | — | 34 | (0) |
| 1989–90 | 52 | (0) | 0 | — | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| 1990–91 | 150 | (3) | 0 | — | 350 | (350) | 0 | — |
| 1991–92 | 124 | (2) | 17 | (0) | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| 1992–93 | 450 | (442) | 225 | (225) | 44 | (44) | 0 | — |
| 1993–94 | 100 | (6) | 751 | (750) | 413 | (344) | 0 | — |
| 1994–95 | 220 | (113) | 225 | (225) | 80 | (54) | 0 | — |

### Stamp Prices

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what increase in the cost of *(a)* first-class and *(b)* second-class stamps he expects following the Budget. [9190]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* I understand that the Post Office has undertaken to maintain the existing level of postal charges until at least 31 March this year. It will be for the Post Office in the first instance to put forward a specific proposal on the amount and timing of the increase it believes will necessary thereafter.

### Character Ceramics, Falmouth

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department received from hon. Members about grant aid by his Department to Character Ceramics. [10110]

**Mr. Eggar** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* No such representations were received.

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much Character Ceramics, Falmouth, received from his Department in grant aid and on what date. [10173]

**Mr. Eggar** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* A total of £104,000 was paid in three tranches between March and September 1993.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Prisons (Mechanical Restraints)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* longest and *(c)* average time during which inmates at HMP New Hall, Wakefield, have been detained in a body belt or mechanical restraint, since January 1990; [8444]

(2) how often the Home Office official at HMP New Hall, Wakefield, responsible for the punishment of inmates has authorised the use of *(a)* body belts, *(b)* ankle straps, *(c)* handcuffs and *(d)* special segregation unit cells for each year since January 1990; [8422]

(3) on how many occasions since January 1990 inmates in HMP New Hall, Wakefield, have been kept in body belts for more than 12 hours; [8438]

(4) on how many occasions since January 1990 inmates at HMP New Hall, Wakefield, have been *(a)* detained in a strip cell and *(b)* restrained by body belts for (i) medical or (ii) non-medical purposes. [8441]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about the use of restraints, the segregation unit and the strip cell at New Hall prison since January 1990.

Since January 1990, inmates have been detained in a strip cell for medical reasons on 136 occasions. New Hall prison did not have a segregation unit until 1992. Since then, inmates have been detained on 46 occasions in the unit for non-medical reasons.

On no occasion since January 1990 has any inmate at New Hall prison been restrained by bodybelts or other mechanical restraint.

No official responsible for the punishment of inmates at New Hall prison has, since January 1990, authorised the use of bodybelts, ankle straps or handcuffs. Use of the special segregation unit cells has been authorised on the following occasions, 1992—twice; 1993—once; 1994—once; 1995—once.

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement about the policy of handcuffing pregnant prisoners receiving hospital treatment around childbirth. [7540]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Tessa Jowell, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the handcuffing of pregnant prisoners.

The Home Secretary announced on 18 January revised arrangements on the use of restraints on prisoners attending hospital. The Prison Service implemented the revised policy on 19 January. Amendments to the Prison Service security manual reflecting the revised policy will be issued as soon as possible and placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what stage labour is deemed to have begun in the context of paragraph 60.18 of the current edition of the Prison Service security manual. [9492]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking at what stage labour is deemed to have begun in the context of paragraph 60.18 of the current edition of the Prison Service Security Manual.

All decisions about the onset of labour are made by nursing and medical staff attending the mother at the time.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures govern requests by *(a)* a doctor and *(b)* a midwife for the removal of handcuffs from a prisoner giving birth; and what discretion prison officers have on whether to comply with such a request. [9491]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 12 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what procedures govern requests by (a) a doctor and (b) a midwife for the removal of handcuffs from a prisoner giving birth; and what discretion prison officers have on whether to comply with such a request.

The Home Secretary announced on 18 January revised arrangements on the use of restraints on prisoners attending hospital, which were implemented by the Prison Service on 19 January. Amendments to the Prison Service security manual reflecting the revised policy will be issued as soon as possible and placed in the Library of the House.

From now on, no female prisoner admitted to hospital to give birth will have physical restraints applied from the time she arrives at the hospital until she leaves.

### Fraud

**Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total value of fraud cases reported in the last five years. [9562]

**Mr. Maclean:** Figures are collected centrally on the number of fraud offences recorded by the police, but not on their total value.

### Bull Bars

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if all bull bars have now been removed from police vehicles. [9938]

**Mr. Maclean:** As I stated in my reply to an earlier question from the hon. Member on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *781–82*, this is an operational matter for chief constables. The information requested is not available centrally, but the Association of Chief Police Officers has written to every force suggesting that they remove bull bars from their vehicles.

### Internet

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what legal controls there are in respect of material providing instructions on explosives and weapons on the Internet; and if he will make a statement; [10479]

(2) if he will press for the prosecution of those Internet providers who publish the detailed processes of making explosives and bombs; and if he will make a statement. [10483]

**Mr. Maclean:** There are no specific legal controls in respect of material providing instructions on explosives and weapons whether that material is contained on the Internet or any other medium. A person could, however, be liable to prosecution under the Explosive Substances Act 1883 if they actually carried out the instructions to make an explosive device, or the Control of Explosives Regulations 1991 for simply acquiring or keeping explosives without an explosives certificate from the police.

In such cases, it is the responsibility of the police to decide whether there are sufficient grounds to launch a criminal investigation, and that of the Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether to prosecute those alleged to be responsible for the material.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to meet the Internet providers so as to eliminate the practice of the Internet making available chemical and other data required for making bombs and incendiary devices; [10481]

(2) how he proposes to prevent children and students having access via the Internet to material illustrating how explosives and bombs might be made; [10480]

(3) what legislation he plans to bring forward to prevent Internet providers publishing manuals on bomb making and terrorist activities; and if he will make a statement. [10482]

**Mr. Maclean:** Officials have discussed with Internet service providers concerns about the availability of unsuitable material on the Internet, and ways of controlling access by children and young people to such material. The Government are currently considering the most suitable way of tackling the issue.

The general question of regulation of the Internet and other computer networks is a matter for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, who has commissioned a short study on the subject of unsuitable material on the Internet to identify the issues and possible solutions.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the availability on the Internet of information on the making of bombs and the materials required for the making of bombs and on the techniques of terrorism. [11032]

**Mr. Maclean:** My right hon. and learned Friend has received one letter expressing concern about the availability of information on the Internet providing instructions on how to make bombs and on terrorist techniques.

### Prison Service (Director General)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional help and support the Deputy Director General of the Prison Service is receiving pending the appointment of a new Director General. [10878]

**Miss Widdecombe:** The temporary Director General of the Prison Service receives the same administrative support as his predecessor.

### Commission for Racial Equality

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *966*, against whom a case was brought by the Commission for Racial Equality on the basis that the ethnic profile of employees was such as to be inconsistent with appointments made purely on merit; if he will indicate in that case the percentage of employees who were from *(a)* white European and *(b)* ethnic minority backgrounds; and if he will make a statement of the implications of that case for (i) employers generally and (ii) the Commission for Racial Equality in particular, which employs high percentages of its work force from the ethnic minorities. [11048]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** My reply of 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *966*, was incorrectly printed and should have read:

"None of the cases brought or supported by the commission against employers in the last year was on the basis that the ethnic profile of its employees was such as to be inconsistent with appointments made purely on merit.

Information on whether such a profile has been a significant factor in other cases could be obtained only at disproportionate cost".

Arrangements have already been made to amend the bound volume of the *Official Report*.

**Mrs. Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy in future to appoint to the Commission for Racial Equality such members that its ethnic profile broadly reflects that of the United Kingdom as a whole. [11046]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** We believe that it is desirable for the 15 members of the Commission for Racial Equality to be drawn from a broad range of communities in the United Kingdom and we shall continue to take this into account when making appointments.

**Mrs. Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *965*, if he will require the Commission for Racial Equality in future to record the ethnic background both of complainants and of those against whom the complaint is made. [11047]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The Commission for Racial Equality already monitors the ethnic origin of complainants. It is not practicable to monitor the ethnic origin of those against whom the complaint is made as these will usually be organisations rather than individuals.

### West Yorkshire Police

**Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of constables employed by the West Yorkshire police force currently; what the figures were in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1980; and what is the projected figure for 1999. [10733]

**Mr. Maclean:** The number of constables employed by West Yorkshire police in these years was:

(a) September 1980: 3,660

(b) September 1985: 3,739

(c) September 1990: 3,992

(d) September 1995[1]: 3,961

[1] Latest date centrally available.

Between March and September 1995 the number of constables in the force increased by 89. The chief constable has also said that he expects overall police strength in West Yorkshire to increase by 135 in the year to March 1996. Projections for 1999 are a matter for the chief constable and police authority. However, West Yorkshire police's share of the extra funding being provided to recruit 5,000 additional officers nationally over three years is likely to be sufficient to enable 200 extra constables to be recruited by March 1999.

### Young Offenders

**Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the total annual cost of dealing with young people aged 10 to 17 years in the judicial and custodial systems; [10940]

(2) what is the average cost of processing the case of a juvenile offender from offence to completion, to *(a)* the police, *(b)* the Crown Prosecution Service, *(c)* the social services, *(d)* the education system and *(e)* the courts, and in total. [10866]

**Mr. Maclean:** We estimate that, including police, court, legal aid, Crown Prosecution Service, probation and prison service costs, the total annual cost to the criminal justice system in 1994–95 of dealing with juvenile offenders aged 10 to 17 years was about £130 million. We estimate that the average cost was about £1,000. These estimates do not include the costs to social services and the education system, which are not available.

### Holloway Prison

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place between the Whittington hospital county midwifery services and Her Majesty's Prison Holloway concerning access to medical care for women prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [11640]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what discussions have taken place between the Whittington Hospital County Midwifery Services and Holloway prison concerning access for medical care for woman prisoners.

Discussions have taken place between Holloway and the Whittington Hospital over the provision of and access to a range of medical services. These discussions are continuing.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letters to him dated 19 October, 16 November and 13 December 1995 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. Shah Shrana Ahmed of 18 Harcock close, Manchester. [11615]

**Mr. Howard:** I wrote to the right hon. Member about Mrs. Shah Shuara Ahmed on 22 January 1996.

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letters to him dated 29 September, 2 November and 13 December 1995 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. S. Shah of 23 Sarnesfield close, Manchester. [11613]

**Mr. Howard:** I wrote to the right hon. Member about Mrs. S. Shah on 22 January 1996.

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letters to him dated 10 October, 9 November and 13 December 1995 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. Mohammed Ashfaq of 19 Sullivan street, Manchester. [11614]

**Mr. Howard:** I wrote to the right hon. Member about Mr. Mohammad Ashfaq on 22 January 1996.

### Identity Cards

**Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will report on the responses he has received to the Green Paper on identity cards, Cm 2879. [12136]

**Mr. Howard:** I have today placed in the Library a copy of the Government's memorandum of evidence on identity cards to the Home Affairs Committee containing a summary of the responses received to the Green Paper.

### Merseyside Police

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to visit Merseyside to discuss the police authority's budget; and if he will make a statement. [10473]

**Mr. Maclean:** My right hon. and learned Friend would be happy to visit Merseyside when a suitable opportunity arises.

My right hon. and learned Friend has proposed that Merseyside police authority's basic funding allocation for 1996–97 should increase by 3.2 per cent. over 1995–96. If it sets a budget for 1996–97 at the cap, spending could increase by £8 million—3.7 per cent. over the current financial year.

### National Lottery

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent by the National Lottery Charities Board on start-up and running costs since its inception. [9175]

**Mr. Sackville** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* From August 1994 to November 1995—the latest date for which figures are available—the National Lottery Charities Board spent £7.8 million, of which £2 million was on start-up costs and the remainder on running costs. This is around 3½ per cent. of the money then available to it from the national lottery distribution fund and is comparable with the corresponding figure for other general purpose grant givers.

## TRANSPORT

### Rail Privatisation

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, what instructions he has issued to the franchising director regarding the assessment of the costs of a passenger rail franchise continuing to be operated by the British Railways Board rather than by private franchisee. [9940]

**Mr. Watts:** The franchising director has a duty under section 5(1) (b) of the Railway Act 1993 to ensure that any payments made in pursuance of an agreement under section 52 of the Act, which enables the franchising director to secure provision by the British Railways Board or any wholly owned subsidiary of the board of railway passenger services that are not provided under a franchise agreement, achieve economically and efficiently and objectives given to him by the Secretary of State. The franchising director has an objective to encourage efficiency and economy in the provision of railway services.

### Upper Thames Piers

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what expressions of interest have been received by the Port of London Authority in the public piers on the upper Thames; what criteria he proposes to adopt in respect of access, charging policy and other operational considerations; and what safeguards will be required in respect of access by potential future riverbus services. [10260]

**Mr. Norris:** These are matters for the Port of London Authority.

### A1 (Construction Work)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what factors underlie the areas where construction work on the A1 *(a)* is delayed and *(b)* is taking place. [9688]

**Mr. Watts:** Criteria used in the review of the roads programme are set out in the document "Managing the trunk road programme", published on 28 November 1995. I have set out in the tables the status of the A1 schemes in the road programme.

*1. Construction soon to start*

| | *Area* |
|---|---|
| A1(M) | Alconbury–Peterborough (DBFO)—start of works later this year |
| M1/A1 | Link road (Lofthouse–Branham) (DBFO)—start of works spring 1996 |

*2. Main programme*

| | *Area* |
|---|---|
| A1(M) | Wetherby–Walshford, North Yorkshire, Leeds MB |
| A1(M) | Wetherby Bypass, Leeds MB |
| A1(M) | Bramham—Wetherby, Leeds MB |
| A1(M) | Ferrybridge-Hook Moor, Wakefield MB, Leeds MB, North Yorkshire |
| A1(M) | Redhouse—Ferrybridge, Doncaster, MB, Wakefield MB, North Yorkshire |
| | Willowburn–Denwick Imp, Northumberland |
| A1 | Morpeth–Lanehead Imp, Northumberland |
| A1 | Blyth GSJ, Nottinghamshire |
| A1 | Five Lanes End GSJ, Nottinghamshire |
| A1 | Markham Moor GSJ, Nottinghamshire |
| A1 | Tempsford GSJ, Bedfordshire |

*3. To be reviewed as potential smaller scale improvements*

| | Area |
|---|---|
| A1(M) | J6–8 Widening, Hertfordshire |
| A1 | Gateshead Western Bypass, Gateshead MB |

*4. Longer term*

| | Area |
|---|---|
| A1(M) | Leeming–Scotch Corner, North Yorkshire |
| A1(M) | Dishforth–Leeming, North Yorkshire |
| A1(M) | Tuxford–Blyth, Nottinghamshire |
| A1(M) | Newark–Tuxford, Nottinghamshire |
| A1(M) | Stamford—Newark, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire |
| A1(M) | Stamford Bypass, Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire |
| A1(M) | Peterborough–Stamford, Cambridgeshire |
| A1(M) | Baldock–Alconbury, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire |
| A1(M) | J9–10 Widening, Hertfordshire |
| A1(M) | J4–6 Widening, Hertfordshire |
| A1(M) | J1–4 Widening, Hertfordshire |

### A19 (Emergency Telephones)

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to install emergency telephones on the A19 between the River Tees and the River Tyne. [10914]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. John Cummings, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking when emergency telephones will be installed on the A19 between the River Tees and the River Tyne.

This stretch of the A19 is included in the A19 Dishforth to Tyne Tunnel DBFO contract. Tenders have been received, and the contract is currently being negotiated with the bidders. Under the terms of the contract, the DBFO Co will be obliged to provide emergency telephones between the River Tees and the River Tyne. The timescale for implementation will be agreed as part of the contract negotiations, but every effort will be made to achieve installation of the emergency telephones as soon as possible.

### Vehicle Owners

**Mr. Jopling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the percentage of households who have *(a)* cars and *(b)* motor cycles for each shire county in England. [11153]

**Mr. Norris:** The 1995 county estimates of the percentage of households owning cars are shown in the table.

Comparable information for motor cycles is not available.

| | Per cent. |
|---|---|
| Avon | 74 |
| Bedfordshire | 77 |
| Berkshire | 80 |
| Buckinghamshire | 82 |
| Cambridgeshire | 77 |
| Cheshire | 75 |
| Cleveland | 61 |
| Cornwall | 76 |
| Cumbria | 70 |
| Derbyshire | 71 |
| Devon | 74 |
| Dorset | 77 |
| Durham | 62 |
| East Sussex | 69 |
| Essex | 77 |
| Gloucestershire | 78 |
| Hampshire | 77 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 79 |
| Hertfordshire | 80 |
| Humberside | 65 |
| Isle of Wight | 71 |
| Kent | 75 |
| Lancashire | 68 |
| Leicestershire | 72 |
| Lincolnshire | 75 |
| Norfolk | 75 |
| North Yorkshire | 73 |
| Northamptonshire | 75 |
| Northumberland | 67 |
| Nottinghamshire | 67 |
| Oxfordshire | 79 |
| Shropshire | 77 |
| Somerset | 79 |
| Staffordshire | 73 |
| Suffolk | 76 |
| Surrey | 83 |
| Warwickshire | 77 |
| West Sussex | 78 |
| Wiltshire | 78 |

### Bus Deregulation, Warrington

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with the Office of Fair Trading in relation to bus deregulation in Warrington. [11198]

**Mr. Norris:** My officials have frequent discussions with the Office of Fair Trading about various matters concerning the bus industry. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it is not my practice to disclose the details of any such discussions.

### Rail Privatisation, Manchester

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what payment is planned to be made to the Office of Passenger Franchising in respect of additional costs of supporting rail services in the Manchester passenger transport executive area arising from the privatisation of British Rail [11319]

**Mr. Watts:** The amount has not been finalised. It will be published in the transport report in due course.

### London Transport (Funding)

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what allocation his Department has made for core funding for London Transport for each of the years 1995–96 to 1998–99. [11223]

**Mr. Norris:** The grant allocation for the London Transport core business for 1995–96 is £442 million. For later years, a combined allocation of grant has been made for the core business and the Jubilee line extension project, as follows: 1996–97, £939 million; 1997–98, £648 million; 1998–99, £429 million. The apportionment of grant between the two areas will be determined by London Transport in the light of the precise requirements of the Jubilee line extension. The final allocation of grant at outturn will be reported in the DOT departmental report for the relevant year.

### Nottingham City Transport

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from Nottingham city council on the sale of shares in Nottingham City Transport to *(a)* First Bus and *(b)* the employees; and if he will make a statement. [11222]

**Mr. Norris:** For reasons of commercial confidentiality it is not my practice to disclose the details of any discussions between the Department and an owning local authority on such an issue.

### Taxi Drivers

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to regulate local council policy on the adoption of group II medical status for taxi drivers. [11134]

**Mr. Norris:** In their response to the Transport Committee's report on taxis and private hire vehicles (CM 2715) the Government agreed with the Committee's recommendation that applicants for taxi and private hire vehicle driver licences should pass a medical similar to that required for bus and coach drivers. This will require primary legislation, and will thus depend upon a suitable legislative opportunity becoming available.

### Newbury Bypass

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the SACTRA report was taken into consideration in the value for money assessment of the Newbury bypass. [11193]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr Graham Allen, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if the SACTRA report was taken into consideration in the value for money assessment of the Newbury Bypass.

The Highways Agency Study last year looked at the potential for induced traffic in line with the SACTRA report. It concluded that even if a severe test were to be applied, and very high levels of induced traffic assumed, the scheme would still represent good value for money.

### Yellow Lines

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which authorities are involved in the authorisation of yellow lines on roads. [11306]

**Mr. Norris:** Traffic authorities may cause or permit yellow lines to be placed on a road in support of an order that they have made restricting waiting or loading. In England, the Secretary of State is the traffic authority for trunk roads and motorways; the traffic authority for other roads is the relevant London borough, county council, metropolitan district council or unitary authority. The Traffic Director for London has powers to introduce stopping and loading restrictions on priority—red—routes, and his consent is required when proposals affect or are likely to affect the strategic road network in London. Under certain circumstances, orders made by local traffic authorities require the consent of the Secretary of State.

### Seafarers (Employment Prospects)

**Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the employment prospects for British seafarers; and if he will make a statement. [9447]

**Mr. Norris:** We are pursuing a package of positive measures to improve the attractiveness of the red ensign and the employment prospects of UK seafarers. These include:

Foreign earnings deduction for seafarers; 100 per cent. allowance on earning made abroad;

Crew relief costs scheme: grants to alleviate the cost of flying British crews to and from distant ports.

Government assistance for training scheme: grants for the training of British officer trainees to first certificate of competency;

Development of certificated seafarers scheme: grants for British junior officers training for their second certificate of competency.

### Port Waste Facilities

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to improve port waste facilities. [12068]

**Mr. Norris:** My noble Friend, the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, has today announced 18 new measures to reduce the discharge of waste from ships, including measures to improve the provision and use of port waste reception facilities. Copies of the announcement have been placed in the House Libraries.

### Indian Sub-continent (Travellers)

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of people arriving and departing on flights to and from the Indian sub-continent in *(a)* each of the last 10 years and *(b)* each of the last 20 months. [10463]

**Mr. Norris** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The information requested is shown in the attached table.

These data illustrate the approximate passenger flows between the United Kingdom and the Indian sub-continent.

*Terminal passengers arriving and departing on flights between the Indian sub-continent and the United Kingdom*

| *Annual data* | *Arrivals* | *Departures* |
|---|---|---|
| 1986 | 308,780 | 299,640 |
| 1987 | 339,432 | 326,471 |
| 1988 | 394,606 | 368,652 |
| 1989 | 452,915 | 430,747 |
| 1990 | 477,839 | 449,471 |
| 1991 | 426,242 | 400,106 |
| 1992 | 441,725 | 425,495 |
| 1993 | 467,003 | 466,384 |
| 1994 | 581,707 | 578,178 |
| Year ended October 1995 | 620,540 | 617,022 |
| *Monthly data* | | |
| March 1994 | 53,102 | 53,868 |
| April 1994 | 59,869 | 35,270 |
| May 1994 | 46,740 | 31,889 |
| June 1994 | 42,063 | 40,148 |
| July 1994 | 43,262 | 54,910 |
| August 1994 | 52,594 | 41,726 |
| September 1994 | 46,884 | 40,194 |
| October 1994 | 40,492 | 53,099 |
| November 1994 | 42,511 | 52,914 |
| December 1994 | 44,275 | 66,447 |
| January 1995 | 64,648 | 63,359 |
| February 1995 | 52,874 | 50,196 |
| March 1995 | 61,095 | 52,638 |
| April 1995 | 62,807 | 43,727 |
| May 1995 | 53,596 | 33,859 |
| June 1995 | 45,678 | 43,161 |
| July 1995 | 45,368 | 58,043 |
| August 1995 | 53,058 | 45,326 |
| September 1995 | 49,267 | 46,185 |
| October 1995 | 45,363 | 61,167 |

*Source:*

CAA Airport Statistics

*Notes:*

1. Includes non-revenue passengers.

2. Indian sub-Continent defined as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

3. Departures/Arrivals equate to embarkation/disembarkation from the flight in the UK. It does not indicate the origin of the journey.

4. Passengers may only be travelling to the UK to connect with other flights. Not all will enter the United Kingdom.

5. Passengers embarking/disembarking in the Indian sub-Continent may do so only to connect with other flights and may have a final origin/destination outside the area.

6. Where the airport authority is unable to supply a breakdown of the embarkation/disembarkation points of a flight serving more than one airport on the route, all passengers are allocated to the aircraft origin/destination. Mid points will therefore be understated and end points overstated. This affects inbound flights more than outbound.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Child Support Agency

**Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what options are available to the Child Support Agency in cases where an absent parent refuses to complete and return an assessment form. [9542]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Dennis Canavan, dated 21 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessment forms.

If the absent parent (AP) fails to return a completed Maintenance Enquiry Form (MEF) or Review Form (RF) within 14 days of it being issued, the Agency will contact the AP to establish the reasons for non-completion and, where there are no issues regarding paternity or CSA jurisdiction, will advise the AP on completion of the form and where necessary allow the AP extra time to complete and return the form.

If, despite this action, a completed MEF is not returned the options available to the Child Support Office (CSO) depend upon what is known of the AP's circumstances:

a) If nothing is known of the AP's circumstances or they are known to have income and the CSO considers that the AP is deliberately not co-operating in providing the required evidence he will consider the imposition of an interim maintenance assessment (Category A) calculated at 1.5 times the Maintenance Requirement. If necessary an IMA can be collected by a Deduction from Earning Order (DEO) direct from the absent parent's salary. Imposing a DEO in these circumstances often results in the completed MEF being returned and for many months we have placed increased emphasis on this work.

b) If the AP has a Partner and is not able to provide evidence of the Partner's income but provides all other required evidence the CSO can consider imposing an interim maintenance assessment (Category B) based solely on the Absent Parent's circumstances and making no allowance for their Partner.

c) If the AP is self-employed and is having genuine difficulty in supplying details of their earnings the CSO can consider imposing an interim maintenance assessment (Category C) at a standard rate (currently £30). A lower amount can be considered at the AP's request and after consultation with the parent with care. If the AP fails to make IMA payments and does not come to an arrears agreement, the Agency will consider enforcement action to recover those arrears. Such action commences by obtaining a liability order in a Magistrates' Court and leads to committal proceedings as a last resort.

d) If the AP is receiving Income Support the CSO can request the Benefits Agency to make a standard deduction (currently £2.35) from the AP's Income Support as a contribution to maintenance.

Under current legislation if a completed Review Form is not returned the CSO is unable to impose an interim maintenance assessment. The CSOs only option is to review the current MA. This involves the CSO in considering the evidences already held to see if they are still reasonable and updating those evidences independently where possible, using the powers available to the Secretary of State.

Revised legislation from 22 January 1996 will allow the CSO to consider the imposition of an interim maintenance assessment in the same way as when a completed MEF has been returned.

I hope this is helpful.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to replace the Child Support Agency computer system. [10508]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 21 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency computer system.

As part of its normal management of business operations the Child Support Agency regularly reviews the role of the information systems it utilises. This review includes ongoing assessment of the cost effectiveness of the system and cost of change.
There are no current plans to replace the Child Support Computer System.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mrs. Ann Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that the hon. Member for Dewsbury receives a prompt response to all outstanding inquiries about Child Support Agency cases in the Dewsbury constituency that she has raised with the CSA chief executive. [11246]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 21 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about constituency cases you have raised with my office.

I have looked into the three cases you have written to me about, and I will write to you shortly on each individual case.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of the number of complaints filed in relation to the operation of the Child Support Agency *(a)* with Ministers and *(b)* the agency itself in each quarter since the agency was set up. [9535]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 21 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about complaints received in relation to the Child Support Agency.

It should be noted at the outset that complaints are not raised exclusively in relation to CSA administration. Many concern the financial amounts as calculated under the formula set by the Child Support Act.

We do not have a detailed breakdown of the categories of Ministerial correspondence, and are therefore unable to provide information relating specifically to complaints filed with Ministers. Figures for all Ministerial and Chief Executive correspondence, including complaints, are as follows:

| | *Ministerial* | *Chief executive* |
|---|---|---|
| *1993–94* | | |
| Total | [1]6,275 | — |
| *1994–95* | | |
| Quarter 1 | 317 | 2,221 |
| Quarter 2 | 325 | 1,917 |
| Quarter 3 | 368 | 2,343 |
| Quarter 4 | 339 | 2,205 |
| Total | 1,349 | 8,686 |
| *1995–96* | | |
| Quarter 1 | 346 | 2,127 |
| Quarter 2 | 294 | 2,041 |
| Total | 640 | 4,168 |

[1] This is an aggregate figure; separate details for Ministerial and Chief Executive correspondence are not available for 1993–94.

Statistics are collated for complaints handled by the Agency as a whole, and the details from inception are as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *1993–94* | |
| Total | [1]10,886 |
| *1994–95* | |
| Quarter 1 | 5,330 |
| Quarter 2 | 5,659 |
| Quarter 3 | 8,107 |
| Quarter 4 | 8,552 |
| Total | 27,648 |
| *1995–96* | |
| Quarter 1 | 8,639 |
| Quarter 2 | 8,086 |
| Total | 16,725 |

[1] A quarterly breakdown for 1993–94 is not available.

As details for December 1995 are not yet published, we are unable to provide information for the third quarter of 1995/96.

I hope this is helpful.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Children Order

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what account will be taken of spending levels in England in the Children Order. [10314]

**Mr. Moss:** The level of spending on personal social services for children following introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 will reflect local circumstances and priorities in Northern Ireland. No meaningful comparison can be made with the spending levels of local authorities in England.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much additional money will be spent in implementing the Children Order in Northern Ireland; [10312]

(2) what impact the saving requirement that boards are expected to make will have on the amount available to service the requirements of the Children Order. [10313]

**Mr. Moss:** Before taking final decisions on allocations to boards and efficiency savings targets for 1996–97, no comment can be made on the amount available to service the requirements of the Children Order.

### Psychiatric Beds

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the change in the number of psychiatric beds available in each of the Northern Ireland health boards since 1991. [10568]

**Mr. Moss:** The information is as follows:

| *Board area* | *1990–91* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|
| Eastern | 1,401 | 901 |
| Northern | 555 | 419 |
| Southern | 465 | 320 |
| Western | 1,113 | 499 |

### Magherafelt Bypass

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Department of the Environment intends to commence the Magherafelt bypass. [10579]

**Mr. Moss:** A scheme to by-pass Magherafelt is included in the Department's long-term programme of major road works, although its precise timing will be subject to future funding levels.

### Education Building Programme

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much of the planned building programme budget for education will be spent directly on construction in Mid-Ulster 1996–97; and what were the figures for 1995–96. [10571]

**Mr. Ancram:** Expenditure of £160,000 in 1995–96 and £310,000 in 1996–97, has been earmarked for construction work in Mid-Ulster within the major works building programme for the education service.

### Vegetable Industry, Ards

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of damage to the vegetable industry in the borough of Ards resulting from the recent severe weather conditions. [10305]

**Mr. Ancram:** Damage to the vegetable industry in the borough of Ards as a consequence of recent adverse weather conditions has been variable. The degree of damage varied from farm to farm, the stage of growth and the crop and variety grown.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he had made of the size and quality of the current year's vegetable crop in the borough of Ards relative to those of recent years; what plans he has to refer the matter to the Commission of the European Communities for financial assistance; and if he will make a statement. [10306]

**Mr. Ancram:** Vegetable quality in 1995, before the adverse weather spell, had been very good. Supplies were below 1994 levels, which was an abnormally good year. The harsh weather has, however, caused quality to deteriorate, depending on the crop grown, and has resulted in reduced supplies of some locally produced vegetables.

There are no plans to refer the matter to the EC Commission for financial assistance.

### Alcohol-related Problems

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much the NHS will spend this year on treatment for alcohol-related problems, and what were the equivalent figures for each of the last two years. [10629]

**Mr. Moss:** This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Patient Statistics

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients were treated at the *(a)* Mid Ulster hospital, *(b)* South Tyrone hospital, *(c)* Tyrone County hospital and *(d)* Erne hospital during the last two years. [10570]

**Mr. Moss:** The information requested is as follows:

| | *Mid Ulster hospital* | *South Tyrone hospital* | *Tyrone County hospital* | *Erne hospital* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Ordinary admissions* | | | | |
| 1993–94 | 7,226 | 10,252 | 8,820 | 8,258 |
| 1994–95 | 8,183 | 10,363 | 8,332 | 8,419 |
| *Day cases* | | | | |
| 1993–94 | 1,604 | 2,403 | 1,430 | 906 |
| 1994–95 | 1,787 | 2,757 | 1,824 | 1,022 |
| *Total attendances at consultant outpatient clinics* | | | | |
| 1993–94 | 25,575 | 33,280 | 34,648 | 31,850 |
| 1994–95 | 24,442 | 34,339 | 33,700 | 31,792 |
| *Total attendances at accident and emergency departments* | | | | |
| 1993–94 | 16,416 | 20,617 | 18,763 | 14,964 |
| 1994–95 | 18,416 | 21,100 | 21,418 | 14,491 |

### Sean Quinn Cement Ltd.

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what Government grants have been received by Sean Quinn Cement Ltd. in each of the last 10 years. [10632]

**Mr. Ancram:** In 1991–92, £1,800 was paid to Sean Quinn Cement Ltd. in respect of assistance under the Industrial Development Board's marketing development grant scheme. No other grants were paid to this company over the past 10 years.

### Anti-social Tenants

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce new measures to deal with *(a)* anti-social tenants in the public sector, *(b)* anti-social tenants in the private sector and *(c)* anti-social neighbours in the owner-occupied sector of housing in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [10578]

**Mr. Moss:** The need for new measures to deal with anti-social tenants in the public sector will be considered

as part of the housing policy review in Northern Ireland, the consultation stage of which expires on 31 March 1996. There are no plans at present to introduce new measures to deal with anti-social tenants in the private sector or anti-social neighbours in the owner-occupied sector.

### Job Creation

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what jobs have been announced by the Department of Economic Development since the ceasefire in each of the 17 Ulster constituencies. [10574]

**Mr. Ancram:** The Industrial Development Board has made a series of job announcements since the terrorist ceasefires. Details are as follows:

*Jobs announced by IDB since 1 September 1994, by Parliamentary Constituency*

| *Constituency* | *Jobs* |
|---|---|
| East Antrim | 409 |
| North Antrim | — |
| South Antrim | 575 |
| Belfast East | — |
| Belfast North | 106 |
| Belfast South | 20 |
| Belfast West | 498 |
| North Down | 119 |
| South Down | — |
| Farmanagh and South Tyrone | 667 |
| Foyle | 860 |
| Lagan Valley | 1,581 |
| East Londonderry | 81 |
| Mid Ulster | 218 |
| Newry and Armagh | 771 |
| Strangford | — |
| Upper Bann | 1,111 |
| Total | 7,016 |

An additional 316 jobs have been announced but no definite location is yet known.

### Heath Services (Privatisation)

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has further to involve the private sector in the provision of health services. [10569]

**Mr. Moss:** The provision of health services is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services and will remain so. The private sector routinely provides goods and services to support care and treatment, and supplies necessary capital works and equipment. In addition the provision of care and treatment may be procured on a patient's behalf from private or voluntary providers, where this represents the most economical, efficient and effective solution. With regard to any extension of private sector involvement, there are no plans which have this as their objective. It may arise indirectly as part of the Government's private finance initiative; from the White Paper, "Competing for Quality"; or from purchasing decisions by health boards or GP fundholders in light of the patient's need for the best available treatment.

### Flooding, Campsie

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Department of the Environment plans to install a new pump to prevent flooding at Campsie, Omagh. [10576]

**Mr. Moss:** When I wrote to the hon. Member on 10 December 1995 I informed him that it was intended to bring forward work on the scheme to the financial year 1997–98. I am now pleased to inform him that the Water Executive has just recently reviewed priorities in its capital works programme and it is possible to advance the work further. This is now scheduled to commence in the autumn of 1996.

### Health Boards (Finance)

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the savings proposed by his Department in each of the Northern Ireland health board areas in 1996–97. [10567]

**Mr. Moss:** The 1995 survey outcome provides for a small increase of 0.22 per cent. in real terms in the overall resources for the health and personnel Social Services in 1996–97. When one excludes the cost of drugs, the resources available to health and social services boards for hospital, community health and personal social services is 1.03 per cent. less than 1995–96 in real terms. In addition the survey outcome assumes 3 per cent. cash releasing efficiency savings. I have arranged to meet health and social services board chairmen and the local branch of the NHS Trust Federation before taking final decisions on allocations to boards for 1996–97.

### Pre-school Education

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by board the number of four-year-olds participating in pre-school education in Northern Ireland. [10563]

**Mr. Ancram:** Available statistics relate to pupils' age at 1 July. Measured at that date, there are no four-year-olds participating in pre-school education as four is the compulsory school age in Northern Ireland.

### Housing Executive

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when funds will be made available to clear the backlog of grant applications and awards by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. [10580]

**Mr. Moss:** This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The chief executive has advised me that, in response to the very high demand for grant aid for home improvements, the budget for 1995–96 has been increased by £10 million over the previous year to some £44 million. These substantial resources should enable further in-roads to be made in improving housing conditions in Northern Ireland.

### Birth Statistics

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many babies were born at the maternity units at *(a)* Erne hospital, *(b)* South Tyrone hospital and *(c)* Mid Ulster hospital during the past three years. [10572]

**Mr. Moss:** The information requested is as follows:

| | Erne hospital | South Tyrone hospital | Mid Ulster hospital |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Live births* | | | |
| 1992–93 | 737 | 957 | 788 |
| 1993–94 | 790 | 890 | 763 |
| 1994–95 | 911 | 1,066 | 765 |
| *Still births* | | | |
| 1992–93 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| 1993–94 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| 1994–95 | 7 | 7 | 4 |
| *Totals* | | | |
| 1992–93 | 740 | 958 | 793 |
| 1993–94 | 793 | 893 | 767 |
| 1994–95 | 918 | 1,073 | 769 |

### Owner Occupation

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest estimates of the level of owner occupation in Northern Ireland and what were the figures for the previous three years. [10582]

**Mr. Moss:** The estimated level of owner occupation expressed as a percentage of the total occupied housing stock in Northern Ireland is:

1994: 67 per cent.

1993: 67 per cent.

1992: 66 per cent.

1991: 66 per cent.

### Planning (Belfast)

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to address the future planning of the Belfast city region; and if he will make a statement. [12067]

**Mr. Moss:** Recent studies by the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) of urban regeneration, housing and transportation have pointed up the need for a review of strategic planning issues in the Belfast city region. I propose, therefore, to initiate debate about the future of Belfast and its environs and to help shape that debate I have today launched a discussion paper entitled, "The Belfast City Region: Towards and Beyond the Millennium". Copies of the discussion paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

### Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of ex-service *(a)* men and *(b)* women resident in Northern Ireland and ex-members (i) male and (ii) female of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its reserve suffering from combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder distinguishing between service inside and outside Northern Ireland. [10541]

**Sir John Wheeler** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The first part of the question is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

In the inclusive period 1987 to 1995, 37—33 male and four female—RUC officers were medically retired from the RUC/RUC Reserve as a result of suffering post-traumatic stress disorder.

The term "combat-induced" is not a recognised medical definition and therefore no distinction can be made on this.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what provision is made by his department for the treatment of combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder; [10540]

(2) what provision is made by his Department for respite care for sufferers of combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder. [10543]

**Mr. Moss** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Health and social services boards in Northern Ireland provide a comprehensive range of mental health services and social services, including respite care, to meet the needs of all mentally ill people, including those suffering from combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research is undertaken by his Department *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly by financing research elsewhere into combat-induced post traumatic stress disorder; and if he will indicate for *(b)* the organisations involved and the total funding provided. [10542]

**Mr. Moss** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* No research into combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder is being funded directly or indirectly by the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland at present. The Department has not received any applications for support of research into combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder in recent years.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### School Funding (Wolverhampton)

19. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received from schools in Wolverhampton regarding the local authority finance settlement for 1996–97. [9434]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** My right hon. Friend has received a small number of representations from schools in Wolverhampton about funding for 1996–97.

### Nursery School Vouchers

20. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she will take to ensure that a nursery place in a state school will be available to every holder of a nursery voucher who wants one. [9435]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The number of additional places created through the nursery voucher scheme in the maintained sector will depend on individual local education authority decisions influenced by parental choice.

### Youth Unemployment

21. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the statistics for youth unemployment in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other European Union countries. [9436]

**Mr. Paice:** On internationally comparable figures the International Labour Organisation unemployment rate in November 1995 for those aged under 25 was 13.4 per cent. This is among the lowest in the European Union, and almost 7 percentage points below the EU average.

25. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of youth unemployment. [9440]

**Mr. Paice:** We will continue with the economic and employment policies that have reduced unemployment among young people under 25 by 225,000 since October 1992 and to less than half the rate in France or Spain where a minimum wage and other regulations discourage employment of young people.

### Student Loans

22. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what factors led her to delay the introduction of subsidised private sector student loans. [9437]

**Mr. Forth:** Following consultation with the major banks and building societies, we decided to defer implementation of the new arrangements until 1997 to allow time for the development of new systems.

### School Standards

23. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when a Minister in her Department last met Sir Geoffrey Holland, vice-chancellor of Exeter university, to discuss his views on the outputs of the school system. [9438]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** My right hon. Friend discussed these issues with Sir Geoffrey Holland earlier this month at the annual conference of the Council of Local Education Authorities, where issues of school standards were at the top of the agenda.

### Education Budget (Lancashire)

24. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from Lancashire county council about its education budget settlement. [9439]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** My right hon. Friend has received no representation from Lancashire county council about its education budget for 1996–97.

### Social Chapter

26. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the employment implications for Britain of agreeing to the social chapter. [9441]

**Mr. Forth:** The social chapter would have damaged the United Kingdom's competitiveness and destroyed jobs. That is why we could not, and will not, accept it.

### Training and Enterprise Councils

27. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she last met representatives of the training and enterprise councils to discuss their budgets. [9443]

**Mr. Paice:** I regularly meet TEC representatives to discuss a wide range of topics including TEC budgets.

### Schools (London)

28. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made since the Greenwich judgment of the percentage of children who attend schools in London boroughs outside the one in which they reside. [9444]

**Mrs. Gillan:** According to information provided by local education authorities in January 1994, approximately 11 per cent. of children of compulsory school age were then attending schools outside the London borough in which they resided.

### Single-sex Grammer Schools

29. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many single-sex grammar schools there are in England. [9445]

**Mrs. Gillan:** There are at present 116 single-sex maintained grammar schools in England.

### Employment Opportunities (Workington)

30. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will introduce new measures for the creation of employment opportunities for the Workington travel-to-work area. [9446]

**Mr. Forth:** New jobs are being created all the time. The latest labour force survey shows that the number of people in employment in Great Britain rose by over 300,000 in the year summer 1994 to summer 1995.

The priority for the Department is to help unemployed people get these jobs. In November, I announced a programme of 1.5 million opportunities to do that, which has more than doubled the number of places on 1-2-1, a programme of intensive help tailored to the needs of the individual jobseeker.

### Education Budget (Birmingham)

31. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the standard education spending assessment for Birmingham local education authority in 1996–97; and what was Birmingham's budget for education in 1995–96. [9448]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Birmingham's provisional education standard spending assessment for 1996–97 is £448.7 million, an increase of 5 per cent. This year Birmingham's education SSA is some £427 million, and its education budget is some £456 million.

### Assisted Places Scheme

32. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children currently have assisted places. [9449]

**Mrs. Gillan:** About 30,200 children are now estimated to hold assisted places at schools in England in the current academic year 1995–96.

### Grant-maintained Schools

33. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have balloted in the last six months to become grant-maintained. [9450]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Forty-nine schools in England have balloted parents on the question of grant-maintained status since 1 July 1995.

### Labour Statistics

34. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many men were in full-time employment in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1995 or the most recent year for which figures are available. [9451]

**Mr. Forth:** In June 1979 there were 14,213,000 men in full-time employment in Great Britain, compared with 12,037,000 in June 1995.

### National Curriculum

35. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on quality and the diversity of the curriculum in school education. [9452]

**Mr. Paice:** The national curriculum aims to ensure that all pupils at maintained schools benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. The Office for Standards in Education has confirmed that it is already proving to be a successful vehicle for raising standards in school education. The revised national curriculum, introduced in August 1995, removed overload and gave teachers in primary and secondary schools more time to use at their discretion. Diversity is further guaranteed by the ability to choose between different elements of programmes of study.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to consult on what changes are desired to the national curriculum during the moratorium period. [11131]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The revised national curriculum was introduced into schools only last term and is intended to take them into the next century without further major change. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority has already begun to monitor the revised national curriculum and will, in due course, consider the need for further revision.

### Older Workers

36. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to improve employment opportunities for older workers. [9453]

**Mr. Forth:** We will continue our successful economic policies which produced growth in jobs for all age groups. And we will pursue the campaign for older workers which seeks to persuade employers to eliminate age discrimination from their employment and recruitment practices.

### Special Needs

**Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and which schools for educationally disadvantaged pupils in England are able to offer a full programme of GNVQ foundation courses for key stage 4 pupils provided by staff all qualified to TDLB—Training Development Lead Body—D32/33 or D34. [10884]

**Mr. Paice:** This information is not held centrally.

### Education and Employment Departments (Merger Costs)

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the total costs that will be incurred by her Department in amending stationery as a result of the merger of the Departments of Education and of Employment, the costs of new signs on buildings; and what other costs have been identified to her Department as a result of the merger of the Education and the Employment Departments. [11101]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The total cost for printing new stationery and production of new signage following the adoption of the merged Department's corporate identity is some £33,000. An estimated additional £57,000 has been incurred in developing the design of the identity and in the associated cost of its implementation throughout the Department, including production of a detailed set of guidelines. There have been significant savings elsewhere as a consequence of the merger.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost to her Department of producing its new logo; which company produced the logo; and what was the cost to her Department of this contract. [11106]

**Mr. Squire:** The design of the new logo and corporate identify for the Department for Education and Employment cost £15,000. The design work was carried out by the Central Office of Information after winning a free six-way creative pitch. The total cost of the contract, covering all aspects of design, production of all materials needed for the new Department and the production of a guidelines document is estimated at £90,000—this includes the original design cost of £15,000.

### Access to Work Scheme

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have applied for assistance through the access to work scheme over each of the last 12 months; and how many of these applicants have received assistance. [11465]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the monthly number of Access to Work applicants.

The attached table shows the number of people accepted for Access to Work support in each month since December 1994. We do not collect information centrally about the numbers of people who apply for support but are not eligible.

I hope this is helpful.

*Access to work beneficiaries: December 1994 to November 1995*

| *Month* | *Beneficiaries* |
|---|---|
| *1994* | |
| December | 622 |
| *1995* | |
| January | 785 |
| February | 830 |
| March | 868 |
| April/May[1] | 1,058 |
| June | 929 |
| July | 934 |
| August | 854 |
| September | 896 |
| October | 794 |
| November | 866 |

[1] New procedures for recording information were introduced during April. The first count covered the period from 1 April to 31 May 1995.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects the review of access to work to be completed; and when the information from that review will be made available. [11466]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the Access to Work review.

The review of Access to Work is an internal exercise carried out by the Employment Service. A report of the review will soon be sent to the Minister of State and he has already announced that he will discuss the operation of the programme in 1996/97 with the principal organisations concerned before any recommendations are implemented.

The Employment Service commissioned research from Social Community Planning Research to feed into the review. That research is complete and we intend to publish it during February.

I hope this is helpful.

### Information Technology

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new information is being collected by her officials in the current survey into the levels of provision of information technology in schools. [11129]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Some questions have been updated in the survey to be carried out in March 1996 to reflect the changing provision of information technology in schools resulting from new technology developments. No new categories of information are involved.

**Mrs. Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many local education authority advisory information technology centres there were in each year since 1991. [11113]

**Mr. Squire:** The information is not held centrally. It is a matter for individual local education authorities to decide how to provide IT support arrangements in the light of demand from schools. The Department's statistical bulletin "Survey of Information Technology in Schools", issue No. 3/95, ISSN 0142-5013, gives information on sources of technical support.

**Mrs. Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of teachers in the current work force have received some formal training in information technology. [11116]

**Mr. Squire:** A sample survey of information technology provision in schools carried out by the Department in 1994 showed that the proportion of teachers who had received some training in information technology was 94 per cent. in primary schools, 86 per cent. in secondary schools and 92 per cent. in special schools.

The ability to make constructive use of IT is among the competencies now required of all newly qualified teachers.

**Mrs. Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the current survey by her Department into the level of provision of information technology in schools. [11128]

**Mr. Squire:** The Department will be carrying out a further survey of information technology provision in a representative sample of schools in England in March 1996. The results of the survey should be available around the end of the year.

### Education Multi-media Industry

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she is taking to represent the views of the United Kingdom education multi-media industry in the European Commission. [11130]

**Mr. Forth:** The Government are maintaining dialogue with the Commission and with relevant interests, including the British Educational Suppliers Association. Most recently, this has involved discussion of work by the European Commission's task force on multi-media educational software. UK interests will be represented in formal discussions within the Council of Ministers later this year.

### Schools Renewal Challenge Fund

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has received from the Isle of Wight education authority for bids under the schools renewal challenge fund for capital projects involving renewal, repair, replacement or improvement of the island's school capital stock. [11151]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Local education authorities have not yet had the opportunity to bid for support from the schools renewal challenge fund, which we propose should operate in the 1996–97 financial year.

### School Budgets (Manchester and Trafford)

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the levels of capital funding requested and capital spending allowed for school buildings in 1996–97 to the city of Manchester and the borough of Trafford. [9428]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The annual capital guidelines for capital work in schools for the city of Manchester and the borough of Trafford in 1996–97 are £6.378 million and £2.153 million respectively. These figures represent 12.52 per cent. and 30.75 per cent. respectively of the amounts bid for, compared with the national average of 23 per cent. Grants for building work at voluntary aided schools to the value of £3.463 million in Manchester and £285,000 in Trafford were also approved in the recent capital round.

ACGs do not constitute limits on capital spending by these authorities on their schools. Local education authorities can, and do, supplement their borrowing from other sources, including capital receipts and revenue budgets.

### Violent Pupils

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to issue guidelines in respect of the protection of head teachers and teachers from violent pupils. [9773]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The working group established by my right hon. Friend following the tragic murder of Philip Lawrence is considering urgently what more should be done to improve security in and around schools. Measures to protect school staff against violence—wherever it comes from—are a vital element in that work. DFEE circular 9/94, "The Education of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties", already contains advice to schools on the physical containment of pupils, where this is necessary to prevent them causing harm to themselves or to others.

### National Vocational Qualifications (L

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of those aged 18 to 21 years have achieved NVQ level 2 or its equivalent; and what are the equivalent figures for *(a)* Germany and *(b)* Japan. [10165]

**Mr. Paice:** The latest estimate for the proportion of 18 to 21-year-olds in the United Kingdom who have achieved at least national vocational qualification level 2 or equivalent is 63 per cent. This figure is taken from the summer 1995 labour force survey.

Comparable information for Germany and Japan is not available.

### Nursery Education

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates he has made of the proportion of families in England that have state nursery education available to them in each education authority for children aged *(a)* three to four and *(b)* four to five years. [11087]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The information is not collected centrally.

Information about pupils under five being taught in maintained nursery and primary schools in each local education authority area in England in January 1995 is contained in statistical bulletin 1/96 "Pupils Under Five Years of Age in Schools in England—January 1995", which is available in the Library.

### Job Insecurity

**Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to reduce levels of job insecurity. [9442]

**Mr. Forth:** Concerns about job insecurity will be reduced by sustainable economic growth, falling unemployment, and rising employment, which the Government's policies are achieving.

### GCSE Scores

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will provide the GCSE average point scores per pupil in 1995 for each individual 20th group, and also for the cumulative 20th group, of all 15-year-old pupils when ranked according to their average point scores, where A* = 7 for *(a)* all such pupils in England, *(b)* all such pupils of the local education authority maintained sector only, excluding those of grant-maintained schools, *(c)* all such pupils of the grant-maintained sector only, *(d)* all such pupils of the whole maintained sector only, excluding those of independent schools and *(e)* all such pupils of the independent sector only. [42202]

**Mr. Robin Squire** *[holding answer 8 November 1995]:* The GCSE average point scores per pupil in 1995 for each individual 20th group, and also for the cumulative 20th groups of all 15-year-old pupils when ranked according to their average point scores where A* = 7 are shown in the following tables:

*GCSE average point scores by each twentieth of the 15-year-olds 1994–95 provisional figures*

*Cumulative totals*

| | All schools[1] | | | Grant maintained | | | Independent | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average GCSE points | Number 15-year-olds | Total point score | Average GCSE points | Number 15-year-olds | Total point score | Average GCSE points | Number 15-year-olds | Total point score |
| 0.000 | 28,910 | 0 | 0.218 | 4,775 | 1,042 | 0.000 | 2,374 | 0 |
| 0.413 | 57,819 | 23,892 | 3.751 | 9,550 | 35,821 | 1.150 | 4,749 | 5,463 |
| 2.641 | 86,729 | 229,072 | 7.301 | 14,325 | 104,589 | 6.321 | 7,123 | 45,021 |
| 5.249 | 115,639 | 607,042 | 10.352 | 19,100 | 197,731 | 12.915 | 9,497 | 122,650 |
| 7.793 | 144,549 | 1,126,428 | 13.001 | 23,875 | 310,409 | 18.283 | 11,871 | 217,043 |
| 10.177 | 173,458 | 1,765,351 | 15.361 | 28,649 | 440,079 | 22.581 | 14,246 | 321,682 |
| 12.394 | 202,368 | 2,508,125 | 17.494 | 33,424 | 584,714 | 26.088 | 16,620 | 433,584 |
| 14.475 | 231,278 | 3,347,636 | 19.448 | 38,199 | 742,899 | 29.053 | 18,994 | 551,824 |
| 16.438 | 260,187 | 4,277,067 | 21.282 | 42,974 | 914,568 | 31.599 | 21,368 | 675,199 |
| 18.306 | 289,097 | 5,292,290 | 23.008 | 47,749 | 1,098,614 | 33.828 | 23,743 | 803,187 |
| 20.096 | 318,007 | 6,[illegible]3 | 24.650 | 52,524 | 1,294,723 | 35.804 | 26,117 | 935,103 |

*GCSE average point scores by each twentieth of the 15-year-olds 1994–95 provisional figures*

*Cumulative totals*

| Average GCSE points | All schools[1] Grant maintained Number 15-year-olds | Total point score | Independent Average GCSE points | Number 15-year-olds | Total point score | Average GCSE points | Number 15-year-olds | Total point score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21.823 | 346,916 | 7,570,643 | 26.228 | 57,299 | 1,502,835 | 37.591 | 28,491 | 1,071,011 |
| 23.496 | 375,826 | 8,830,343 | 27.750 | 62,074 | 1,722,550 | 39.212 | 30,865 | 1,210,267 |
| 25.123 | 404,736 | 10,168,051 | 29.228 | 66,849 | 1,953,858 | 40.717 | 33,240 | 1,353,446 |
| 26.716 | 433,646 | 11,585,492 | 30.674 | 71,624 | 2,197,008 | 42.109 | 35,614 | 1,499,672 |
| 28.290 | 462,555 | 13,085,748 | 32.100 | 76,398 | 2,452,391 | 43.400 | 37,988 | 1,648,678 |
| 29.854 | 491,465 | 14,672,377 | 33.518 | 81,173 | 2,720,772 | 44.624 | 40,362 | 1,801,098 |
| 31.431 | 520,375 | 16,355,717 | 34.953 | 85,948 | 3,004,113 | 45.873 | 42,737 | 1,960,481 |
| 33.036 | 549,284 | 18,146,009 | 36.429 | 90,723 | 3,304,934 | 47.112 | 45,111 | 2,125,259 |
| 34.827 | 578,194 | 20,137,007 | 38.102 | 95,498 | 3,638,642 | 48.467 | 47,485 | 2,301,460 |

[1] Includes LEA and grant-maintained schools, independent schools, hospital schools and pupil referral units.

| *Average GCSE points* | *Maintained[1] Number 15-year-olds* | *Total point score* | *Average GCSE points* | *LEA maintained Number 15-year-olds* | *Total point score* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.000 | 26,416 | 0 | 0.000 | 21,641 | 0 |
| 0.502 | 52,832 | 26,509 | 0.221 | 43,282 | 9,569 |
| 2.749 | 79,248 | 217,826 | 2.111 | 64,924 | 137,027 |
| 5.292 | 105,664 | 559,146 | 4.474 | 86,565 | 387,315 |
| 7.733 | 132,081 | 1,021,317 | 6.818 | 108,206 | 737,741 |
| 10.019 | 158,497 | 1,588,019 | 9.047 | 129,847 | 1,174,775 |
| 12.136 | 184,913 | 2,244,018 | 11.134 | 151,488 | 1,686,656 |
| 14.122 | 211,329 | 2,984,408 | 13.099 | 173,130 | 2,267,840 |
| 15.997 | 237,745 | 3,803,121 | 14.962 | 194,771 | 2,914,229 |
| 17.781 | 264,161 | 4,697,065 | 16.740 | 216,412 | 3.622,833 |
| 19.490 | 290,577 | 5,663,336 | 18.447 | 238,053 | 4,391,259 |
| 21.135 | 316,993 | 6,699,751 | 20.094 | 259,694 | 5,218,197 |
| 22.737 | 343,409 | 7,808,110 | 21.699 | 281,336 | 6,104,623 |
| 24.301 | 369,825 | 8,986,961 | 23.269 | 302,977 | 7,050,001 |
| 25.833 | 396,242 | 10,235,997 | 24.810 | 324,618 | 8,053,922 |
| 27.348 | 422,658 | 11,558,679 | 26.336 | 346,259 | 9,119,118 |
| 28.862 | 449,074 | 12,961,258 | 27.861 | 367,900 | 10,250,138 |
| 30.394 | 475,490 | 14,451,924 | 29.404 | 389,542 | 11,454,202 |
| 31.976 | 501,906 | 16,048,730 | 31.003 | 411,183 | 12,747,745 |
| 33.750 | 528,322 | 17,830,804 | 32.790 | 432,824 | 14,192,162 |

[1]Includes LEA and grant-maintained schools but excludes hospital schools and pupil referral units.

*GCSE average point scores by each twentieth of the 15-year-olds 1994–95 provisional figures*

*Individual totals*

| Average GCSE points | All schools[1] Number 15-year-olds | Total point score | Grant maintained Average GCSE points | Number 15-year-olds | Total point score | Average GCSE points | Independent Number 15-year-olds | Total point score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.000 | 28,910 | 0 | 0.218 | 4,775 | 1,042 | 0.000 | 2,374 | 0 |
| 0.826 | 28,909 | 23,892 | 7.284 | 4,775 | 34,779 | 2.300 | 2,375 | 5,463 |
| 7.097 | 28,910 | 205,180 | 14.402 | 4,775 | 68,768 | 16.663 | 2,374 | 39,558 |
| 13.074 | 28,910 | 377,970 | 19.506 | 4,775 | 93,142 | 32.700 | 2,374 | 77,629 |
| 17.966 | 28,910 | 519,386 | 23.597 | 4,775 | 112,678 | 39.761 | 2,374 | 94,393 |
| 22.101 | 28,909 | 638,923 | 27.162 | 4,774 | 129,670 | 44.059 | 2,375 | 104,639 |
| 25.693 | 28,910 | 742,774 | 30.290 | 4,775 | 144,635 | 47.136 | 2,374 | 111,902 |
| 29.039 | 28,910 | 839,511 | 33.128 | 4,775 | 158,185 | 49.806 | 2,374 | 118,240 |
| 32.150 | 28,909 | 929,431 | 35.952 | 4,775 | 171,669 | 51.969 | 2,374 | 123,375 |
| 35.110 | 28,910 | 1,015,023 | 38.544 | 4,775 | 184,046 | 53.890 | 2,375 | 127,988 |
| 37.999 | 28,910 | 1,098,540 | 41.070 | 4,775 | 196,109 | 55.567 | 2,374 | 131,916 |
| 40.818 | 28,909 | 1,180,013 | 43.584 | 4,775 | 208,112 | 57.249 | 2,374 | 135,908 |
| 43.573 | 28,910 | 1,259,700 | 46.014 | 4,775 | 219,715 | 58.659 | 2,374 | 139,256 |
| 46.271 | 28,910 | 1,337,708 | 48.441 | 4,775 | 231,308 | 60.286 | 2,375 | 143,179 |
| 49.029 | 28,910 | 1,417,441 | 50.921 | 4,775 | 243,150 | 61.595 | 2,374 | 146,226 |
| 51.896 | 28,909 | 1,500,256 | 53.495 | 4,774 | 255,383 | 62.766 | 2,374 | 149,006 |
| 54.882 | 28,910 | 1,586,629 | 56.205 | 4,775 | 268,381 | 64.204 | 2,374 | 152,420 |
| 58.227 | 28,910 | 1,683,340 | 59.338 | 4,775 | 283,341 | 67.109 | 2,375 | 159,383 |
| 61.929 | 28,909 | 1,790,292 | 62.999 | 4,775 | 300,821 | 69.409 | 2,374 | 164,778 |
| 68.869 | 28,910 | 1,990,998 | 69.886 | 4,775 | 333,708 | 74.221 | 2,374 | 176,201 |

[1] Includes LEA and grant-maintained schools, independent schools, hospital schools and pupil referral units.

*Individual totals*

| Maintained | | | LEA maintained | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Average GCSE points* | *Number 15-year-olds* | *Total point score* | *Average GCSE points* | *Number 15-year-olds* | *Total point score* |
| 0.000 | 26,416 | 0 | 0.000 | 21,641 | 0 |
| 1.004 | 26,416 | 26,509 | 0.442 | 21,641 | 9,569 |
| 7.242 | 26,416 | 191,317 | 5.889 | 21,642 | 127,458 |
| 12.921 | 26,416 | 341,320 | 11.565 | 21,641 | 250,288 |
| 17.495 | 26,417 | 462,171 | 16.193 | 21,641 | 350,426 |
| 21.453 | 26,416 | 566,702 | 20.195 | 21,641 | 437,034 |
| 24.833 | 26,416 | 655,999 | 23.653 | 21,641 | 511,881 |
| 28.028 | 26,416 | 740,390 | 26.854 | 21,642 | 581,184 |
| 30.993 | 26,416 | 818,713 | 29.869 | 21,641 | 646,389 |
| 33.841 | 26,416 | 893,944 | 32.744 | 21,641 | 708,604 |
| 36.579 | 26,416 | 966,271 | 35.508 | 21,641 | 768,426 |
| 39.234 | 26,416 | 1,036,415 | 38.212 | 21,641 | 826,938 |
| 41.958 | 26,416 | 1,108,359 | 40.959 | 21,642 | 886,426 |
| 44.626 | 26,416 | 1,178,851 | 43.685 | 21,641 | 945,378 |
| 47.282 | 26,417 | 1,249,036 | 46.390 | 21,641 | 1,003,921 |
| 50.071 | 26,416 | 1,322,682 | 49.221 | 21,641 | 1,065,196 |
| 53.096 | 26,416 | 1,402,579 | 52.263 | 21,641 | 1,131,020 |
| 56.430 | 26,416 | 1,490,666 | 55.636 | 21,642 | 1,204,064 |
| 60.448 | 26,416 | 1,596,806 | 59.773 | 21,641 | 1,293,543 |
| 67.462 | 26,416 | 1,782,074 | 66.744 | 21,641 | 1,444,417 |

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will provide the average GCSE point scores, where A* = 7, per 15-year-old pupil by local education authority and for 1995, and also by gender in each case for *(a)* the local education authority maintained sector only, *(b)* the grant-maintained sector only and *(c)* the whole maintained sector; and if he will state the averages in each case for each standard Department for Education region. [42203]

**Mr. Squire** *[holding answer 8 November 1995]:* The average GCSE point scores, where A* = 7 per 15-year-old pupil by local education authority and for 1995, and also by gender in each case for *(a)* the local authority maintained sector only, *(b)* the grant-maintained sector only and *(c)* the whole maintained sector are shown in the following table. The averages for each standard Department for Education region are also shown at the end of the following table:

*Average GCSE point scores (based on A* equals 7)*

| | *LEA maintained* | | | *Grant maintained* | | | *Maintained sector* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Boys* | *Girls* | *Total* | *Boys* | *Girls* | *Total* | *Boys* | *Girls* | *Total* |
| Corporation of London | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Camden | 25.8 | 32.9 | 29.8 | 42.3 | 41.2 | 41.5 | 28.6 | 35.0 | 32.3 |
| Greenwich | 26.3 | 30.5 | 28.4 | — | — | — | 26.3 | 30.5 | 28.4 |
| Hackney | 21.7 | 28.8 | 25.9 | — | — | — | 21.7 | 28.8 | 25.9 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 16.9 | 30.0 | 24.3 | 40.0 | 0.0 | 40.1 | 24.1 | 30.0 | 26.9 |
| Islington | 20.2 | 24.2 | 21.9 | — | — | — | 20.2 | 24.2 | 21.9 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 28.3 | 30.6 | 29.6 | 50.6 | — | 50.6 | 36.5 | 30.6 | 33.7 |
| Lambeth | 14.1 | 26.1 | 21.4 | 29.0 | 32.5 | 30.9 | 22.9 | 29.3 | 26.5 |
| Lewisham | 24.8 | 30.6 | 27.6 | — | — | — | 24.8 | 30.6 | 27.6 |
| Southwark | 17.4 | 26.9 | 22.0 | 30.5 | 34.8 | 32.7 | 20.6 | 28.9 | 24.7 |
| Tower Hamlets | 21.2 | 26.7 | 23.8 | 31.5 | 32.2 | 31.8 | 21.9 | 27.1 | 24.4 |
| Wandsworth | 20.7 | 19.4 | 20.3 | 29.7 | 34.3 | 32.3 | 25.5 | 31.3 | 28.2 |
| Westminster | 22.8 | 30.6 | 26.9 | — | — | — | 22.8 | 30.6 | 26.9 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 26.2 | 30.1 | 28.1 | — | — | — | 26.2 | 30.1 | 28.1 |
| Barnet | 30.2 | 41.3 | 36.8 | 40.7 | 45.5 | 42.6 | 36.7 | 43.1 | 39.8 |
| Bexley | 31.7 | 38.3 | 35.4 | 37.1 | 40.0 | 37.9 | 33.5 | 38.5 | 36.0 |
| Brent | 20.1 | 30.4 | 24.6 | 30.4 | 36.4 | 33.4 | 28.6 | 35.5 | 32.0 |
| Bromley | 28.2 | 30.7 | 29.8 | 37.7 | 42.5 | 40.0 | 36.3 | 39.4 | 37.8 |
| Croydon | 27.4 | 33.3 | 30.3 | 31.4 | 39.9 | 35.7 | 29.2 | 36.3 | 32.7 |
| Ealing | 25.5 | 33.6 | 29.4 | 28.5 | 36.0 | 32.7 | 26.6 | 34.7 | 30.8 |
| Enfield | 26.2 | 34.6 | 31.0 | 35.9 | 38.6 | 36.7 | 30.3 | 35.3 | 32.7 |
| Haringey | 21.9 | 28.6 | 25.1 | — | — | — | 21.9 | 28.6 | 25.1 |
| Harrow | 35.8 | 41.1 | 38.5 | 38.4 | — | 38.4 | 36.1 | 41.1 | 38.5 |
| Havering | 31.7 | 34.9 | 33.1 | 43.8 | 45.4 | 44.9 | 33.3 | 38.5 | 35.9 |
| Hillingdon | 27.6 | 31.4 | 29.7 | 31.4 | 35.9 | 33.7 | 30.8 | 35.1 | 33.0 |
| Hounslow | 29.1 | 35.6 | 32.1 | 38.1 | 44.9 | 41.5 | 30.2 | 37.0 | 33.4 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 28.8 | 43.5 | 39.0 | 45.0 | 36.7 | 43.1 | 38.1 | 42.5 | 40.4 |
| Merton | 30.6 | 32.5 | 31.4 | — | 43.3 | 43.3 | 30.6 | 35.3 | 32.8 |
| Newham | 22.6 | 27.9 | 25.2 | 23.0 | 33.9 | 28.7 | 22.6 | 28.1 | 25.3 |
| Redbridge | 36.1 | 38.5 | 37.3 | 34.0 | 39.2 | 36.8 | 36.0 | 38.5 | 37.2 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 34.2 | 39.8 | 36.9 | — | — | — | 34.2 | 39.8 | 36.9 |
| Sutton | 24.9 | 30.0 | 27.7 | 46.3 | 50.5 | 48.1 | 38.0 | 40.4 | 39.1 |
| Waltham Forest | 25.1 | 31.7 | 28.4 | 33.9 | 42.6 | 37.7 | 26.8 | 33.4 | 30.0 |
| Birmingham | 23.4 | 28.6 | 25.9 | 36.1 | 38.8 | 37.4 | 26.3 | 30.7 | 28.5 |
| Coventry | 27.9 | 33.5 | 30.6 | — | — | — | 27.9 | 33.5 | 30.6 |

*Average GCSE point scores (based on A* equals 7)*

| | LEA maintained | | | Grant maintained | | | Maintained sector | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Total | Boys | Girls | Total | Boys | Girls | Total |
| Dudley | 30.3 | 35.9 | 33.1 | 34.5 | 37.4 | 35.8 | 31.4 | 36.3 | 33.8 |
| Sandwell | 25.4 | 30.3 | 27.8 | 23.7 | 26.6 | 25.2 | 25.3 | 30.0 | 27.6 |
| Solihull | 34.2 | 39.4 | 36.9 | — | — | — | 34.2 | 39.4 | 36.9 |
| Walsall | 22.1 | 27.8 | 24.9 | 34.9 | 39.1 | 37.0 | 26.5 | 31.8 | 29.1 |
| Wolverhampton | 26.6 | 30.0 | 28.2 | 24.5 | 37.9 | 32.6 | 26.4 | 31.4 | 28.9 |
| Knowsley | 21.7 | 23.8 | 22.8 | 16.1 | 23.5 | 19.7 | 21.3 | 23.8 | 22.5 |
| Liverpool | 21.7 | 27.1 | 24.4 | 34.0 | 36.1 | 34.7 | 23.2 | 27.7 | 25.4 |
| St. Helens | 29.6 | 35.0 | 32.1 | — | — | — | 29.6 | 35.0 | 32.1 |
| Sefton | 32.3 | 37.8 | 35.1 | — | — | — | 32.3 | 37.8 | 35.1 |
| Wirral | 28.2 | 35.6 | 32.1 | 56.8 | 49.8 | 55.5 | 33.8 | 36.3 | 35.0 |
| Bolton | 30.1 | 35.2 | 32.5 | 37.1 | 43.0 | 40.1 | 31.2 | 36.6 | 33.7 |
| Bury | 34.3 | 38.1 | 36.1 | — | — | — | 34.3 | 38.1 | 36.1 |
| Manchester | 21.5 | 26.3 | 23.8 | — | — | — | 21.5 | 26.3 | 23.8 |
| Oldham | 26.3 | 32.9 | 29.5 | — | — | — | 26.3 | 32.9 | 29.5 |
| Rochdale | 27.2 | 31.8 | 29.4 | 32.2 | 38.7 | 35.4 | 28.0 | 33.0 | 30.4 |
| Salford | 23.5 | 28.1 | 25.8 | 39.0 | 41.9 | 40.4 | 24.0 | 28.5 | 26.3 |
| Stockport | 33.3 | 38.0 | 35.5 | — | — | — | 33.3 | 38.0 | 35.5 |
| Tameside | 25.9 | 32.1 | 29.2 | 36.0 | 41.1 | 37.6 | 28.4 | 33.2 | 30.7 |
| Trafford | 34.4 | 39.2 | 36.9 | 27.3 | 31.1 | 29.0 | 32.5 | 37.4 | 35.0 |
| Wigan | 32.1 | 38.3 | 35.1 | — | — | — | 32.1 | 38.3 | 35.1 |
| Barnsley | 24.8 | 30.8 | 27.8 | — | — | — | 24.8 | 30.8 | 27.8 |
| Doncaster | 25.9 | 30.1 | 27.8 | 43.1 | 49.7 | 46.3 | 26.8 | 31.2 | 28.8 |
| Rotherham | 29.7 | 34.4 | 32.0 | — | — | — | 29.7 | 34.4 | 32.0 |
| Sheffield | 28.3 | 32.6 | 30.4 | 37.5 | 39.5 | 38.6 | 28.8 | 33.1 | 30.9 |
| Bradford | 24.0 | 29.4 | 26.6 | 28.5 | 33.9 | 31.0 | 24.9 | 30.2 | 27.4 |
| Calderdale | 22.3 | 27.1 | 24.5 | 34.8 | 39.5 | 37.0 | 28.7 | 33.7 | 31.1 |
| Kirklees | 28.3 | 34.6 | 31.4 | 57.5 | 53.8 | 55.7 | 29.0 | 35.1 | 31.9 |
| Leeds | 27.8 | 33.2 | 30.4 | 35.9 | 36.1 | 36.0 | 28.0 | 33.3 | 30.6 |
| Wakefield | 28.5 | 33.8 | 31.2 | — | — | — | 28.5 | 33.8 | 31.2 |
| Gateshead | 30.1 | 33.6 | 31.9 | — | — | — | 30.1 | 33.6 | 31.9 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 26.0 | 27.8 | 26.9 | — | — | — | 26.0 | 27.8 | 26.9 |
| North Tyneside | 30.9 | 34.8 | 32.8 | — | — | — | 30.9 | 34.8 | 32.8 |
| South Tyneside | 28.7 | 34.5 | 31.6 | — | — | — | 28.7 | 34.5 | 31.6 |
| Sunderland | 27.0 | 32.9 | 29.9 | — | — | — | 27.0 | 32.9 | 29.9 |
| Isles of Scilly | 38.6 | 50.9 | 46.2 | — | — | — | 38.6 | 50.9 | 46.2 |
| Avon | 31.5 | 36.4 | 33.9 | 37.3 | 41.1 | 39.0 | 31.7 | 36.6 | 34.1 |
| Bedfordshire | 32.1 | 37.2 | 34.6 | 34.9 | 40.1 | 37.4 | 32.9 | 38.0 | 35.4 |
| Berkshire | 33.2 | 39.5 | 36.3 | 40.0 | 39.5 | 39.8 | 34.6 | 39.5 | 37.0 |
| Buckinghamshire | 36.4 | 41.2 | 38.8 | 37.1 | 39.5 | 38.3 | 36.6 | 40.7 | 38.6 |
| Cambridgeshire | 33.3 | 38.3 | 35.8 | 36.2 | 39.1 | 37.6 | 34.3 | 38.6 | 36.4 |
| Cheshire | 34.1 | 39.1 | 36.6 | 36.3 | 41.3 | 38.8 | 34.2 | 39.2 | 36.7 |
| Cleveland | 28.3 | 32.5 | 30.4 | — | — | — | 28.3 | 32.5 | 30.4 |
| Cornwall | 34.9 | 39.3 | 37.1 | — | — | — | 34.9 | 39.3 | 37.1 |
| Cumbria | 30.4 | 35.1 | 32.7 | 36.5 | 41.3 | 38.9 | 32.6 | 37.4 | 35.0 |
| Derbyshire | 29.2 | 34.3 | 31.6 | 34.5 | 39.7 | 37.0 | 30.8 | 35.9 | 33.3 |
| Devon | 31.7 | 38.3 | 35.0 | 43.4 | 44.9 | 43.9 | 32.8 | 38.6 | 35.6 |
| Dorset | 35.3 | 40.1 | 37.5 | 43.6 | 46.7 | 45.4 | 37.0 | 42.0 | 39.4 |
| Durham | 28.5 | 34.1 | 31.2 | — | — | — | 28.5 | 34.1 | 31.2 |
| East Sussex | 33.1 | 37.2 | 35.1 | — | — | — | 33.1 | 37.2 | 35.1 |
| Essex | 28.1 | 33.5 | 30.8 | 35.5 | 40.8 | 38.1 | 33.2 | 38.5 | 35.8 |
| Gloucestershire | 32.1 | 35.8 | 34.0 | 37.6 | 42.1 | 39.7 | 35.9 | 40.0 | 37.9 |
| Hampshire | 33.9 | 39.2 | 36.5 | 39.1 | 45.2 | 42.1 | 34.9 | 40.4 | 37.6 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 32.5 | 37.3 | 34.9 | 34.9 | 40.1 | 37.7 | 32.7 | 37.5 | 35.1 |
| Hertfordshire | 32.6 | 38.7 | 35.6 | 38.2 | 42.8 | 40.5 | 34.6 | 40.1 | 37.3 |
| Humberside | 28.3 | 32.9 | 30.6 | — | — | — | 28.3 | 32.9 | 30.6 |
| Isle of Wight | 33.3 | 35.9 | 34.5 | — | — | — | 33.3 | 35.9 | 34.5 |
| Kent | 29.5 | 35.4 | 32.7 | 34.2 | 38.3 | 36.0 | 32.1 | 36.7 | 34.4 |
| Lancashire | 30.8 | 35.4 | 33.0 | 46.9 | 49.3 | 48.1 | 31.8 | 36.3 | 34.0 |
| Leicestershire | 30.3 | 35.6 | 32.9 | 38.5 | 41.9 | 39.9 | 30.4 | 35.6 | 33.0 |
| Lincolnshire | 28.1 | 36.7 | 32.8 | 37.1 | 38.0 | 37.5 | 32.7 | 37.2 | 35.0 |
| Norfolk | 31.2 | 37.5 | 34.3 | 33.6 | 38.8 | 36.1 | 31.8 | 37.8 | 34.8 |
| North Yorkshire | 36.1 | 40.9 | 38.5 | — | — | — | 36.1 | 40.9 | 38.5 |
| Northamptonshire | 32.5 | 38.0 | 35.3 | 32.6 | 35.2 | 33.8 | 32.6 | 37.4 | 35.0 |
| Northumberland | 33.2 | 38.2 | 35.7 | 28.6 | 35.8 | 31.7 | 33.0 | 38.1 | 35.5 |
| Nottinghamshire | 28.7 | 33.2 | 30.9 | 26.1 | 34.2 | 30.0 | 28.6 | 33.2 | 30.9 |
| Oxfordshire | 33.3 | 39.4 | 36.3 | — | — | — | 33.3 | 39.4 | 36.3 |
| Shropshire | 32.7 | 38.9 | 35.8 | 37.0 | 39.8 | 38.3 | 33.5 | 39.1 | 36.2 |
| Somerset | 34.5 | 39.9 | 37.2 | 30.4 | 44.5 | 32.6 | 34.4 | 39.9 | 37.1 |
| Staffordshire | 30.1 | 35.2 | 32.6 | 32.1 | 33.8 | 33.0 | 30.2 | 35.1 | 32.6 |
| Suffolk | 35.7 | 40.7 | 38.2 | — | — | — | 35.7 | 40.7 | 38.2 |

*Average GCSE point scores (based on A* equals 7)*

| | LEA maintained | | | Grant maintained | | | Maintained sector | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Boys* | *Girls* | *Total* | *Boys* | *Girls* | *Total* | *Boys* | *Girls* | *Total* |
| Surrey | 34.3 | 39.6 | 36.9 | 38.3 | 43.1 | 40.6 | 35.6 | 40.7 | 38.1 |
| Warwickshire | 32.1 | 36.8 | 34.4 | 32.8 | 40.2 | 37.0 | 32.2 | 37.5 | 34.9 |
| West Sussex | 36.9 | 42.1 | 39.4 | — | — | — | 36.9 | 42.1 | 39.4 |
| Wiltshire | 33.2 | 38.4 | 35.8 | 37.6 | 43.4 | 40.3 | 35.0 | 40.3 | 37.6 |
| Total | 30.2 | 35.5 | 32.8 | 36.2 | 40.2 | 38.1 | 31.3 | 36.3 | 33.7 |
| *Regions* | | | | | | | | | |
| North | 29.1 | 33.7 | 31.3 | 35.8 | 40.9 | 38.3 | 29.5 | 34.1 | 31.8 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 38.7 | 33.7 | 31.1 | 34.0 | 38.4 | 36.1 | 29.0 | 34.0 | 31.4 |
| North-west | 29.5 | 34.6 | 32.0 | 39.4 | 41.6 | 40.4 | 30.2 | 35.0 | 32.5 |
| East Midlands | 29.8 | 35.1 | 32.4 | 34.9 | 38.0 | 36.3 | 30.8 | 35.6 | 33.1 |
| West Midlands | 28.9 | 34.1 | 31.5 | 34.2 | 38.1 | 36.1 | 29.7 | 34.7 | 32.1 |
| East Anglia | 33.5 | 39.0 | 36.2 | 35.1 | 39.0 | 37.0 | 33.8 | 39.0 | 36.4 |
| Greater London | 26.6 | 32.9 | 29.8 | 35.8 | 39.7 | 37.6 | 29.3 | 34.7 | 32.0 |
| South-east | 33.1 | 38.5 | 35.8 | 36.2 | 40.8 | 38.4 | 34.1 | 39.2 | 36.6 |
| South-west | 33.1 | 38.3 | 35.6 | 39.0 | 43.5 | 41.1 | 34.2 | 39.3 | 36.6 |
| Total | 30.2 | 35.5 | 32.8 | 36.2 | 40.2 | 38.1 | 31.3 | 36.3 | 33.7 |

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will provide for all 15-year-old pupils in *(a)* England, *(b)* the local education authority maintained, *(c)* grant-maintained and *(d)* independent sectors, on the same basis as in the annual school performance tables, and also by gender (i) their GCSE average point score where A* = 7 and where A* = 8 and (ii) the percentage achieving (1) at least five GCSEs at grades A* = C, (2) at least one GCSE at grade C or higher, (3) at least five GCSEs at grade G or higher and (4) at least one GCSE at grade G or higher. [42204]

**Mr. Squire** *[holding answer 8 November 1995]:* The information for all 15-year-old pupils in *(a)* England, *(b)* the local education authority maintained, *(c)* grant-maintained and *(d)* independent sectors, on the same coverage as in the annual school performance tables, and also by gender (i) their GCSE average point score per pupil where A* = 7 and where A* = 8 and (ii) the percentage achieving (1) at least five GCSEs at grades A* = C, (2) at least one GCSE at grade C or higher, (3) at least five GCSEs at grade G or higher and (4) at least one GCSE at grade G or higher is shown in the following table:

*School performance tables 1995*

| | Average point score | | Percentage of 15-year-olds achieving | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *A* = 7* | *A* = 8* | *5+ A* –C* | *1+ A* –C* | *5+ A* –G* | *1+ A* –G* |
| *(A) England* | | | | | | |
| Boys | 32.5 | 32.7 | 39.0 | 63.5 | 83.4 | 90.7 |
| Girls | 37.3 | 37.6 | 48.1 | 75.0 | 88.1 | 93.2 |
| Total | 34.8 | 35.1 | 43.5 | 69.1 | 85.7 | 91.9 |
| *(B) LEA maintained* | | | | | | |
| Boys | 30.2 | 30.3 | 33.6 | 59.4 | 82.2 | 90.1 |
| Girls | 35.5 | 35.7 | 43.6 | 72.1 | 87.2 | 92.5 |
| Total | 32.8 | 33.0 | 38.5 | 65.7 | 84.7 | 91.3 |
| *(C) Grant maintained* | | | | | | |
| Boys | 36.2 | 36.4 | 44.8 | 71.0 | 90.0 | 95.3 |
| Girls | 40.2 | 40.5 | 53.0 | 81.0 | 92.5 | 96.1 |
| Total | 38.1 | 38.4 | 48.7 | 75.7 | 91.2 | 95.7 |
| *(D) Independent* | | | | | | |
| Boys | 47.3 | 48.2 | 76.9 | 87.9 | 85.8 | 90.7 |
| Girls | 49.8 | 50.9 | 83.1 | 82.6 | 89.7 | 93.9 |
| Total | 48.5 | 49.5 | 79.9 | 90.1 | 87.8 | 92.9 |

## WALES

### Homelessness

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action was taken by local authorities in Wales for those households accepted as homeless and in priority need by reason of old age in each quarter of 1993 and 1994 and in the first two quarters of 1995. [10263]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The information requested is provided in the following table.

*Action taken by local authority for those households accepted as homeless in Wales, in priority need by reason of old age*

*Number of cases*

| Action taken by local authority | 1993 | | | | 1994 | | | | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | January–March | April–June | July–September | October–December | January–March | April–June | July–September | October–December | January–March | April–June |
| Enabled to stay in/return to previous accommodation | 16 | 9 | 17 | 17 | 13 | 30 | 28 | 29 | 24 | 30 |
| Placed in ordinary local authority dwelling | 35 | 36 | 36 | 30 | 34 | 21 | 24 | 25 | 24 | 18 |
| Placed in short life local authority dwelling | 2 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Placed in new town dwelling | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Placed in housing association dwelling | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Placed in private rented dwelling | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Placed in bed and breakfast | 11 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Placed in local authority hostel | 5 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 13 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Placed in mobile home | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Placed with relatives/friends | 5 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 5 |
| Placed in women's refuge | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Case referred to another housing authority | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Case referred to a voluntary organisation | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Given advice and appropriate assistance | 15 | 12 | 15 | 12 | 18 | 8 | 16 | 13 | 11 | 6 |
| Total | 96 | 80 | 81 | 78 | 90 | 91 | 89 | 78 | 77 | 82 |

Local authority returns.

### Bryncoedifor-Dolgellau Road Scheme

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when it is expected that the Bryncoedifor-Dolgellau road improvement scheme will be commenced; and if he will make a statement. [10709]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The Drws y Nant improvement on the A494 trunk road is programmed to start in 1997, subject to the satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures and the availability of finance.

### Planning Decisions

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many revocations of planning decisions his Department has made over the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [10691]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** None.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local planning decisions his Department has called in during the last two years. [10720]

**Mr. Jones:** Ten.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines his Department has issued to the shadow unitary authorities on consultations between planning authorities and town and community councils; and if he will make a statement. [10676]

**Mr. Jones:** The Welsh Office issued guidance to the new local authorities on consultations with community councils in June 1995. The guidance indicates the subjects on which the new councils should normally consult community councils; local planning matters are among the subjects indicated.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many appeals against decisions of local planning authorities there are currently pending. [10721]

**Mr. Jones:** The information requested is as follows:

| | Number |
|---|---|
| Appeals under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990: | |
| Section 78 | 292 |
| Section 137 | 1 |
| Section 174 | 114 |
| Section 195 | 22 |
| Appeals under the Planning and Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 | 20 |
| Appeals under section 18 of the Land Compensation | |

| | Number |
|---|---|
| Act 1961 | 4 |
| Appeals under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulation 1992 | 16 |
| Appeals under schedule 2 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 | 5 |

## Tourism

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently employed in the tourism industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [10728]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The number of employees employed in tourism-related industries in Wales was 71,000 in September 1993 according to the 1993 census of employment. Employment data at this level of industrial activity are collected only in the census of employment and 1993 is the latest year for which data are available. Tourism-related industries are those classified as such in table 1.14, "Labour Market Trends", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations his Department has received over the past year on the question of the rate of value added tax on tourism services; and if he will make a statement. [10729]

**Mr. Jones:** Seven.

## Local Government Finance

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the amount made available by the Welsh Office for capital expenditure on local authority needs in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97. [10038]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The total of credit approvals and grant to local authorities, announced prior to the start of each financial year, is given in the following table.

*Local authority capital provision*

£ million

| | Cash prices | Constant 1994–95 prices |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 414.3 | 480.3 |
| 1991–92 | 464.1 | 506.4 |
| 1992–93 | 536.3 | 562.3 |
| 1993–94 | 483.5 | 492.6 |
| 1994–95 | 503.0 | 503.0 |
| 1995–96 | 525.6 | 511.5 |
| 1996–97 | 508.5 | 481.7 |

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the provision made for local authority capital programmes as (i) grant and (ii) a right to borrow, in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97. [10039]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Information for 1990–91 to 1995–96 is given in the following table. Figures for 1996–97 are not yet available.

*Available resources for local authority capital programmes*[1]

£ million

| | Cash prices | | Constant 1994–95 prices | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Grant[2] | Right to borrow[3] | Grant[2] | Right to borrow[3] |
| 1990–91 | 155.3 | 283.3 | 180.1 | 328.4 |
| 1991–92 | 213.6 | 313.7 | 233.1 | 342.3 |
| 1992–93 | 274.2 | 327.3 | 287.5 | 343.2 |
| 1993–94 | 266.5 | 299.5 | 271.5 | 305.2 |
| 1994–95 | 282.6 | 354.7 | 282.6 | 354.7 |
| 1995–96 | 309.0 | 348.0 | 300.8 | 338.7 |

[1] As reported by local authorities. Includes Home Office provision.
[2] Excludes European Community capital grant used to repay debt. Includes capital grants from non-departmental public bodies and contributions from private developers.
[3] Includes basic and supplementary credit approvals issued to local authorities.

## Fire Service

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received over the past 12 months on the subject of the amalgamation of Welsh fire brigades. [10722]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend and I have received 30 representations about the reorganisation of the fire brigades in Wales over the past 12 months.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received over the past 12 months in favour of amalgamation of Welsh fire brigades; and if he will make a statement. [10693]

**Mr. Jones:** My right hon. Friend and I have received two representations in favour of the reorganisation of the fire brigades in Wales over the past 12 months.

## A470 Improvement Scheme

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when work will commence on the A470 road improvement scheme between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Betws-y-Coed. [10706]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Work started in August 1995 on stage 1 of the scheme, the length between Cancoed and Minffordd. A public inquiry will be held into the draft orders for the next stage, Dolwyddelan to Pont yr Afanc, this April. Subject to the satisfactory outcome of the statutory procedures, it is expected that works on this stage will commence in early 1997.

## Sites of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites of special scientific interest there were in Wales in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1994. [10698]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The information is as follows:

(a) 1990: 769

(b) 1992: 841

(c) 1994: 890

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites of special scientific interest there are in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [10701]

**Mr. Jones:** There are 907.

### Sheep Quota Scheme

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations his Department has received in the past 12 months on the current operation of the sheep quota scheme; and if he will make a statement. [10678]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The Welsh Office has received a number of letters on general quota issues from individuals and representative organisations; and many approaches from individual producers, the farming unions, and members about the effect of the quota scheme in particular cases.

### Bathing Beaches

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many Welsh beaches currently display the EC blue flag; [10699]

(2) how many Welsh beaches were awarded the EC blue flag in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1993, and *(e)* 1994; and if he will make a statement. [10697]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The information is as follows:

1990: 1
1991: 3
1992: 2
1993: 3
1994: 2
1995: 2

### M48 (Signs)

**Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that adequate signposts are in place for the renumbered M48 before the opening of the second Severn crossing. [10780]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** In liaison with the Highways Agency, my Department will ensure that appropriate signing is in place for the new motorway links to the second Severn crossing and the renumbered M48 before the crossing is opened to traffic.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Thursday 25 January 1996*

## SCOTLAND

### Scottish Grand Committee

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee to be held in *(a)* Ayr, *(b)* Kilmarnock, *(c)* Cumnock, *(d)* Dumfries, *(e)* Stranraer, *(f)* Prestwick, *(g)* Troon and *(h)* Girvan. [8566]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I am delighted with the enthusiasm now being shown by Opposition Members for my proposals to take the Scottish Grand Committee to locations throughout Scotland. Possible venues in Scotland must first of all be assessed by the House authorities before they can be added to the list of suitable locations. Decisions are then taken through the usual channels on where the Scottish Grand Committee should meet.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11358]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11355]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Expenditure by the Scottish Office and its associated agencies on external consultants including management consultants was:

1989–90: £2,095,000

1991–92: £10,836,000

1993–94: £5,383,000

1994–95: £4,079,000

1995–96: £5,758,000

No details are currently available centrally on the expenditure during 1979–80, the expenditure to date on external consultants for 1995–96, the estimate of expenditure for 1996–97, or the expenditure by non-departmental public bodies. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Not all consultancy projects are capable of being measured in terms of identifiable savings. The Scottish Office is currently preparing a report summarising the benefits obtained from major projects since April 1992. I shall write to the hon. Member on this subject as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Conservative Central Office

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters and faxes have been dispatched from his Department to Conservative central office in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [11477]

**Mr. Howard:** The information requested is not available.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11383]

**Mr. Howard:** The information requested in not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11385]

**Mr. Howard:** Figures are not collected centrally on absenteeism.

The average number of working days lost through sick absence per staff year in the Home Office, including its agencies, for which data are available was as follows:

1991: 9.9

1992: 9.0

1993: 10.6

1994: 10.1

### Police Funding

**Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to review the pensions element of the police funding allocation formula. [11902]

**Mr. Maclean:** No. The present mechanism for allocating money for police pensions is the best available to us. We shall continue to refine it.

**Mrs. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Minister of State's letter of 30 November 1995, if he will give details of those aspects of the police funding allocation formula which are in need of further work. [11901]

**Mr. Maclean:** I refer the hon. Member to the report entitled "Critical Analysis of the Police Funding Formula", produced last summer by the independent consultants Price Waterhouse. We have carried out the further work recommended by the consultants, but in some instances it has proved inconclusive and investigations will continue into 1996. Copies of the report are in the Library.

### Prisoners (Mechanical Restraints)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how often the Home Office official at Doncaster prison responsible for the punishment of inmates has authorised the use of *(a)* bodybelts, *(b)* ankle straps, *(c)* handcuffs and *(d)* special segregation unit cells since the prison was opened; [8424]

(2) what is the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* longest and *(c)* average time during which inmates at Doncaster prison have been detained in a bodybelt or mechanical restraint since it opened; [8442]

(3) on how many occasions since it opened inmates in Doncaster prison have been kept in bodybelts for more than 12 hours; [8421]

(4) on how many occasions since it opened inmates at Doncaster prison have been *(a)* detained in a strip cell and *(b)* restrained by bodybelts for (i) medical or (ii) non-medical purposes. [8439]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 25 January 1996*:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the use of restraints, special segregation unit cells and strip cells at Doncaster prison since its opening in June 1994.

The use of ankle-straps has twice been authorized on one inmate, for medical reasons, to prevent him causing himself serious and permanent injury. The first occasion was for 24 hours 37 minutes and the second was for six days and 55 minutes.

The use of the special cell was authorized on 57 occasions during the period 20 June 1994 to 31 December 1994. It was also used without authorization on 44 occasions. This resulted in the operating company Premier Prison Services being issued with a default notice for use of the cell without the Controller's authorization. From 1 January to 31 December 1995 the special cell was used on 41 occasions with the authorization of the Controller of each occasion.

Bodybelts have been used on two occasions since the prison opened, once for medical and once for non-medical reasons. The longest time spent in a body belt is two hours. The shortest time spent in a body belt was 1 hour 55 minutes. This gives an average time of 1 hour 57 minutes.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list for each prison in England and Wales the number of occasions that restraints were used on *(a)* men and *(b)* women prisoners during December 1995; [11603]

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were placed in restraints when taken outside prisons, in England and Wales, for whatever reason, during the week beginning 1 January 1996. [11604]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 25 January 1996*:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about restraints used on prisoners in England and Wales.

This information is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Doncaster Prison

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the protection of remand prisoners under 18 years of age from bullying at Doncaster prison. [9900]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the protection of remand prisoners under 18 years of age from bullying at Doncaster prison.

Doncaster has already taken a number of steps to minimise bullying among young offender remand prisoners. Those considered to be bullying are isolated from other prisoners until they cease such activities. Doncaster has also installed cameras to help staff in monitoring the movement and behaviour of juvenile offenders and employed a full-time anti-bullying co-ordinator and removed personal cell keys from young offenders, in order to prevent them being forced to hand them over to other prisoners.

Anti-bullying measures are subject to continuous review and appraisal. A "Safe Inside Doncaster" Committee has recently been formed, which has been tasked with helping to increase further the safety and comfort of prisoners inside the prison environment. Doncaster takes very seriously its commitment to try and prevent bullying among this age group.

### Holloway Prison

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the ethnic breakdown of women prisoners in Holloway prison in December 1995 or at the latest available date. [10084]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Diane Abbott, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the ethnic breakdown of women prisoners in Holloway prison.

The ethnic breakdown of women prisoners in Holloway prison on 17 January 1996 is given in the attached table.

| | *Adult* | *Young offender* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Asian—Bangladeshi | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Asian—Indian | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Asian—other | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Asian—Pakistani | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Black—African | 42 | 5 | 47 |
| Black—Caribbean | 91 | 8 | 99 |
| Black—other | 25 | 8 | 33 |
| Chinese | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 24 | 1 | 25 |
| White | 299 | 40 | 339 |

## Martin Fenton

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the consideration by the Parole Board of the application by Martin Fenton, currently serving a life sentence for murder. [10252]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Mr. Fenton's case was last considered by the Parole Board on 1 December 1995. The board did not recommend his release on life licence.

On 14 January 1996, Mr. Fenton suffered a cardiac arrest. He was immediately admitted to hospital where he is still serious ill. I shall be writing to the hon. Member about that.

## Prisons Budgets and Staff

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each prison, including those which are privately managed *(a)* the projected budget in monetary terms, *(b)* the percentage change and *(c)* the change in staffing levels for each financial year between 1996–97 and 1999–2000, inclusive. [10296]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the budget allocation and staffing levels for each prison establishment for each financial year 1996–97 and 1992–2000.

The process of setting budgets for public sector establishments for 1996–97 is not yet complete. I will send you details of budgets once they are finished.

Governors are in the process of working out staffing projections for their establishments in 1996–97. I will send you their estimates once governors have had the opportunity to discuss them with their staff locally. I will also send you the provision made for payments to private sector prisons for 1996–97. These are not exactly the same as cash-limited budgets, as the terms of the contract may trigger additional payments in some circumstances.

We do not at present have budget figures at establishment level more than one year ahead. But later this year we shall be issuing indicative spending figures for the years 1997–98 to 1998–99.

## Stoke Heath Young Offenders Institution

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the highest number of visitors strip searched in a single day during November 1995 at Stoke Heath young offenders institution without the police being present; and how many visitors to Stoke Heath young offenders institution have been strip searched in each of the last six months. [10327]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has ben asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the strip searching of visitors to Stoke Heath Young Offenders Institution during November 1995 and in each of the last six months.

There were no strip searches of visitors to Stoke Heath YOI in November 1995. In the last six months there has been one strip search of a visitor to Stoke Heath YOI.

## Immigration and Asylum Interviews

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of tape recording immigration and asylum interviews at ports of entry and at the Home Office. [10477]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** We have not made any estimates of the cost of tape recording immigration and asylum interviews at ports of entry or at the Home Office. We have no plans to introduce the tape recording of such interviews.

## Prison Service (Director General)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the previous Directors General of the Prison Service, the dates of their retirement, resignation or dismissal and the dates on which their successors took over. [10877]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Mr. Richard Tilt was appointed temporary Director General of the Prison Service on 16 October 1995. The available information in respect of previous Directors Generals—a term used since 1967—is as follows:

Mr. Derek Lewis (6 January 1993–16 October 1995. Dismissed)

Mr. Joe Pilling (14 August 1991–2 January 1993. Transferred)

Mr. Christopher Train (14 March 1983–31 August 1991. Retired)

Mr. Dennis Trevelyan (1 January 1978–13 March 1983. Transferred)

Mr. Eric Wright (1973–1977. Retired)

Mr. William Cox (1970–1973. Transferred)

Mr. William Pile (1964–1970. Transferred)

## Incapacitants

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *587*, what conclusions he has reached on the effects on human health of *(a)* CS and

*(b)* incapacitant products containing oleoresin capsicum. [11515]

**Mr. Maclean:** My right hon. and learned Friend has concluded that CS presents no significant risk to human health, but that not enough is currently known about oleoresin capsicum for us to be reassured as to its effects on human health.

## TREASURY

### Labour Statistics

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the numbers in work for each of the last 30 years, dividing this total where possible between full and part-time workers. [11890]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The information requested is shown in the following table.

*Work force in employment[1] in Great Britain, seasonally adjusted: at June*

| *(Thousands)* | *All[2]* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1965 | 24,860 | '— | '— |
| 1966 | 25,017 | '— | '— |
| 1967 | 24,670 | '— | '— |
| 1968 | 24,519 | '— | '— |
| 1969 | 24,536 | '— | '— |
| 1970 | 24,428 | '— | '— |
| 1971 | 24,097 | '— | '— |
| 1972 | 24,079 | '— | '— |
| 1973 | 24,646 | '— | '— |
| 1974 | 24,707 | '— | '— |
| 1975 | 24,608 | '— | '— |
| 1976 | 24,382 | '— | '— |
| 1977 | 24,401 | '— | '— |
| 1978 | 24,523 | '— | '— |
| 1979 | 24,881 | '— | '— |
| 1980 | 24,838 | '— | '— |
| 1981 | 23,887 | '— | '— |
| 1982 | 23,461 | '— | '— |
| 1983 | 23,184 | 18,299 | 4,885 |
| 1984 | 23,836 | 18,556 | 5,280 |
| 1985 | 24,106 | 18,705 | 5,401 |
| 1986 | 24,132 | 18,569 | 5,563 |
| 1987 | 24,651 | 18,809 | 5,842 |
| 1988 | 25,523 | 19,482 | 6,042 |
| 1989 | 26,322 | 19,933 | 6,389 |
| 1990 | 26,555 | 19,912 | 6,644 |
| 1991 | 25,657 | 19,095 | 6,562 |
| 1992 | 25,091 | 18,515 | 6,576 |
| 1993 | 24,703 | 18,097 | 6,605 |
| 1994 | 24,823 | 18,041 | 6,781 |
| 1995 | 25,052 | 18,098 | 6,953 |

[1] Includes employees in employment, self-employed, HM forces and work-related Government training programme participants.
[2] May not equal sum of full and part-time due to rounding.
"—" denotes information not available.

*Source:*
CSO.

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Chancellor of Exchequer if he will list the number of unemployed workers who *(a)* return to the labour market and *(b)* cease claiming benefit after (i) under one month's unemployment, (ii) over one month's unemployment but less than two month's unemployment, (iii) each succeeding period of one month up to 12 months' unemployment and (iv) over 12 months' unemployment. [11891]

**Mrs. Knight:** The following table shows the duration of claim for claimants who left the claimant count in the United Kingdom between 10 November 1995 and 14 December 1995. No information is available on the destination of claimants who cease to claim unemployment-related benefit.

*Duration of claim for claimants leaving the claimant count between 10 November 1995 and 14 December 1995, United Kingdom*

| *Duration of claim (weeks)* | *Number of claimants* |
|---|---|
| Up to 4 | 70,517 |
| Over 4 and up to 8 | 42,608 |
| Over 8 and up to 12 | 28,398 |
| Over 12 and up to 16 | 19,772 |
| Over 16 and up to 20 | 16,728 |
| Over 20 and up to 24 | 13,583 |
| Over 24 and up to 28 | 9,343 |
| Over 28 and up to 32 | 10,163 |
| Over 32 and up to 36 | 9,402 |
| Over 36 and up to 40 | 6,235 |
| Over 40 and up to 44 | 5,086 |
| Over 44 and up to 48 | 4,595 |
| Over 48 and up to 52 | 3,604 |
| Over 52 | 56,158 |
| Total | 296,192 |

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have at any time used copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to prepare the Government's response to Sir Richard's report. [11887]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** No decision about the response to Sir Richard Scott's report will be taken until the report has been received.

In considering issues relating to the Scott inquiry, all Departments naturally take account of material properly available to them.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report are in the possession of Ministers or officials in his Department other than those to whom draft sections of the report were sent by Sir Richard Scott. [11886]

**Mr. Clarke:** In forwarding draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to Ministers and officials, the inquiry expressly stated that individuals could, at their discretion, make a copy for a legal or other adviser and another for the Department concerned.

### Employment Statistics (Accuracy)

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new proposals he has to improve the accuracy of employment statistics. [9414]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* Central Statistical Office statisticians keep methods under constant review. A number of new initiatives have been put in place in recent years. Further initiatives will be implemented as appropriate.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of people in each of the last three years in the north-west in *(a)* part-time employment and *(b)* temporary employment. [11601]

**Mrs. Knight:** The information requested is available from the labour force survey and is shown in the following table.

*Employees in North West region: Summer of each year (thousands)*[1]

| Year | Part-time | Temporary |
|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 555 | 146 |
| 1994 | 576 | 164 |
| 1995 | 580 | 163 |

[1] Unadjusted.
*Source:*
CSO, Labour Force Survey.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* 16-year-olds and *(b)* 17-year-olds were available for work in (i) Lancashire and (ii) the north-west at the latest date for which figures are available. [11602]

**Mrs. Knight:** The following table shows the latest available information from the summer (June to August) 1995 labour force survey.

*16 and 17-year-olds in employment or ILO unemployed (summer 1995, not seasonally adjusted)*

| | North-west | | Lancashire |
|---|---|---|---|
| Thousands | 16 | 17 | 16–17 |
| In employment | 25 | 42 | 16 |
| Of which in FTE[1] | 17 | 22 | 10 |
| ILO unemployed[2] | 16 | 11 | n/a |

[1] In full-time education.
[2] Not in employment, but seeking work in past four weeks and available to start in the next two weeks.
n/a Not available, estimate below 10,000.

### Earnings (Yorkshire and Humberside)

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the average *(a)* weekly earnings, *(b)* total hours, *(c)* average hourly earnings and *(d)* median hourly earnings, including and excluding overtime, for (i) all part-time females and (ii) all part-time males on adult rates in (1) West Yorkshire, (2) South Yorkshire, (3) North Yorkshire, (4) Humberside and (5) Yorkshire and Humberside as a whole, broken down to show (A) manual and (b) non-manual workers; [10688]

(2) if he will list the proportion of full-time employees on adult rates with weekly earnings of less than *(a)* £150, *(b)* £200 and *(c)* £250 per week (i) excluding and (ii) including overtime, in (1) West Yorkshire, (2) South Yorkshire, (3) North Yorkshire, (4) Humberside and (5) Yorkshire and Humberside as a whole for all full-time (A) males and (B) females on adult rates, broken down to show *(x)* manual and *(y)* non-manual workers; [10689]

(3) if he will list the proportion of employees on adult rates earning less than *(a)* £3.20, *(b)* £3.50, *(c)* £4.00, *(d)* £4.60 and *(e)* £6.00 per hour in (i) West Yorkshire, (ii) South Yorkshire, (iii) North Yorkshire, (iv) Humberside and (v) Yorkshire and Humberside as a whole, (1) excluding and (2) including overtime for (A) all full-time males, (B) all part-time males, *(c)* all full-time females and (D) all part-time females on adult rates, broken down to show *(x)* manual and *(y)* non-manual workers. [10690]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The information is contained in tables which I am placing in the Library.

### Part-time Workers

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of *(a)* manual part-time workers and *(b)* non-manual part-time workers, broken down into men and women, work less than (i) eight hours a week and (ii) 16 hours a week. [10862]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Estimates from the labour force survey are shown in the table following.

*Part-time manual and non-manual workers by the total number of hours they usually work Great Britain,summer 1995 (not seasonally adjusted)*

| | Working less than 8 hours a week | | Working less than 16 hours a week | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Thousands | Per cent. | Thousands | Per cent. |
| Men | | | | |
| Manual part-time | 87 | 16 | 238 | 45 |
| Non-Manual part-time | 93 | 17 | 264 | 48 |
| Women | | | | |
| Manual part-time | 303 | 15 | 944 | 47 |
| Non-Manual part-time | 330 | 11 | 1,075 | 35 |

### Employment (Maastricht Treaty)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the effect on employment in the United Kingdom of the Maastricht treaty when full implemented. [9798]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The Government have made no estimates of the effect on employment in the United Kingdom of the convergence criteria under the Maastricht treaty when fully implemented. The UK opt-out from the social chapter means that the Maastricht treaty will have no adverse effect on employment via that mechanism. However, the Government will agree to join a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

### Manufacturing Industry

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact on manufacturing jobs of the United Kingdom adopting a common EU currency in its currently proposed form. [9805]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Protocol No. 11 annexed to the EC Treaty means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. The Government will only agree to take part in a single

currency if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time. Clearly employment forms a vital part in the assessment of our national interest.

The Government have made no estimates of the impact on manufacturing jobs of the United Kingdom adopting a single currency. It is impossible to say at this stage what the impact will be. Studies by others have produced a wide variation of estimates.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### ISDN Lines

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to ensure that the price of integrated services data network lines falls in line with the real terms price reductions for all telecommunications services. [10426]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** The detailed answer on the supply of ISDN lines which I gave my hon. Friend last November, 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *210*, set out the variety of ways in which use of ISDN is being stimulated. The Director General of Telecommunications has now issued his consultation document on the BT price cap. This document discusses whether ISDN services should be brought within the price control regime, and Oftel has asked for responses by 2 February.

There will also be downward pressure on prices from the increasing competition in the supply of ISDN services with cable companies entering the market. In the future, radio fixed access systems at 10Ghz should also offer an alternative to the current services available from BT and Mercury. I was particularly pleased to learn of the deal between Energis and Research Machines which will allow many schools to access the Internet via ISDN at attractive rates.

### Waste

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what *(a)* committees and *(b)* working parties his Department has set up to advise on (i) recycling, (ii) waste management and (iii) packaging; and in each case who are the current members. [11182]

**Mr. Page:** The Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment was set up in 1991 to provide a dialogue between Government and industry on environmental issues, including those of waste management and recycling. ACBE is currently reorganising under the chairmanship of David Davies—Johnson Matthey plc—and the membership of the new committee has yet to be established. A list of the membership of the previous committee, whose work finished in November 1995, follows:

MEMBERSHIP OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

*Chairman*

Derek Wanless: National Westminster Bank Plc

*Members*

John Baker: National Power Plc
Peter Bonfield CBE: ICL Plc
Cedric Brown: British Gas Plc
Ann Burdus: Dawsons International
Rodney Chase: British Petroleum Plc
Mike Clasper: Proctor and Gamble Europe
David Davies: Johnson Matthey Plc
Peter Davies: DHL International Ltd.
Dr. Oliver Doubleday: Bax Farm
Richard Gamble: Royal Insurance Plc
Ian Gibson CBE: Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd.
Roger Hewitt: formerly Shanks and McEwan
Derek Higgs: S.G. Warburg and Co. Ltd.
Ron Huggins: Kimberly-Clarke Ltd.
Sir Gordon Jones: Yorkshire Water Plc
Martin Laing CBE: John Laing Plc
Robert Lawton: Lawton Farms
David Malpas: Tesco Plc
Jean Parker CBE: Vacu-Lug Traction Tyres Ltd.
Dr. Robin C. Paul: Albright and Wilson Ltd.
George Phillipson: Redland Aggregates Ltd.
Sir Antony Pilkington: Pilkington Plc
Alan Smith: formerly B and Q Plc
John Speirs: Norsk Hydro UK Ltd.
Geoff Turnbull MBE: GT Group Ltd.

A Government/industry scrap tyre working group was formed in June 1994 to advise and report on scrap tyre recovery and recycling and associated matters. Its current membership is:

Mr. W. Pollock: Director, British Rubber Manufacturers Association
Mr. R. Edy Director: National Tyre Distributors Association
Ms S. Ikin Director: Retread Manufacturers Association
Mr. P. Taylor: Director, Imported Tyre Manufacturers Association
Mr. S. Norgrove: DTI
Mr. J. Marsh: DTI (Secretary)

The producer responsibility group was set up by industry in response to the joint producer responsibility challenge from DTI and DoE Ministers in July 1993 to recover more value from package waste. It reported in November 1994 and wound itself up. A list of its former members is as follows:

LIST OF MEMBER COMPANIES

Allied Lyons Plc
Bass
ASDA Group
Booker Plc
Bowater Plc
Burton Group
Guinness Plc
Grand Metropolitan Plc
Marks and Spencer Plc
Northern Foods Ltd.
RHM
Shell Chemicals Ltd.
Tesco Stores Ltd.
Unilever
Argyll Group Plc
BP Chemicals Ltd.
The Boots Company Plc

Coco-Cola GT Britain and Ireland
Forte Plc
ICI Plc
Kingfisher Plc
Nestle UK Ltd.
Procter and Gamble Ltd.
J. Sainsbury Plc
D. S. Smith (Holdings) Plc
Unigate Plc
United Biscuits
Weetabix Ltd.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Mike Clasper (Chairman)
Graeme Crombie
Peter Barr
Ross Buckland
Mike Buzzacott
Tim Clement Jones
Roger Huff
David Lyon
Bill Madden
Bill Mason
John Sharpe
Guy Walker
David Webster
Peter Williams
Martin van Zwanenberg
Procter and Gamble
Shell Chemicals
Hazlewood Foods
Unigate
BP Chemicals
Kingfisher
Boots
Bowater
ICI Materials
Consultant
Birds Eye Walls
Van den Bergh Foods
Argyll Group
D S Smith (Holdings)
Marks and Spencer

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what *(a)* advisory committees and *(b)* working parties have been established by his Department to advise him on the implications of changes in legislation regarding packaging, recycling and waste management. [11184]

**Mr. Page:** As far as the implication for legislation are concerned with regard to these matters, the Government consult widely and take into account the views of all interested parties. No committees or working groups have been set up specifically to address the implication of changes in legislation.

The Government are currently considering the recommendation by companies in the packaging chain at their meeting on 15 December 1995 that an advisory committee be established to advise on the drafting and implementation of the regulations and on arrangements for carrying out a review of the legal obligation, including consideration of actual burden on individual companies.

### Industrial Death and Retirement Fund

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) in which publication the annual reports and statement of accounts of the industrial death and retirement fund are published; [11590]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the actuary's report on the industrial death and retirement fund. [11591]

**Mr. Page:** These are matters for British Coal. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

### Balance of Trade

**Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each year since 1985 the percentage changes in *(a)* export volumes and export unit values, *(b)* import volumes and unit values, *(c)* the terms of trade and *(d)* the non-oil visible trade balance. [11898]

**Mr. Page:** The information is shown in the table.

| | *Annual percentage change(total visible trade)* | | | | | *Non-oil balance* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Export volumes* | *Export unit values* | *Import volumes* | *Import unit values* | *Terms of trade* | *Percentage of gross domestic product* | *Change in percentage of gross domestic product* |
| 1985 | 5.6 | 5.4 | 3.2 | 4.9 | 0.5 | –3.2 | 0.6 |
| 1986 | 4.2 | –9.9 | 7.4 | –4.6 | –5.6 | –3.5 | –0.3 |
| 1987 | 6.0 | 3.5 | 7.7 | 2.9 | 0.5 | –3.7 | –0.2 |
| 1988 | 2.2 | 1.0 | 13.5 | –1.0 | 2.0 | –5.2 | –1.5 |
| 1989 | 5.8 | 4.5 | 8.1 | 4.3 | 0.3 | –5.0 | 0.2 |
| 1990 | 6.2 | 3.5 | 0.1 | 2.4 | 1.1 | –3.7 | 1.3 |
| 1991 | 1.2 | 1.4 | –5.3 | 1.2 | 0.2 | –2.0 | 1.7 |
| 1992 | 2.5 | 2.1 | 6.5 | 0.9 | 1.2 | –2.5 | –0.5 |
| 1993 | 3.6 | 12.2 | 3.9 | 10.0 | 2.0 | –2.5 | –0.1 |
| 1994 | 10.4 | 2.2 | 4.1 | 3.4 | –1.2 | –2.2 | 0.3 |

**Mrs. Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list as a percentage of gross domestic product for each year since 1985 *(a)* the visible trade balance, *(b)* the invisible trade balance, *(c)* the current account balance and *(d)* the non-energy visible balance. [11899]

**Mr. Page:** The information is shown in the table.

*Percentage of gross domestic product*

| Year | Visible trade balance | Invisible trade balance | Current account balance | Non-oil visible balance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1985 | –0.9 | 1.6 | 0.6 | –3.2 |
| 1986 | –2.5 | 2.3 | –0.2 | –3.5 |
| 1987 | –2.7 | 1.6 | –1.1 | –3.7 |
| 1988 | –4.6 | 1.1 | –3.5 | –5.2 |
| 1989 | –4.8 | 0.4 | –4.3 | –5.0 |
| 1990 | –3.4 | –0.1 | –3.5 | –3.7 |
| 1991 | –1.8 | 0.3 | –1.5 | –2.0 |
| 1992 | –2.2 | 0.6 | –1.6 | –2.5 |
| 1993 | –2.1 | 0.4 | –1.8 | –2.5 |
| 1994 | –1.6 | 1.3 | –0.3 | –2.2 |

### Directors' Remuneration (Disclosure)

**Mr. French:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will publish a consultative document on proposals for amending the Companies Acts to take account of the recommendations on disclosure of directors' remuneration contained in the Greenbury report. [12291]

**Mr. Lang:** I have today published a consultative document seeking views on proposed changes to the requirements of the Companies Act 1985 relating to disclosure of directors' emoluments. The proposals are designed to remove overlap with the Greenbury recommendations for full disclosure of the emoluments of individuals directors by listed companies, now implemented by the stock exchange listing rules, and generally to ensure consistency of approach between the Companies Act provisions and the Greenbury recommendations. Copies of the consultative document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Royal Family (Free Postage)

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade under which statute free postage to members of the royal family is authorised. [11027]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* This facility is not granted by statute. The provision of free postage to members of the royal family is a facility which has been provided by the Post Office since the earliest days of its inception.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade which members of the royal family receive free postage for their official mail. [11026]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The following members of the royal family and their households receive free postage for their official mail:

> the Queen, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of York, the Prince Edward, the Princess Royal, the Princess Margaret, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Duke and Duchess of Kent, Prince and Princess Michael of Kent, and Princess Alexandra.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11380]

**Mr. Hanley:** Total expenditure on publicity—that is, promotional material and recruitment advertising—in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—diplomatic wing and Overseas Development Administration—since 1979 at 1995–96 prices was:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 809,559 |
| 1980–81 | 569,578 |
| 1981–82 | 734,682 |
| 1982–83 | 675,220 |
| 1983–84 | 809,117 |
| 1984–85 | 645,986 |
| 1985–86 | 688,390 |
| 1986–87 | 873,338 |
| 1987–88 | 802,582 |
| 1988–89 | 1,348,555 |
| 1989–90 | 1,883,124 |
| 1990–91 | 2,180,180 |
| 1991–92 | 2,003,485 |
| 1992–93 | 2,193,224 |
| 1993–94 | 2,229,921 |
| 1994–95 | 2,384,083 |
| 1995–96 | 2,707,000 (Estimate) |

An estimate for 1996–97 is not yet available.

It is not possible to break these figures down between (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. However, the expenditure outturn figures for 1994–95 comprise:

*At 1995–96 prices*

| | £ | £ |
|---|---|---|
| Newspaper advertising for recruitment purposes: | (DW) 80,575 | 82,791 |
| | (ODA) 727,000 | 746,993 |
| Videos and brochures giving consular advice: | 162,700 | 167,174 |
| ODA publicity and promotional material: | 1,350,000 | 1,387,125 |
| | 2,320,275 | 2,384,083 |

The foregoing do not include figures for the executive agencies. Publicity expenditure—at outturn prices—for

the National Resource Institute and the Wilton Park Executive agency are as follows:

*thousand*

| | *NRI* | *WP* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 137 | — |
| 1991–92 | 132 | 20 |
| 1992–93 | 77 | 27 |
| 1993–94 | 47 | 22 |
| 1994–95 | 56 | 20 |
| 1995–96 | 56 | 15 |

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report are in the possession of Ministers or officials in his Department other than those to whom draft sections of the report were sent by Sir Richard Scott. [11880]

**Mr. Hanley:** In forwarding draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to Ministers and officials, the inquiry expressly stated that individuals could, at their discretion, make a copy for a legal or other adviser and another for the department concerned. Whether they did so is entirely a matter for the individuals concerned.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *691-92*, how much of the sum spent by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry has been spent on legal advice. [11882]

**Mr. Hanley:** All of it.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have used copies o draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to prepare the Government's response to Sir Richard Scott's report. [11881]

**Mr. Hanley:** No decision about the response to Sir Richard Scott's report will be taken until the report has been received.

In considering issues relating to the Scott inquiry, all Departments naturally take account of material properly available to them.

### China

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the recent television programme, "The Dying Rooms", was discussed during his recent visit to China; and if he will make a statement. [10329]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 10 January, *Official Report*, columns 206-7.

### Saudi Arabia

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings have been held by his Department with Saudi Arabian opposition groups *(a)* in Saudi Arabia and *(b)* elsewhere. [11025]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* I am unaware of any requests from such groups for any meetings during 1995 to date and can confirm that none took place. We are similarly unaware of any previous meetings, but could not research this without incurring disproportionate cost.

### Government Borrowing

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the implications of the Maastricht treaty for (i) the creation of credit, (ii) Government borrowing through ways and means advances and (iii) Government borrowing through the banks. [9797]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** I have been asked to reply.

Under article 105(2) of the EC treaty, the primary objective of the European system of central banks shall be to maintain price stability, and the basic tasks to be carried out through the ESCB include the definition and implementation of monetary policy of the Community, which would have implications for the creation of credit. As a result of article 109k(3) and protocol 11 there would no direct implications in countries not participating in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Under article 104(1) of the EC treaty, central Governments are prohibited from having an overdraft facility or any other credit facility with the European central bank or with the national central banks. However, article 11 of protocol 11 annexed to the EC treaty makes clear that, notwithstanding article 104, the United Kingdom may maintain the ways and means facility with the Bank of England, if and so long as the United Kingdom does not move to the third stage of EMU. If the United Kingdom were to participate in the third stage of EMU, the Government would be unable to maintain the Ways and Means facility.

Under article 104a(1) of the EC treaty, public authorities are prohibited from establishing "privileged access" to financial institutions. This provision is already in effects and the United Kingdom is in compliance. There are no other treaty provisions directly concerned with the ability of central Governments to borrow through banks.

Under protocol 11 annexed to the EC treaty, the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interst to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

**Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 January. [10166]

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 January. [10167]

**The Prime Minister:** This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings late today.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Prime Minister if officials in *(a)* his private office and *(b)* the Cabinet Office have used copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to prepare the Government's response to Sir Richard's report. [11889]

**The Prime Minister:** No decision about the response to Sir Richard Scott's report will be taken until the report has been received.

In considering issues relating to the Scott inquiry all Departments naturally take account of material properly available to them.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Prime Minister if copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report are in *(a)* his possession and *(b)* the possession of officials in the Cabinet Office other than those to whom draft sections of the report were sent by Sir Richard Scott. [11888]

**The Prime Minister:** In forwarding draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to Ministers and officials the inquiry expressly stated that individuals could at their discretion make a copy for legal or other advisers and another for the Department concerned. Whether they did so is entirely a matter for the individuals concerned.

### Hafey Dalkamouni

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with Chancellor Kohl the proposed release of Hafey Dalkamouni. [11733]

**The Prime Minister:** I have no plans to do so.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Compliance Cost Assessments

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will set out the arrangements for compliance cost assessments. [12328]

**Mr. Freeman:** Compliance cost assessments are a vital tool for helping to minimise the costs to business arising from new legislation. Under the Government's deregulation initiative, I am today publishing a revised guidance booklet on compliance cost assessment and am arranging for copies to be placed in the House Libraries. The new booklet includes:

- the requirement for Ministers to personally sign-off all CCAs and to certify that the regulatory proposal strikes an appropriate balance between cost and benefit.
- the requirement for a CCA to be prepared and published with all legislative proposals presented to Parliament.
- extension of the requirement to complete a CCA to regulatory proposals which impact on charities and the voluntary sector.
- the arrangements for carrying out the small business litmus test.
- the parliamentary scrutiny arrangements for CCAs dealing with EC legislative proposals.

I have also presented to Parliament today a Command Paper listing 75 CCAs published between 1 January 1995 and 30 June 1995. Copies of the CCAs listed are available in the House Libraries. This is the third such Command Paper and further Command Papers listing CCAs published in the preceding six-month period will be published at six-monthly intervals.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Staff Salaries

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will list all employees of the House who have salaries in excess of the salary of a Member of Parliament, indicating in each case the salary and a brief description of their job. [9405]

**Mr. Beith:** One hundred and fourteen Officers of the House in the following grades receive basic salaries above the £33,189 paid to hon. Members. In the list which, follows job holders grade titles are provided but it is not practicable to provide a job description for each post.

| *Grade title* | *Number of job holders* | *Grade* |
|---|---|---|
| *Office of the Speaker* | | |
| Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (part-time) | 1 | — |
| Speaker's Secretary | 1 | 5 |
| *Department of the Clerk of the House* | | |
| Clerk of the House | 1 | 1 |
| Clerk of Committees | 1 | 2 |
| Clerk Assistant | 1 | 2 |
| Speaker's Counsel | 2 | 3 |
| Principal Clerk Class I | 6 | 3 |
| Principal Clerk Class II | 4 | 4 |
| Deputy Principal Clerk | 25 | 5 |
| Deliverer of the Vote | 1 | 5 |
| Assistant to Speaker's Counsel | 1 | 5 |
| Supervisor of Broadcasting | 1 | 6 |
| Senior Clerk | 5 | 7 |
| Deputy Deliverer of the Vote | 2 | 7 |
| *Department of the Serjeant at Arms* | | |
| Serjeant at Arms | 1 | 3 |
| Director of Works | 1 | 4 |
| Deputy Serjeant at Arms | 1 | 5 |
| Deputy Director of Works | 1 | 5 |
| Information Systems Officer | 1 | 5 |
| Assistant Serjeant at Arms | 1 | 6 |
| Members of Works Office | 5 | 7 |
| *Department of the Library* | | |
| Librarian | 1 | 3 |
| Deputy Librarian | 1 | 4 |
| Head of Information Systems | 1 | 5 |

| Grade title | Number of job holders | Grade |
|---|---|---|
| Assistant Librarian | 2 | 5 |
| Deputy Assistant Librarian | 8 | 6 |
| Head of Information Technology | 1 | 7 |
| Senior Library Clerk | 5 | 7 |
| *Department of the Official Report* | | |
| Editor | 1 | 4 |
| Deputy Editor | 1 | 5 |
| Assistant Editor | 7 | 6 |
| Principal Assistant Editor | 4 | 6 |
| Committee Sub-Editor | 6 | 7 |
| *Department of Finance and Administration* | | |
| Adviser | 1 | 2 |
| Director of Finance and Administration | 1 | 3 |
| Accountant | 1 | 4 |
| Head of Establishment Office | 1 | 4 |
| Head of Finance Office | 1 | 5 |
| Deputy Accountant | 1 | 6 |
| Staff Inspector | 1 | 6 |
| Deputy Head—Establishments | 1 | 6 |
| Internal Auditor | 1 | 7 |
| Assistant Accountant | 1 | 7 |
| Head of Policy/Project Unit | 1 | 7 |
| *Refreshment Department* | | |
| Director of Catering Services | 1 | 5 |
| Executive Chef | 1 | 7 |

*Salary range*

| Grade | Range £ |
|---|---|
| 1 | 98,957 |
| 2 | 67,500–81,400 |
| 3 | 55,000–66,000 |
| 4 | 47,921–58,077 |
| 5 | 39,227–58,077 |
| 6 | 30,377–50,276 |
| 7 | 26,619–41,162 |

## DEFENCE

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have used copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to prepare the Government's response to Sir Richard Scott's report. [11879]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** No decision about the response to Sir Richard Scott's report will be taken until the report has been received.

In considering issues relating to the Scott inquiry, all Departments naturally take account of material properly available to them.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report are in the possession of Ministers or officials in his Department other than those to whom draft sections of the report were sent by Sir Richard Scott. [11878]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** In forwarding draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to Ministers and officials, the inquiry expressly stated that individuals could at their discretion make a copy for a legal or other adviser and another for the Department concerned. Whether they did so is entirely a matter for the individuals concerned.

### Munitions Dumping

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations his Department has received from *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* other countries in relation to the sea dumping of conventional and chemical munitions around Britain's coast. [11811]

**Mr. Soames:** There have been contacts between the Ministry of Defence and the Irish Government about sea dumping of munitions, but there have been no representations from other Governments or the European Commission.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11914]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My Department initiated the use of the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol and is an accredited user. Departmental organisations, including agencies funded directly from defence votes, are entitled to use the symbol for both external and internal recruitment and promotion. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, which operates on a trading fund basis, and the Meteorological Office, which is planning to operate on this basis later this year, are not covered by the departmental accreditation, but both agencies are currently working towards obtaining authorisation from the Employment Service to use the symbol in their own right.

### NATO (Interoperability)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts concerning the interoperability of ambulances within the alliance. [10102]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* My Department continues to explore ways of achieving greater interoperability with our NATO partners, although there have been no recent discussions specifically related to ambulances. In preparing the staff requirement for the replacement medium mobility ambulance, full account was taken of the need to ensure interoperability with NATO allies, particularly with regard to airportability, stretcher and stretcher mountings. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement announced the order for the medium mobility ambulance on 18 January 1996.

### Departmental Contracts (Chelmsford)

**Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all contracts placed by his Department with *(a)* GEC Marconi Radar in Chelmsford, *(b)* GEC Marconi

Communications in Chelmsford, *(c)* the English Electric Valve Company in Chelmsford and *(d)* other companies based in Chelmsford since June 1987, and what each contract was worth. [10844]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The number and total value of contracts with *(a)* the GEC-Marconi Ltd. group of companies in the Chelmsford area, *(b)* EEV Ltd.—the English Electric Valve Company—and *(c)* other companies in the Chelmsford area which were extant during the period from 1990 to date are shown in the table.

The following points should be noted:

(1) the records from which this data have been obtained do not differentiate between the various divisions and management companies within the GEC-Marconi Ltd. group.

(2) where a contract was current in two or more financial years, it is included in the figures for each year concerned.

(3) the figures do not include any contracts placed by Defence agencies since they took over their own contract administration.

I regret that the figures before 1990 are not immediately available and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

| | *GEC-Marconi Ltd.* | | *EEV Ltd.* | | *Other Co's* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Financial year* | *Number of contracts* | *Total value £ million* | *Number of contracts* | *Total value £ million* | *Number of contracts* | *Total value £ million* |
| 1990–91 | 1,172 | 842.8 | 170 | 118.4 | 567 | 25.1 |
| 1991–92 | 1,387 | 876.4 | 201 | 132.8 | 719 | 30.6 |
| 1992–93 | 516 | 834.3 | 158 | 115.3 | 550 | 34.7 |
| 1993–94 | 603 | 638.7 | 143 | 104.3 | 621 | 51.7 |
| 1994–95 | 588 | 592.5 | 132 | 105.3 | 649 | 48.5 |
| 1995 up to December | 593 | 537.9 | 80 | 74.9 | 542 | 62.7 |

### Dodman Exercise Area

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the success rate of the Dodman exercise area for training; and if he will make a statement about its current use by members of his Department. [11810]

**Mr. Soames:** The exercise areas off Dodman point in Cornwall are used for a variety of naval training purposes, including naval gunfire support training, which is part of essential operational sea Training, and simulates the provision of gunfire support from ships at sea to forces operating ashore. I am satisfied, as is the Navy, that acceptable levels of training are being achieved at Dodman, including steadily improving success rates for NGS firings, and that the area itself fully meets our training requirements.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staffing his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11333]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** In 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994, the average numbers of working days absence for non-industrial staff were 7.8, 7.9, 8.7 and 7.6 respectively. Figures are not yet available for 1995. Those for years before 1991 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Data for industrial staff are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Civilian Posts

**Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian Ministry of Defence jobs there are within a 25-mile radius of *(a)* Bath and *(b)* Cheadle. [11258]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The number of MOD civil servants employed within a 25-mile radius of *(a)* Bath and *(b)* Cheadle was 8,674 and 600 respectively on 1 April 1995.

### LSD Experiments, Porton Down

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify which Porton Down technical papers contain the descriptions and results of the LSD experiments which were conducted *(a)* in the laboratory and *(b)* in the field by the Chemical Defence Establishment; and which are currently unclassified. [11809]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. David Clark, dated 25 January 1996:*

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking which Porton Down Technical Papers contain the descriptions and results of the LSD experiments which were conducted (a) in the laboratory and (b) in the field by the Chemical Defence Establishment; and which are currently unclassified has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which now includes the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE).

A search of the CBDE Information Service's list of technical papers produced by CBDE and its predecessor organisations at Porton Down has identified four published papers concerning the work conducted with LSD in the 1960s. Three of these reports are concerned with the field studies. These are Porton Technical Paper 936 "A field experiment using LSD25 on trained troops", Porton Technical Paper 979 "Recount—A second field experiment to assess the effects of T3456 on trained troops" and Technical Note 53 "Small Change—A brief preliminary report". As you know we have recently arranged for these papers to be made available in the Public Record Office at Kew at the end of January in response to your

earlier request to see information relating to trials with LSD involving service volunteers. We have recently located a fourth report, Technical Note 5 "The determination of T3456 in human plasma following oral administration" which concerns the laboratory based development of an analytical method to detect low levels of LSD in human plasma. This report is not yet in the Public Records Office but arrangements can be made for its early release should this be required. The library search also identified eight papers which include references to laboratory work involving LSD and other substances being tested on animals. The work was primarily concerned with analytical methods and the papers remain classified.

I hope this information is helpful.

### Married Housing Sales

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the sums to be paid to the Treasury from the sale of his Department's married housing. [11807]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** As I told the hon. Member in my reply of 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *988–89*, our assessment of the value of the married quarters estate under the terms of the proposed sale is commercially confidential.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the Attorney-General if *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have used copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to prepare the Government's response to Sir Richard Scott's report. [11884]

**The Attorney-General:** No decision about the response to Sir Richard Scott's report will be taken until the report has been received.

In considering issues relating to the Scott's inquiry, all Departments naturally take account of material properly available to them.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, columns *705–6*, how much of the sum spent by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry has been spent on legal advice. [11885]

**The Attorney-General:** All of it.

**Mr. Cook:** To ask the Attorney-General if copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report are in the possession of Ministers or officials in his Department other than those to whom draft sections of the report were sent by Sir Richard Scott. [11883]

**The Attorney-General:** In forwarding draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to Ministers and officials, the inquiry expressly stated that individuals could at their discretion make a copy for a legal or other adviser. Whether they did so is entirely a matter for the individuals concerned; the Government do not disclose details of communications, if any, between the inquiry and individual witnesses.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Legal Aid

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on cases in each of the last 10 years in which the total legal aid bill exceeded more than £1 million. [11867]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information is available, however, for the period 1 April 1989 and 31 March 1994. During that period, there were 20 cases involving final bills where the total costs to the legal aid fund exceeded £1 million. Of those, 19 were in respect of criminal proceedings.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11377]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information for 1979–80 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost to the public purse. The figures for the year 1989–90 and thereafter are shown in the table. The Public Trust Office is shown separately for the year 1994–95 since it assumed agency status in July 1994. Details for the current financial year 1995–96 will not be available until after the end of this financial year.

*Sick absence in the Lord Chancellor's Department 1989–95*

| *Year* | *Absence rate in days* |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 194,581 |
| 1991–92 | 140,041 |
| 1992–93 | 151,840 |
| 1993–94 | 178,172 |
| 1994–95 | [1]171,192 |
| *Public Trust Office* | |
| 1994–95 | 9,929 |

[1] Excluding the Public Trust Office.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11375]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Before 1995–96, information has not been held centrally for the full period in question, and information before 1992–93 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Expenditure by the Department

and non-departmental public bodies on external consultants was as follows:-

1993–94: £3.455 million

1994–95: £1.640 million

1995–96: £0.853 million (to date)

Forecast expenditure for the whole of the year 1995–96 is £1.234 million, and for 1996–97 is £7.018 million.

The chief executives of the Court Service and Public Trust Office will reply separately for the periods for which they have been agencies. The chief executives of the Land Registry and Public Record Office will reply direct.

In many cases, consultants are employed to contribute particular skills to an element of a much larger process. As a result, their work will be only one of several factors leading to the eventual outcome. There is therefore no ready way of apportioning their particular contribution to savings achieved.

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 19 January 1996, regarding the expenditure on all consultants for each of the years 1979–80, 1989–90, 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) an estimate for the whole year; the estimated expenditure for 1996–97 and an estimate of the savings accruing from the use of consultants in each of these years.

The Public Trust Office became an Agency on 1 July 1994 and figures prior to that date are included in the departmental Headquarters response. The cost of consultants for the financial years 1994–95 onwards are as follows:

1994–95: £70,242.55

1995–96: £43,753.01 (total to date)

£77,252.01 (estimate for year)

1996–97: £70,000 (estimate)

Consultants are employed to provide a particular skill and their work is only one element of a much larger process and as such it is difficult to assess the savings to the Office as a result. However, the consultants used for the Business Process Re-engineering in 1994/95 estimated that there would be a saving of £800,000 to the Office over time.

*Letter from Duncan Simpson to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

In the absence of the Chief Executive, who is away from the Office on official business, I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about expenditure on consultants and the savings accruing.

1. The Public Record Office's annual expenditure on consultants was:

(a) 1979–80: nil

(b) 1989–90: £46,745

(c) 1991–92: £349,111

(d) 1993–94: £674,305

(e) 1994–95: £315,669

(f) 1995–96: £213,500 to date

1995–96: £585,075 budget

The estimated expenditure for 1996–97 is £775,500.

2. The above includes £120,942 spent between 1992–93 and 1994–95 on consultancy to support the market testing programme, which resulted in an annualised net saving to 1994–95 of £291,000 per annum, with additional but not yet quantified savings expected in 1995–96 and subsequent years.

3. Other consultancies have been to carry out necessary specialised work beyond this department's normal scope, rather than to realise direct cost savings. They have related primarily to the construction of a new building, also to the installation of computer systems and training.

*Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's department, to reply to your recent question on expenditure on external consultants for each of the years a) 1979–80 b) 1989–90, c) 1991–92, d) 1993–94, e) 1994–95 and f) 1995–96 i) to date and ii) as estimated for the whole year and the estimated savings accruing to the Land Registry from the use of consultants in each of these years. I can provide the following information:

a) 1979–80 No record of any expenditure on consultancy

b) 1989–90 £42,900

c) 1991–92 £98,539

d) 1993–94 £157,022

e) 1994–95 £196,011

f) 1995–96 i) £236,000 (at 31.12.95)

ii) £468,000

HM Land Registry has not used consultancy services extensively (the actual cost in 1994–95, for instance, represented only 0.1% of its total expenditure) and its main engagements are for specialist tuition, Information System business services, and consultancy arising from the Market Test programme. It is not possible to quantify annual cost savings but consultants services have made a contribution to the overall cost savings achieved by the Registry which, for example, in 1994–95, amounted to a 2.9% reduction in unit costs in real terms over the previous year.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

*Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to the above Question about expenditure on external consultants.

Since April 1995, the date on which the Court Service was established, £1.11m has been spent on external consultants. Forecast expenditure for the whole year 1995–96 is £3.49m. The estimate for 1996–97 has yet to be finalised.

In many cases consultants have been used where it has not been possible to provide the same service 'in-house' or where their contribution has been a small part of a much larger project. It is therefore not possible to assess what specific savings have been achieved as a result of their contribution.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11376]

**Mr. Evans:** The expenditure on publicity by the Lord Chancellor's Department, including the Court Service, was as follows: 1989–90—£33,616; 1991–92—£35,734; 1993–94—£46,667; 1994–95—£78,961; 1995–96 to date—£83,339. The estimate for the year 1995–96 is £113,000. The estimate for 1996–97 has not yet been finalised but will be approximately £125,000. The figure for publicity expenditure for the year 1979–80 is not available.

These figures represent expenditure on press and public relations, excluding staff costs. There was no expenditure on publicity advertising in any of the years specified, and none is planned for 1996–97.

The Lord Chancellor is responsible for three agencies other than the Court Service: Her Majesty's Land Registry, the Public Record Office, and the Public Trust Office. The question concerns specific operational matters on which the chief executives of these three agencies are best placed to provide answers. I have accordingly asked the chief executives to reply direct.

The Lord Chancellor's Department is responsible for two non-Departmental public bodies, the Legal Aid Board and the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct. Publicity expenditure by the Legal Aid Board, which was established in 1989, was as follows: 1989–90—£103,000; 1991–92—£132,000; 1993–94—£141,000; 1994–95—£207,000; 1995–96 to date—£153,178 and estimated for the total year—£218,000. The latest estimate for 1996–97 is £244,000. Publicity expenditure by the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct is contained within its budget for postage and telephone and is not separately itemised.

*Letter from Duncan Simpson to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

In the absence of the Chief Executive, who is away from the Office on official business, I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about the annual expenditure on publicity by the agencies for which he is responsible.

1. Total expenditure has been:

| | *Advertising* £ | *Press and Public Relations* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | nil | 47,000 |
| 1990–91 | 28 | 50,000 |
| 1991–92 | 20,666 | 53,000 |
| 1992–93 | 77,392 | 57,000 |
| 1993–94 | 86,505 | 58,000 |
| 1994–95 to date | 82,900 | 45,000 |
| 1995–96 budget | 107,500 | 59,500 |
| 1996–97 budget | 70,000 | 61,000 |

2. Figures for 1979–80 could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.3. The advertising figures are for staff recruitment and, since 1991–92, for approximately £1,500 per annum spent on advertising our own products for sale.

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 19 January 1996, regarding the assessment made of the total expenditure for publicity for the financial years 1979–80, 1989–90, 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95 and the estimated cost for the same in 1996–97.

It is Government policy that the Public Trust Office does not advertise for the services it provides.

*Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question on expenditure on publicity for each of the years a) 1979–80 b) 1989–90, c) 1991–2, d) 1993–94, e) 1994-95 and f) 1995–96 i) to date and ii) as estimated for the whole year and estimated expenditure for 1996–97. I can provide the following information:

| | *Advertising £* | *Press and Public Relations £* |
|---|---|---|
| (a) 1979–80 | 23,696 | — |
| (b) 1989–90 | 36,434 | 2,684 |
| (c) 1991–92 | 6,342 | 22,322 |
| (d) 1993–94 | 16,233 | 10,554 |
| (e) 1994–95 | 10,070 | 71,765 |
| (f) 1995–96 | (i) [1]9,248 | [1]82,164 |
| | (ii) 13,000 | 131,800 |

[1] At 31 December 1995.

The increase in 1995–96 is mainly due to the production of a Land Registry Corporate Video.

Estimated expenditure figures for 1996–97 are not yet available. The annual non-staff budget setting process is currently taking place and the Land Registry Budget Committee has yet to decide the final budget allocation.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11378]

**Mr. Evans:** Details of expenditure on telephones for LCD headquarters and associated offices, the Legal Aid Board and the Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct are set out in the table, where figures are available.

The chief executives of the Court Service, the Public Trust Office, the Land Registry and the Public Records Office will be replying separately.

LCD headquarters and associated offices

1994–95: £644,031.98

1995–96: £460,161.13

1996–97: £398,000.00

The figures include a number of headquarters' outstations located around the country.

Internal directories are available to all staff.

*Legal Aid Board*

1989–90: £285,425

1991–92: £322,222

1992–93: £311,904

1994–95: £317,215

1995–96: £303,180 estimate to year end

1996–97: £303,000 latest estimate.

Internal directories are available within each of the board's area offices and central departments of the board at its head office.

*Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct*

1991–92: £9,389

1992–93: £8,998

1993–94: £8,966

1994–95: £11,850

1995–96: £11,091

1996–97: £11,000

The figures include expenditure on postage and telephones; the ACLEC does not have separate budgets for each item. Internal directories are available for all staff.

*Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question on expenditure on telephone costs for each of the years i) 1979–80 ii) 1989–90, iii) 1991–92, iv) 1993–94, v) 1994–95, vi) 1995–96 and vii) 1996–97 and if internal telephone directories are available. I can provide the following information:

i) 1979–80: £341,149

ii) 1989–90: £1,198,010

iii) 1991–92: £1,067,855

iv) 1993–94: £1,007,268

v) 1994–95: £751,365

vi) 1995–96: £759,945

vii) 1996–97: Estimated figures are not yet available. The annual non-staff budget setting process is currently taking place and the Land Registry Budget Committee has yet to decide the final budget allocation.

Significant savings were achieved between 1993–94 and 1994–95 due mainly to the change of management in the Government Telecommunications Network (GTN).

Internal telephone directories are available throughout the Land Registry.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

*Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply in respect of the Court Service to your Question about estimated annual telephone costs.

The projected figures for estimated annual telephone costs from 3 April 1995, the date on which the Court Service was established, are:

1995–1996: £3,027,872

1996–1997: £3,044,761

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 19 January 1996, regarding the estimated annual telephone costs for each financial year since 1979 and for the forthcoming financial year. You also asked whether internal telephone directories were available to all staff.

The Public Trust Office became an Agency in July 1994 and the estimated figures prior to that time for the year 1979–80, 1989–90, 1991–92, 1992–93, and 1993–94 form part of the LCD total figures and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. For the following years to 1997 the figures are as follows:

1994–95: £105,000

1995–96: £98,000

1996–97: £98,000

Each member of staff within the Public Trust Office has access to an internal telephone directory.

*Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 25 January 1996:*

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about annual telephone costs, and the availability to staff of internal telephone directories, in the executive agencies for which he is responsible.

The annual telephone costs since 1993–94 are:

1993–94: £124,739

1994–95: £101,170

1995–96: £125,050 (budget)

1996–97: £130,350 (budget)

Figures for earlier years could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas.

## Wayne Thompson

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much is owed in respect of legal aid to Wayne Thompson, solicitor, 9 Wimpole street, London; and when payment will be made. [10474]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** It is not possible to assess the total amount owed to Mr. Thompson in respect of legal aid where work is on-going. Payments from the legal aid fund are made only in response to claims submitted. As at 18 January 1996, the London area office of the Legal Aid Board was not aware of any claims submitted by Mr. Thompson which remain unpaid. For criminal higher legal aid, one outstanding claim for an interim payment has been identified for which payment is expected to be made within the next few days.

## Repossessions

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* proceedings have been commenced to repossess homes and *(b)* homes have been repossessed in Northern Ireland since 1989. [10562]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The number of writs and originating summonses issued in respect of mortgages by the Chancery division of the Northern Ireland High Court for each year since 1989 is as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1989 | 2,459 |
| 1990 | 2,599 |
| 1991 | 3,061 |
| 1992 | 1,646 |
| 1993 | 1,728 |
| 1994 | 1,372 |
| 1995 | 1,220 |
| Total | 14,085 |

There are no reliable figures available on the number of decrees for possession granted on foot of these.

The Enforcement of Judgments Office, which is responsible for delivering vacant possession in Northern Ireland, has received the following number of notices of

intention to enforce decrees for possession for each year over the period.

1989: 718
1990: 748
1991: 832
1992: 683
1993: 492
1994: 468
1995: 396

The figures relating to the number of these which resulted in actual repossessions taking place are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Fish Farming

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how often trout fattening ponds are visited by his Department's officials; [10666]

(2) what have been the wild fish losses at fish farm intakes over the past 21 years; [10667]

(3) if Department staff report the number of dead wild fish observed at the intake of fish farms when monitoring the farms. [10668]

**Mr. Baldry:** All farms holding trout in England and Wales are inspected by fish disease inspectors once every six months, and fish sampled every 24 months on a routine basis; visits and sampling would also occur whenever there is suspicion of disease. Should inspectors observe dead wild fish or be notified of such occurrences, they would take appropriate disease control action. Inspectors would also notify the National Rivers Authority, which is responsible for the regulation and management of salmon and freshwater fisheries in England and Wales, including pollution control measures. However, no record is kept of wild fish losses at fish farm intakes.

### Live Animal Transport

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what plans he has to review procedures for the veterinary inspection of live animals for transport; and if he will make a statement; [11118]

(2) what representations he has received in relation to the efficiency of veterinary inspection of live animals for transport. [11117]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Department is considering recent allegations that our detailed inspection procedures for live exports have not been followed. We will take firm action if a full assessment of all the available facts shows that there has been any failure to observe the rules or certification instructions.

### Chernobyl Explosion (Compensation)

**Mr. Jopling:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost of providing compensation to farmers who were affected by the Chernobyl incident, in both England and Wales. [11155]

**Mrs. Browning:** As at 30 November 1995, the total cost of compensation to farmers who were affected by the Chernobyl incident in England has been £1,335,757 and in Wales the total cost has been £7,903,872.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees; [10949]

(2) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10950]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Department has not incurred significantly increased consultancy and running costs in the tendering process of the private finance initiative, compared with those which would have been incurred in a more traditional approach.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the mobile phones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last six years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11005]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* There is no information available prior to May 1994 on the cloning of mobile telephones supplied to the Ministry. Since then it is known that a total of 13 of the Ministry's mobile telephones have been cloned.

There is no information available on the specific dates when cloning took place, only the date when it was discovered. This information, broken down by years, is as follows:

| *Year* | *Number* | *Date discovered* |
|---|---|---|
| 1994 | 1 | 19 December 1994 |
| 1995 | 12 | 19 January 1995 |
| | | 30 March 1995 |
| | | 6 April 1995 |
| | | 8 May 1995 |
| | | 19 May 1995 |
| | | 30 May 1995 |
| | | 9 July 1995 |
| | | 4 November 1995 |
| | | 21 November 1995 |
| | | 17 December 1995 |

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Young Entrepreneurs (Training)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to encourage the provision of high quality training for young entrepreneurs. [10893]

**Mr. Paice:** The enterprise in higher education programme encouraged the development of enterprising graduates, whose skills fit them for a wide range of opportunities in both the private and pubic sectors.

Enterprise in higher education commenced in 1987. More than 60 universities have participated in the initiative, which ends this year. Good practice is being disseminated to other higher education institutions.

### University Facilities

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many universities in the United Kingdom have developed joint programmes with their local authority economic development units. [10895]

**Mr. Forth:** The required information is not collected centrally by the Department.

### Information Technology

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of officials within her Department have attended a training course on information technology skills. [11227]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Around 90 per cent. of DFEE staff have received training in information technology skills

Much of the training is devolved and takes place locally, and a more precise estimate could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Home-to-school Transport

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has to change the law concerning responsibilities for home-to-school transport. [11237]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** My right hon. Friend has no proposals to change the law governing the provision of home-to-school transport.

### Education Multi-media Industry

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the involvement of the United Kingdom in the EU task force on multi-media in education. [11132]

**Mr. Forth:** Members of this task force were appointed by the European Commission. A number of United Kingdom organisations were consulted by the task force in producing drafts of its report. Formal discussions between the Commission and member states on the proposals arising from the work of the task force are expected later this year.

### Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if providers of early learning education associated with *(a)* supermarkets, *(b)* franchised retail suppliers of early learning materials and *(c)* companies providing early-years schools in several locations will, under the proposed legislation, be permitted to operate within the voucher scheme on similar conditions as local education authorities or other providers. [11896]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** To join the voucher scheme, all private and voluntary providers must either be registered under the Children Act 1989 or finally registered as an independent school, and must undertake to meet the quality criteria and inspection arrangements as set out in "Nursery Education Scheme: The Next Steps."

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many provider institutions have expressed interest in participating in phase one of the nursery voucher scheme in *(a)* Wandsworth, *(b)* Westminster, *(c)* Kensington and Chelsea and *(d)* Norfolk. [11482]

**Mr. Squire:** In the three London boroughs, all eligible maintained schools have applied to join the scheme through their local education authority and around 50 private and voluntary providers have applied so far. In Norfolk 154 are maintained schools and 178 private and voluntary providers have so far applied to join the scheme.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *472-73*, (1) what estimates she has made of the cost of employing *(a)* 200 registered nursery education inspectors in phase one and *(b)* 4,000 registered nursery education inspectors in phase two of the voucher scheme; [11480]

(2) what estimate she has made of the cost of carrying out *(a)* 600 inspections of voucher-redeeming institutions in phase one and *(b)* 12,000 inspections of voucher-redeeming institutions in phase two of the voucher scheme. [11481]

**Mr. Squire:** The costs of inspection and administration together are estimated to be £5 millions for phase 1 and £20 million for phase 2. My Department is in discussions with Ofsted about the likely cost of employing sufficient inspectors and carrying out inspections in both phases of the voucher scheme.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what procedures will be established to ensure the prevention of fraud in the nursery voucher system. [11478]

**Mr. Squire:** We have worked closely with the voucher agency to set up a system which will deter and detect fraud. Vouchers will incorporate a number of security features to prevent counterfeiting and will be issued only to parents whose children are on the child benefit centre database or who provide full documentation.

### Voluntary Aided Schools

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she now expects to publish her Department's analysis of the responses to the consultation paper on self-government for voluntary aided schools. [11483]

**Mrs. Gillan:** A summary of responses has been placed in the Library. Copies are available from the Department on request.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the expenditure of her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate she has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if she will estimate the savings accruing to her Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11343]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in her Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11345]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Information in the form requested is not available.

### Nursery Education

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 15 January, *Official Report,* columns 471-72, what estimates have been made of the shortfall of places for four-year-olds in *(a)* Wandsworth, *(b)* Westminster, *(c)* Kensington and Chelsea and *(d)* Norfolk, taking into account provision in the private, voluntary and maintained sectors, expressed in each case as (i) a number and (ii) a percentage of all four-year-olds in each local education authority. [11479]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Information on the numbers of four-year-olds in nursery education other than maintained and independent schools in individual local education authorities is not held centrally.

### Local Government Finance, Cheshire

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total value of the standard spending assessment for the Cheshire county council; how much was passed on to local schools by the county council; what was retained by the county council to cover schools' administration and other services; what average figure per school in Cheshire this total represents; and what was the average cost of employing *(a)* a primary and *(b)* a secondary school teacher in Cheshire in 1995–96. [11836]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table shows the education standard spending assessment for Cheshire in 1995–96, together with the size of the general schools budget—total local education authority spending on its schools—the aggregated schools budget—the sum delegated to schools—and the balance of the general schools budget not delegated to schools, with each figure also expressed as an average per school. The last three figures are taken from the budget statement published by the Cheshire LEA in accordance with section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

| | *£ million* | *£ per school* |
|---|---|---|
| Education SSA | 332.027 | 639,744 |
| General schools budget | 340.071 | 655,243 |
| Aggregated schools budget | 261.938 | 504,697 |
| Balance of general schools budget retained by LEA | 78.133 | 150,545 |

The LEA also has to meet the cost of recoupment of annual maintenance grant paid to grant-maintained schools, and I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member about the level of recurrent grant paid to Cheshire GM schools in 1995–96.

Information about the cost of employing teachers individual LEAs in 1995–96 is not held centrally.

### National Curriculum

**Sir Donald Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the future of the national curriculum assessment and testing arrangements. [12230]

**Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** In January 1995, I asked the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority to conduct a full review of national curriculum assessment and testing arrangements for seven, 11 and 14-year-olds.

SCAA's report on its wide-ranging and thorough review is published today. It draws on teachers' comments, evaluation reports, evidence from Her Majesty's inspectors and studies by teacher associations, local education authorities and other organisations.

I accept in full the recommendations made by SCAA concerning the future of the assessment programme. We announced earlier this month the availability of a new grant in 1996–97 to fund additional assessment training for the primary school teachers who need it most—those at key stage 2.

SCAA's review showed that most teachers want a period of stability. That is what we now intend. We shall introduce changes only if they will bring real improvements and if they will: maintain rigorous and reliable assessment for all seven, 11 and 14-year-olds; be consistent with the complementary roles of tests and teacher assessment; and take into account the work load on teachers.

Some of SCAA's recommendations have already been or are being implemented, to ensure the benefits are available as soon as possible. For example, in the wake of our consultation last summer, SCAA has already set out for schools the 1996 assessment arrangements, but, for the most part, SCAA's review focuses on 1997 and beyond. I intend to carry out extensive consultation on my provisional decisions on these proposals and have today published a consultation document accordingly.

I have also announced today the national results of the 1995 assessments for seven, 11, and 14-year-olds and my decision to give greater access to schools' assessment results in order to raise standards, following our consultation in the autumn.

Copies of my exchange of correspondence with Sir Ron Dearing about SCASS's review; the Government's consultation document; a letter from Her Majesty's chief inspector; and the national curriculum assessment results of seven, 11 and 14-year-olds have been placed in the Library.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### National Lottery

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what allocations of national lottery funds have been made to date to organisations and projects in the Greater Manchester area. [11056]

**Mr. Sproat:** To date, 116 awards totalling £27.8 million have been made to organisations in Greater Manchester. The allocations of awards are shown in the following table:

| Body | Announced | Recipient | Location | Amount |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Saint Peter and Paul over 50's Club | Salford, Manchester | 500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Rochdale Pensioners Association | Rochdale | 500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied Club | Middleton, Gtr. Manchester | 836 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | 346 (East Manchester) Scout Group | Chadderton, Manchester | 1,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Trustees of Seven Springs Camp Site—Disley | Didsbury, Manchester | 1,910 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Harpurhey Minibus Group | Harpurhey, Manchester | 2,630 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade, Manchester | Manchester | 2,750 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Arthritis Care—Manchester North | Middleton, Manchester | 3,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Ratcliffe Arms Senior Citizens Club | Rochdale | 3,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | St. Marks Youth Club, Glodwick | Oldham | 3,375 |
| Sports | 10 January 1996 | Tyldesley Tennis Club | Tyldesley, Gtr. Manchester | 3,564 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Higher Broughton Advice Centre | Salford, Manchester | 3,600 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | 161st Manchester Troop of Boy Scouts | Cheetham Hill, Manchester | 5,000 |
| Sports | 6 September 1995 | Withenshawe Shortmat Bowling Club | Manchester | 5,241 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Volunteer Reading Help | Bolton | 5,410 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Manchester Women's Aid | Manchester | 5,500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Denton Blind Centre | Denton, Manchester | 6,000 |
| NLCB | 23 October 1995 | Rochdale Childer | Rochdale | 6,500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Moss Side Playgroup | Moss Side, Manchester | 6,646 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Little Tots Toy Library Steering Committee | Salford, Manchester | 5,650 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Triump Over Phobia (TOP) UK | Manchester | 6,753 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Formal Term | Moss Side, Manchester | 7,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Moss Side Community Build | Moss Side, Manchester | 7,500 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | The Bolton Association of Playgroups | Bolton | 7,500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Manchester Bosnian Community Association | Prestwich, Manchester | 8,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Link Community Care Group | Moss Side, Manchester | 8,200 |
| Sports | 9 August 1995 | Hawkshaw Tennis Club | Bury | 8,250 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Bury Women's Aid | Bury | 9,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | 7th A Rochdale Scouts | Rochdale | 9,063 |
| Sports | 10 January 1996 | Denton Town Football Club | Tameside, Gtr. Manchester | 9,513 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Community Action | Manchester | 10,000 |
| Arts | 21 September 1995 | Black Arts Alliance | Manchester | 10,758 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Selclare (Greater Manchester) Trust—Accemp | Bury, Gtr. Manchester | 11,500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Selclare (Greater Manchester) Trust—Accemp | Bury, Gtr. Manchester | 11,500 |
| NLCB | 23 October 1995 | Manchester and District Transport for Sick Children | Manchester and District | 12,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | North Manchester Crime Prevention Panel | Oldham | 12,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Victim Support | Rochdale | 12,300 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | North Manchester District Scout Council | North Manchester | 12,400 |
| Arts | 16 October 1995 | Theatre Workshop | Manchester | 12,850 |
| Arts | 21 September 1995 | Theatre in Prisons and Probation | Manchester | 13,338 |
| NLCB | 23 October 1995 | Manchester Young People's Theatre Company | Manchester | 15,000 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | The Selcare Greater Manchester Trust | Greater Manchester | 15,000 |
| Sports | 10 January 1996 | Shaw Cricket Club | Oldham | 15,246 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Slade Lane Neighbourhood Centre | Longsight, Manchester | 15,500 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | Oldham District Scout Council | Oldham | 16,500 |
| Sports | 3 October 1995 | Sacred Heart Football Club | Rochdale | 17,446 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | First Rochdale Scout Group | Rochdale | 18,000 |
| Sports | 10 January 1996 | Saddleworth Outdoor Pursuits Association | Greenfield, Gtr. Manchester | 22,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Inskip League of Friendship for Disabled Persons | Rochdale | 22,903 |
| Arts | 21 September 1995 | Bury Music Services Ltd. | Bury | 25,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Gate House Publishing Charity | Hulme, Manchester | 25,525 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | College Bank Tenants and Residents | Rochdale | 28,000 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | 100th Manchester (centurians) Scout Group | Manchester | 29,040 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | INCITU | Moss Side, Manchester | 30,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Mosscare Housing Limited | Manchester | 30,000 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | The Manchester Deaf Centre | Manchester | 30,000 |
| Arts | 16 October 1995 | Dobcross Youth Band | Oldham | 34,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Weaste Community Care Centre | Salford, Manchester | 35,000 |

| Body | Announced | Recipient | Location | Amount |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sports | 8 November 1995 | Saddleworth and District Angling Society | Oldham | 35,754 |
| Sports | 10 January 1996 | Bradshaw Tennis Club | Bolton | 36,887 |
| NHMF | 20 December 1995 | St. Ann's Church | Manchester | 38,000 |
| Arts | 16 October 1995 | Multi Asian Arts | Rochdale | 39,190 |
| Sports | 7 June 1995 | Etherow Centre | Gtr. Manchester | 39,700 |
| Arts | 21 September 1995 | Blue Coat School Brass Band | Oldham | 40,000 |
| Arts | 30 March 1995 | Inner Sense Percussion Orchestra | Manchester | 40,600 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Contact | Whalley Range, Manchester | 45,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Shiri Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara Mission Centre | Whalley Range, Manchester | 45,000 |
| Arts | 20 July 1995 | Standish Brass Band | Bolton | 48,000 |
| Sports | 6 September 1995 | Little Hulton Cricket and Bowling Club | Manchester | 48,500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | The Agency for Economic Development | Manchester | 50,000 |
| Sports | 8 November 1995 | Rochdale MBC | Rochdale | 55,422 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Trafford CVS | Sale, Manchester | 57,270 |
| Arts | 23 November 1995 | Inner City Music Ltd. | Manchester | 59,142 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Trafford Women's Aid | Stretford, Manchester | 65,447 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Cheetham Hill Advice Centre | Cheetham Hill, Manchester | 70,146 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Heywood/Middleton Citizen Advocacy | Heywood, Gtr. Manchester | 75,000 |
| Arts | 24 May 1995 | M6 Theatre Company | Rochdale | 76,384 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Manchester and Salford Methodist Mission | Manchester | 79,648 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Newhay Playground | Rochdale | 83,500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | St. John Ambulance National Headquarters | Manchester | 83,950 |
| Sports | 7 June 1995 | Garswood Football Club | Gtr. Manchester | 86,045 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Independent Neighbourhood Care Association | Salford, Manchester | 89,100 |
| Arts | 16 October 1995 | St. Ann's Church | Manchester | 95,000 |
| MC | 11 September 1995 | Boarshaw Clough | Rochdale/Oldham | 100,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Hideaway | Moss Side, Manchester | 102,000 |
| NLCB | 23 October 1995 | Bury Metro Racial Equality Council | Bury | 102,900 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Independent Contract Unit | Manchester | 111,445 |
| Sports | 8 November 1995 | Rochdale Football Club Limited (By Shares) | Rochdale | 120,412 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Swinton, Pendlebury and Clifton Care of the Elderly | Manchester | 137,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Creative Support | Manchester | 137,880 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | Manchester Adventure Playgrounds Association | Manchester | 142,000 |
| Sports | 9 August 1995 | Markland Hill Tennis Club Ltd. | Bolton | 146,268 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | The Big Issue North West | Manchester | 155,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | City Centre Project Limited | Manchester | 160,292 |
| NLCB | 23 October 1995 | Manchester and Salford Family Unit | Manchester and Salford | 162,428 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Manchester Rape Crisis | Manchester | 164,068 |
| Sports | 10 January 1996 | Bolton Metropolitan Borough | Bolton | 168,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Indian Association | Oldham | 185,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | The Bibini Centre for Young People | Manchester | 198,900 |
| NLCB | 20 November 1995 | Manchester University Settlement | Manchester | 204,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Nacre Halloween Youth Project | Bolton | 210,071 |
| Sports | 6 December 1995 | Bury Metropolitan Borough Council | Gtr. Manchester | 216,966 |
| Sports | 3 October 1995 | Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (Breeze Hill School) | Oldham, Gtr. Manchester | 246,500 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Demesne Community Association | Middleman, Gtr. Manchester | 250,000 |
| Sports | 5 July 1995 | Manchester City Council (North Manchester High School for Boys) | Gtr. Manchester | 260,000 |
| Sports | 3 October 1995 | Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (Royton and Crompton School) | Oldham, Gtr. Manchester | 266,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Salford Link Project | Salford, Manchester | 303,850 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Newbold Multicultural Residence and Youth Association | Rochdale | 350,000 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | CAB, Manchester | Manchester | 370,541 |
| NLCB | 19 December 1995 | Wai Yin Chinese Women Society | Manchester | 395,031 |
| NHMF | 26 April 1995 | Museum of Science and Industry | Manchester | 400,000 |
| MC | 11 September 1995 | The Visions Centre | Manchester | 435,000 |
| Arts | 24 May 1995 | Green Room | Manchester | 750,000 |
| MC | 11 September 1995 | East Manchester River Valley | Manchester | 2,370,000 |
| Arts | 23 November 1995 | Contact Theatre Company | Manchester | 4,456,392 |
| MC | 30 October 1995 | Rochdale Canal Trust | Manchester to Halifax | 11,923,500 |
| | | 116 Awards | | £27,881,326 |

### Pay-per-view (Five Nations Rugby)

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will add five nations rugby to the list of sporting events excluded from pay-per-view channels. [11467]

**Mr. Sproat:** I have no plans to do so.

### S4C

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what occasions since her appointment *(a)* she or her Ministers and *(b)* her officials have held meetings with (i) the chief executive of S4C, (ii) the chairman of the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority and (iii) members of the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority. [11069]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* Ministers and officials have held meetings with the chairman and chief executive of S4C, as with other bodies for which my Department is responsible, from time to time. Most recently, the Under-Secretary of State, Lord Inglewood, met the chairman and chief executive of S4C to discuss the Broadcasting Bill on Monday 15 January.

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will place in the Library all correspondence sent by her Department to the chairman or members of the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority or to the chief executive of S4C communicating the Department's intention to change the funding basis of S4C. [11071]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* I have placed in the Library of both Houses a copy of my right hon. Friend's letter to the chairman of S4C of 15 December.

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) whether the figures for the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority spending plans in the years 1997–98 and 1998–99 contained in table 2 of her press release of 28 November 1995, were calculated on the basis of the planned new formula for calculating S4C income announced on 15 December 1995; [11073]

(2) what is her estimate of the funding of the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority from her Department in the calendar years *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000 if no change were to take place in the basis of funding S4C; and if she will additionally express these figures as a year on year percentage change. [11077]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The figure for 1996–97, contained in the press release to which the hon. Gentleman refers, derives from best available estimates of the application of the Broadcasting Act 1990 formula, although uncertainties for later years led the Department to uprate the estimated 1996–97 figure by £2 million for each of the following years for planning purposes in the expectation that additional funding would be found if needed in later years of the survey to meet S4C's statutory entitlement.

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will express the income of S4C on a calendar year basis from 1994–1999, inclusive using the financial spending plan figures for the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority contained in table 2 of her press release of 28 November 1995. [11076]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The information the hon. Member requests, based on the particular table he specifies, is as follows:

*£ million*

| | *Estimated outturn* | | *Spending plans* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1994*[1] | *1995* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* |
| Not applicable | 64.0 | 67.9 | 73.3 | 75.3 | 77.3 |

[1] The figures for the 1994 calendar year did not appear in the table to which the hon. Member refers. In 1994, S4C received £57.971 million from the Department of National Heritage.

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will express as a percentage the year on year increase in the figures for the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority for 1994–95 To 1998–99 which were issued in table 2 of her press release of 29 November 1995. [11074]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The information the hon. Member requests is as follows:

| | *Outturn* | *Estimated outturn* | | *Spending Plans* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | | *1998–99* |
| £ million | 64.0 | 67.0 | 73.3 | 75.3 | | 77.3 |
| Percentage increase between above figures | | 6.0 | 7.9 | 2.7 | 2.7 | |

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are her estimates of S4C income for the years *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998 and *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000 taking into account the changes she announced on 15 December 1995; and if she will additionally express these figures as a year on year percentage change. [11078]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* My Department estimates that S4C funding in 1997 will be in the region of £73.3 million, but that figure cannot be assessed with certainty at this stage. Firm estimates of income for S4C in later years deriving from the proposals in the Bill cannot be made until the level of payment to S4C for 1997 is finalised.

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are her estimates of the percentage change in qualifying terrestial advertising revenue year-on-year for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1997–98 and *(e)* 1998–99; and if she will additionally express these as calendar year percentage changes for the years (i) 1994, (ii) 1995 (iii) 1996, (iv) 1997 and (v) 1998. [11075]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* My Department does not compile estimations of terrestrial television advertising revenues. That is a matter for the Independent Television Commission.

**Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) when her Department communicated the intention to change S4C's funding basis to the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority and the chief executive of S4C; [11070]

(2) when she or her Ministers or officials told the Welsh Office of their plans to change the funding basis of S4C. [11072]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The Broadcasting Bill was published on 15 December 1995. It reflected discussions with all interested Government Departments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke and wrote to the chairman of S4C on the morning of 15 December about the contents of the Bill.

### Millennium Projects

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations she held with people from Wales, or what consultation she required the millennium commissioners to hold with people in Wales before reaching a decision on the respective merits as perceived by the people of Wales, in respect of the various schemes being proposed for major millennium projects in Wales; and if she will make a statement. [9393]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in her Department for each of the years *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96. [11341]

**Mr. Sproat:** The absenteeism rate in days for the Department of National Heritage since it was created in April 1992 are shown in the table:

| *Year* | *Number of days* |
|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 1,839 |
| 1994–95 | 2,489 |
| 1995–96 | [1]2,752 |

[1] Estimated figure for whole year based on actual figure as at end of December 1995.

## TRANSPORT

### Rail Privatisation

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what public funds have been allocated by *(a)* the Franchising Director and *(b)* other sources to offset the liabilities which Railtrack faces, in respect of penalty payments under the track access agreements with train operating companies with special reference to schedules 4 and 8 of these agreements. [9945]

**Mr. Watts:** As foreshadowed in his policy statement in January 1995, the Rail Regulator has recently issued advice to BR and Railtrack on the level of additional charges which Railtrack should raise in consequence of its additional liabilities under schedules 4 and 8 to passenger track access agreements. This time limited measure is intended to allow Railtrack to adjust to the demanding targets in its performance regime, which will place on Railtrack strong financial incentives to improve its performance.

For 1995–96, no additional public expenditure will be associated with these arrangements. No decisions on funding matters for 1996–97 have yet been taken.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis the debt of the British Railways Board was shared between BRB and Railtrack, upon the formation of Railtrack. [9941]

**Mr. Watts:** The apportionment of long-term debt between BR and Railtrack on 1 April 1994 was as follows:

BRB: £1,269 million

Railtrack: £1,973 million

This was judged to be the most appropriate apportionment of debt, given the nature and size of the two bodies, when Railtrack was formed.

### Rail Grant (Strathclyde)

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what level of metropolitan rail grant was paid to the regional passenger transport executives and Strathclyde regional council for the financial year 1995–96. [11233]

**Mr. Watts:** The estimated level of metropolitan railway grant to be paid in 1995–96 to the English passenger transport authorities is £72 million. The estimated level of MRG to be paid to Strathclyde regional Council is £60.2 million.

### Trains (Speed Restrictions)

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains speed restrictions imposed for a period of greater than six weeks are currently in place on the *(a)* London, Tilbury and Southend line, *(b)* Great Western line, *(c)* South West main line and South West suburban lines, *(d)* InterCity east coast main line, *(e)* Midland main line, *(f)* South London line and Sussex coast line and *(g)* Gatwick Express line, indicating the information also for spur lines; how long the restrictions have been in place; when the restrictions are due to be lifted; and what is the estimated cost of the works required to lift those restrictions. [11234]

**Mr. Watts:** Railtrack informs me that the number of all speed restrictions currently in place are *(a)* London, Tilbury and Southend Line: none; *(b)* Great Western Line: 16; *(c)* South West main line and suburban lines: four; *(d)* InterCity east coast main line: six; *(e)* Midland main line: two; *(f)* south London line and Sussex coast line: six; *(g)* Gatwick Express line: none.

Details of how long the restrictions have been in place, details of spur line restrictions, and estimated repair costs are not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, Railtrack confirms that repair time scales are in accordance with both operational requirements and Railtrack's rigorous safety standards.

### Railway Property

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of property currently owned by *(a)* the British Railways Board and *(b)* Railtrack plc is classified as contaminated. [11235]

**Mr. Watts:** This information is not available in the form requested.

It is to be expected that some railway activities have had the potential to cause contamination of land. The British Railways Board takes protective action where there are known problems with land formerly in operational railway use and carries out investigations prior to the sale of property where significant contamination is a possibility because of the previous uses. Railtrack seeks to identify and manage those operational sites and facilities which may represent a significant actual or potential risk of harm to the environment.

### East Lancashire Railway Line

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what sources of public funding are available for improvements to the east Lancashire railway line; what decision the Government office north-west has made in respect of this project for regional challenge funding; and if he will make a statement. [11606]

**Mr. Watts:** Although the proposal for improvements to the East Lancashire railway line formed an unsuccessful bid for funding under regional challenge in 1995, the Government office for the north-west is continuing to work with the promoters to examine other funding options, including the possibility of carrying forward some elements of the project through mainstream European regional development fund grant. Lancashire county council can also seek funding in 1997–98 through the transport policies and programmes process, by making a renewed bid for funds as part of the Blackburn/Hyndburn local transport package.

### Highways Agency

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the work to date of the Highways Agency's environmental unit; and what plans there are to increase its resources. [11242]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 25 January 1996: -*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the work to date of the Highways Agency's environmental unit and what plans there are to increase its resources.

The Agency Environmental Policy Division (AEPD) was set up on 31 January 1995 and is approaching the end of its first year of operation. The work of the Division to date has been directed towards the development of an Environmental Strategy for the Highways Agency. The Division has also established itself as the HA focal point for contact with statutory and non-statutory environmental organisations.

The Division has coordinated the preparation of the environmental section of the Agency's first Annual Report and produced a booklet on the archaeological work carried out on the trunk road network in 1994/95. Both of these were published in October 1995. I enclose a copy of the archaeology booklet. You should have received a copy of the Annual Report.

In line with good management practice the resources needed to discharge the duties of the division are kept under review. There are no plans to increase the complement of the Division for the present.

I hope that this is useful.

### Newbury Bypass

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 13 December to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers), *Official Report*, column *677*, on what date he learned that the costs of the Newbury bypass were to increase to £101 million. [11220]

**Mr. Watts:** The estimated cost of the Newbury bypass is £101 million; it has not increased by that sum. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was aware of the revised cost during the review of the roads programme last year. The estimate reflects current price trends.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11347]

**Mr. Norris:** The figures requested are as follows:

| *Year* | *Expenditure £ million* |
|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 24.2 |
| 1994–95 | 29.0 |
| 1995–96 (to date) | 31.0 |
| 1995–96[1] (whole year) | 51.5 |
| 1996–97[1] | 26.6 |

[1] Estimated.

Figures from 1979–80, 1989–90 and 1991–92 are not available except at disproportionate cost.

The totals exclude expenditure on road scheme consultancies as they relate largely to production and planning work.

It is not possible to estimate the savings accruing from this expenditure, the vast majority of which was for specific deliverables such as privatisation; and very little of which had the aim of achieving savings.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11348]

**Mr. Norris:** The expenditure by the Department is as follows:

1979–80: 6,686,000
1989–90: 5,386,000
1991–92: 7,380,000
1993–94: 8,275,000
1994–95: 8,039,000
1995–96: 7,472,000
1996–97: n/a

A forecast for 1996–97 is not yet available. All figures include vat.

The figures cover all publicity expenditure, including television, radio, press advertising and other promotional material. It is not possible to break these figures down between advertising and press and public relations.

Information on non-departmental public bodies and agencies is not held centrally, or otherwise readily available. Available data is given in the table.

*£000*

| *Agency* | *1979–80* | *1989–90* | *1991–92* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1995–96*[1] | *1996–97* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MSA | — | — | — | — | 104 | 55 | 80 | 80 |
| Coastguard agency | — | — | — | — | 241 | 206 | 281 | n/a |
| Highways agency: | | | | | | | | |
| Advertising | — | — | — | — | 320 | 110 | | n/a |
| Publicity | — | — | — | — | 20 | | 1,000 | n/a |
| TRL: | | | | | | | | |
| Advertising | — | — | — | 0.59 | — | 19 | 25 | [2]n/a |
| Publicity | — | — | — | 23.59 | 5 | | | |
| DVLA: | | | | | | | | |
| Advertising | 6 | 736 | 1,192 | 1,604 | 1,506 | 1,177 | 2,200 | 2,200 |
| Publicity | | | 27 | 43 | 45 | 26 | 38 | 38 |
| DSA | — | — | 30 | 40 | 40 | 40 | | n/a |

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] TRL is to be privatised.

### Road Salting

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effects of road salting on (i) roadside flora, (ii) roadside fauna, (iii) vehicles and (iv) bridges. [11644]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question asking what assessment he has commissioned and evaluated on the effects of road salting on roadside flora, fauna, vehicles and bridges.

A comprehensive study of the effects of road salting on roadside flora was carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory in 1982. The subsequent report was "An Assessment of The Conditions For Shrubs Alongside Motorways" by Colwill, Thompson and Rutter, Laboratory Report 1061.

A study was also commissioned in April 1989 into the performance of concrete in bridges. Known as the "Maunsell Report", its findings have been included within the 15 year bridge rehabilitation programme.

There has not been any separate assessments on evaluating the effects of road salting on roadside fauna or on vehicles.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11349]

**Mr. Norris:** Information on sickness absence in the Department of Transport, which is available only for calendar years, is as follows:

| *Year* | *Average working days of sickness per staff year* |
|---|---|
| 1989 | 8.1 |
| 1990 | 9.4 |
| 1991 | 9.9 |
| 1992 | 10.2 |
| 1993 | 10.7 |
| 1994 | 9.4 |
| 1995 | [1]9.0 |

[1] Estimated.

In 1979–90 sick absence rates were not separately recorded for the Department.

### Chiswick Flyover

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the cost of refurbishment of the Chiswick flyover on the London A4, the cause of its deterioration and the time taken to repair it. [11645]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking him if he will estimate the cost of the refurbishment of the Chiswick flyover, the cause of its deterioration and the time taken to repair it.

My reply relates to work to the M4 elevated section which extends from Junction 1 (east of Chiswick roundabout) to Boston Manor playing fields.

It is too early to be precise about the cost of the refurbishment of the elevated section of the M4. In order to maintain access on this busy route between London, Heathrow and the west and to minimise disruption to road users, the work will have to be phased and could take up to ten years. Preliminary estimates suggest that the cost will be in the region of £30m.

The M4 elevated structure is some 30 years old. Repairs are required because over the years water containing de-icing salts has leaked from the road surface into the crossheads at the top of the piers. When this occurs steel reinforcement in the piers begins to rust loosening and pushing off the protective surface concrete.

There is an ongoing maintenance programme to install new bridge deck joints to prevent further deterioration of the structure and to review loose surface concrete. This work is being undertaken at night.

Investigations to prepare a programme a further repairs are still ongoing. There are no plans for weekday or daytime closures of this section of the M4 motorway.

### Sight Tests

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he expects to be made in the eyesight test for public service vehicle and lorry drivers; and what number of these drivers he expects will fail the new test. [11897]

**Mr. Norris:** From 1 July, all those who wish to drive large goods or passenger-carrying vehicles—whether for the first time or to continue doing so—will, when they apply for or to renew their licence, have to meet the minimum uncorrected vision standard in both eyes, rather than in one eye only as at present. We estimate that some 3,000 current licence holders will not meet this requirement.

### Global Warming

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what revisions of emission targets will be made to accord with the findings of the intergovernmental conference on climate control on human influence on the global climate. [10304]

**Mr. Clappison:** I have been asked to reply.

The UK target for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions remains that set down for all developed countries in the climate change convention—to return emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000—although we now expect to surpass this. For the period after 2000, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has called for developed countries to agree to aim to reduce their emissions by a figure in the range of 5 to 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. He intends to take every opportunity to press his international colleagues to support that target and will be highlighting the important findings of the intergovernmental panel on climate change whenever he does so.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Benefit Research

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has carried out and with what findings into what happens to claimants aged *(a)* 16 and 17 years and *(b)* 18 years and over who have become disentitled to state benefit; and if he will make a statement. [8069]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds who meet the qualifying conditions have access to social security benefits including income support and housing benefit. In 1990, the Department of Social Security commissioned research by MORI into the circumstances of young people aged 16 and 17 who claimed income support via the severe hardship provision. This was published in 1991 and is in the Library. People who are aged 18 or over qualify for benefits if they meet the entitlement conditions. We have not conducted research into people who fail to meet those conditions.

### Mortgage Interest Payments

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate savings since 1 October 1995 as a result of his measures announced on 30 November 1994 to limit or withdraw income support for mortgage interest payments indicating the figures for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* the projected figures for 1996–97; what further plans he has to (i) limit and (ii) restrict mortgage interest payments under income support; and if he will make a statement. [9391]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The estimated savings from the measures announced by the Secretary of State on 30 November 1994 and introduced on 10 April 1995 and 2 October 1995 to restrict the amount of mortgage interest met by income support are £30 million in 1995–96, £170 million in 1996–97 and £240 million in 1997–98.

We have no further plans of the kind described but all aspects of social security are kept under review.

### One-parent Families

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of *(a)* families with children, *(b)* one-parent families, *(c)* one-parent families headed by a divorced or separated person, *(d)* one-parent families headed by a widow or widower and *(e)* one-parent families headed by a single unmarried mother receive income support. [9605]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The available information is set out in the table.

*Income support recipients: GB 1993*

| | *Number of IS recipients (thousands)* | *As a percentage of the relevant population* |
|---|---|---|
| Families with dependent children | 1,600 | 23 |
| One-parent families with dependent children of which: | 1,048 | 71 |
| Divorced or separated | 547 | 65 |
| Widowed | 20 | 24 |
| Single unmarried mother | 463 | 85 |

*Income support recipients: GB 1993*

| | *Number of IS recipients (thousands)* | *As a percentage of the relevant population* |
|---|---|---|
| Single unmarried fathers | 14 | [1]— |
| Prisoners' partners | 3 | n/a |

*Notes:*
[1] denotes sample size too small to estimate percentage.
1. n/a denotes not available.
2. Due to rounding, recipient total does not tally.
*Source:*
Income Support 1 per cent. Annual Statistical Enquiry May 1993. Estimates derived from the General Household Survey.

### Parents with Care

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of parents with care for whom good cause has not been accepted by the Child Support Agency have had a reduced benefit directive imposed, broken down by centre, since April 1995; and how he explains variations between centres. [10181]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11394]

**Mr. Burt:** The available information is in the table.

Internal telephone directories are available to staff in the Department, its agencies and its non-departmental public bodies.

*Departmental telecommunications running costs*

*£000*

| | | *Agencies* | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *DSS HQ* | *Benefit Agency* | *Contributions Agency* | *Child Support Agency* | *Information Technology Services Agency* | *Resettlement Agency* | *War Pensions Agency* | *Non-departmental public bodies* | *DSS totals* |
| *1989–90:* | | | | | | | | | |
| Current | — | — | — | — | — | 113 | — | — | 29,738 |
| Capital | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 9,070 |
| *1991–92:* | | | | | | | | | |
| Current | 370 | 16,865 | 227 | — | 24,099 | 107 | — | — | 41,668 |
| Capital | 0 | 0 | 0 | — | 7,281 | 0 | — | — | 7,281 |
| *1993–94:* | | | | | | | | | |
| Current | 384 | 20,794 | 2,658 | 1,325 | 36,413 | 65 | 57 | — | 61,696 |
| Capital | 0 | 1,531 | 0 | 0 | 29,212 | 0 | 0 | — | 30,743 |
| *1994–95:* | | | | | | | | | |
| Current | 352 | 21,009 | 4,516 | 2,523 | 37,154 | 36 | 104 | — | 65,694 |
| Capital | 167 | 2,393 | 86 | 346 | 12,890 | 0 | 184 | — | 16,066 |
| *1995–96 (to date):* | | | | | | | | | |
| Current | 421 | 15,840 | 2,415 | 1,733 | 24,536 | 13 | 78 | 233 | 45,036 |
| Capital | 95 | 1,154 | 70 | 63 | 14,288 | 0 | 75 | 3 | 15,745 |
| *1995–96:* | | | | | | | | | |
| Current | 561 | 21,120 | 3,221 | 2,311 | 32,715 | 18 | 111 | 310 | 60,057 |
| Capital | 84 | 1,539 | 94 | 85 | 15,225 | 0 | 101 | 4 | 17,128 |

1. Figures for 1979–80 are not available. 2. Detailed spending plans for 1996–97 are yet to be finalised.
3. Only Departmental figures and RA figures are available for 1989–90.
4. 1991–92 figures for BA and ITSA include elements of what were to become CSA and WPA.
5. 1995–96 figures have been extrapolated from the year to date figure.
6. Current expenditure figures include running and rental costs for both voice and data transmission, capital expenditure figures include costs of equipment including office machines to handle output—e.g. to print order books.
7. All figures are vote based and include VAT.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11391]

**Mr. Burt:** The available information is in the table. The information requested for 1979–80 and savings accrued from the use of consultants is not available. The estimated expenditure for 1996–97 is not yet available.

*Expenditure on external consultants*

| *Year* | *Amount £ million* |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 43.3 |
| 1991–92 | 69.7 |
| 1993–94 | [1]34.0 |
| 1994–95 | 26.1 |
| 1995–96 (to date 31 December 1995) | [2]16.9 |
| 1995–96 (estimated full year) | 21.66 |

[1] Figures for 1992–93 onwards refer solely to expenditure on consultancy services following work undertaken for the efficiency scrutiny into the Government's use of external consultants. Figures for earlier years include the cost of contracted services.

[2] This figure is provisional and subject to amendment.

## Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11393]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not available in the format requested. The average number of working days per staff year lost due to sickness is as follows:

1991: 11.2 days

1992: 9.3 days

1993: 12.2 days

1994: 12.1 days

The figures for 1995 will not be available until the summer.

## Family Credit

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families are currently in receipt of family credit in *(a)* the City of Durham constituency and *(b)* the northern region; and what has been the cost of this benefit in each year since 1989–90. [10641]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many families are currently in receipt of Family Credit (FC) in (a) the City of Durham constituency and (b) the Northern Region; and what has been the cost of this benefit in each year since 1989-90.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because statistics are not kept which are specific to Parliamentary Constituencies, the borders of which are not the same as those of benefit offices. Statistics are available for the North Durham District which includes the Durham, Chester le street, Peterlee and Seaham offices. The number of families claiming FC in North Durham District is 4080, as at 10 November 1995. These figures are provisional and subject to change.

The Benefits Agency is no longer organised on a regional basis and is now divided into Areas and Territories. FC figures for Scotland and Northern Territory could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Annexe A gives details of the national cost of FC since 1989/90.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

*Annexe A*

| *Year* | *Family credit outturn £ million* |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 425 |
| 1990–91 | 494 |
| 1991–92 | 626 |
| 1992–93 | 929 |
| 1993–94 | 1,208 |
| 1994–95 | 1,441 |

*Note:*

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

*Source:*

Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry April 1995.

1995 Departmental Report.

## Social Fund

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he has taken to publicise the social fund to likely applicants; and what is the total expenditure involved. [9486]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr Jim Callaghan, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State of Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what measures he has taken to publicise the Social Fund to likely applicants and what is the total expenditure involved.

Social Fund information is produced in partnership with the Department of Social Security.

Products include:

A 16 page, introductory leaflet entitled "How the Social Fund can help you" produced in English, English/Welsh bilingual and eleven ethnic languages.

A detailed, 64 page leaflet "A guide to the Social Fund", published in English.

A series of three posters, publicising the help available and outlining the basic conditions people would need to satisfy before they might be eligible for an award from the Social Fund.

The leaflets are made available to the public from Benefits Agency (BA) offices. They are also available to welfare advisers, Post Offices, Doctors Surgeries and Libraries external to the BA on request, from BA offices and HMSO, Chadderton. Posters are displayed in Benefits Agency offices and are also available to welfare advisers.

The Social Fund publicity budget for 1995–96 is £77,300.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for discretionary social fund awards were refused in (i) 1993, (ii) 1994 and (iii) 1995 in total and by *(a)* region and *(b)* local DSS offices. [9484]

**Mr. Evans:** The administration of the Social Fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many applications for discretionary Social Fund awards were refused in (i) 1993, (ii) 1994, and (iii) 1995 in total and by (a) region and (b) his local department's offices.

The information is not available in the format requested. With the creation of the Benefits Agency in April 1991, former Departmental Local Offices and Regions were grouped into Districts and Area and Territorial Directorates. The information that is available is contained in Annex A - C, for the financial years 1993\94, 1994\95 and 1995\96 year to date. Copies will be placed in the Library.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

### Mrs. Marilyn Hume

**Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on behalf of Mrs. Marilyn Hume, 10 St. Anne's court, Aigburth road, Liverpool L17 6BH; and if he will make a statement. [9675]

**Mr. Burt:** This is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Alton, dated 24 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what representations he has received on behalf of Mrs Marilyn Hume.

The Benefits Agency has received representation from the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, Doctor C A Young and Doctor S A Kumar on behalf of Mrs Marilyn Hume.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

### Social Security Fraud

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many instances his Department has identified in the past 12 months of attempted social security fraud based on impersonation with particular reference to attempts to secure benefits by changing a name and assuming the national insurance number of the other person; and if he will make a statement. [9309]

**Mr. Heald:** The information requested is not available. However, a total of 355 multiple identity investigations are currently under way, comprising 14 investigations with over 150 identities in each investigation and 341 investigations containing between two and 149 identities in each investigation.

### Funeral Payments

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received in respect of funeral payments from the social fund since the 5 June 1995 amendments were implemented. [10205]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This Department have responded to 54 letters and 19 parliamentary questions concerning social fund funeral payments since 5 June 1995.

### Pensioners' Incomes

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the value of the basic state retirement pension for *(a)* a single pensioner and *(b)* a pensioner couple in 1970 and at each uprating since 1970; and what it would have been if it had been uprated in line with whichever was the higher of average earnings or prices. [10203]

**Mr. Heald:** The available information is in the table. As there was no uprating in 1970, the table shows the effect of uprating by the higher of prices and earnings since November 1969.

*£ per week*

| *Uprating date* | *Actual rate* | | *Rate if uprated by higher of prices and earnings* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Single* | *Couple* | *Single* | *Couple* |
| November 1969 | 5.00 | 8.10 | 5.00 | 8.10 |
| September 1971 | 6.00 | 9.70 | 6.15 | 9.95 |
| October 1972 | 6.75 | 10.90 | 7.15 | 11.55 |
| October 1973 | 7.75 | 12.50 | 8.05 | 13.00 |
| July 1974 | 10.00 | 16.00 | 9.30 | 15.00 |
| April 1975 | 11.60 | 18.50 | 11.95 | 19.30 |
| November 1975 | 13.30 | 21.20 | 13.85 | 22.35 |
| November 1976 | 15.30 | 24.50 | 15.95 | 25.70 |
| November 1977 | 17.50 | 28.00 | 18.00 | 29.00 |
| November 1978 | 19.50 | 31.20 | 20.40 | 32.85 |
| November 1979 | 23.30 | 37.30 | 24.30 | 39.15 |
| November 1980 | 27.15 | 43.45 | 28.80 | 46.40 |
| November 1981 | 29.60 | 47.35 | 32.25 | 51.95 |
| November 1982 | 32.85 | 52.55 | 34.95 | 56.30 |
| November 1983 | 34.05 | 54.50 | 38.00 | 61.20 |
| November 1984 | 35.80 | 57.30 | 39.95 | 64.35 |
| November 1985 | 38.30 | 61.30 | 43.45 | 69.95 |
| July 1986 | 38.70 | 61.95 | 45.35 | 73.00 |
| April 1987 | 39.50 | 63.25 | 47.90 | 77.10 |
| April 1988 | 41.15 | 65.90 | 51.65 | 83.15 |
| April 1989 | 43.60 | 69.80 | 56.25 | 90.55 |
| April 1990 | 46.90 | 75.10 | 61.70 | 99.35 |
| April 1991 | 52.00 | 83.25 | 68.45 | 110.20 |
| April 1992 | 54.15 | 86.70 | 73.85 | 118.90 |
| April 1993 | 56.10 | 89.80 | 77.45 | 124.70 |
| April 1994 | 57.60 | 92.10 | 79.70 | 128.30 |
| April 1995 | 58.85 | 94.10 | 82.90 | 133.45 |

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of all pensioners, single pensioners and pensioner couples have total incomes of *(a)* £0 to £5, *(b)* £5 to £10, *(c)* £10 to £15, *(d)* £15 to £20, *(e)* £20 to £25 and *(f)* £25 to £30 above income support levels. [10270]

**Mr. Heald:** The available information is in the table. Due to the limited sample size available it is not possible to provide reliable information for the proportion of incomes falling within bands of less than £15.

*Pensioner income levels*

*Numbers in thousands (1993 prices)*

| *Income above I.S.* | *Single pensioners* | | *Pensioner couples* | | *All pensioners units* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Proportion (per cent.)* | *Numbers* | *Proportion (per cent.)* | *Numbers* | *Proportion (per cent.)* | *Numbers* |
| £0 to £15 | 8 | 200 | 17 | 750 | 13 | 1,000 |
| £15 to £30 | 10 | 250 | 21 | 900 | 16 | 1,150 |

*Source:*
Analysis of the Family Expenditure Survey 1993.
*Notes:*
1. Percentages are rounded to the nearest 1 per cent., numbers rounded to the nearest 50,000.
2. The level of Income Support used for this calculation is that for pensioners aged 60/65, at April 1993 benefit levels.

### Housing Benefit

**Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will exempt supported lodgings from the proposed housing benefit changes in relation to young people; and if he will make a statement. [11029]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The Social Security Advisory Committee has just completed its consultation on these proposals. The local authority associations will be completing their consultation shortly. I will consider all the representations which have been made on the provisions for young people with special needs, and will respond to them in the Command Paper.

### Cold Weather Payments

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the system of cold weather payment, in respect of immobile disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [10528]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** There have been no representations on this matter. Cold weather payments are focused on the most vulnerable groups receiving income support, that is those with a pensioner or disability premium, or a child aged under five. So far this winter, 3.8 million payments worth almost £32 million have been made.

### State Pensions

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the value of the basic state retirement pension as a proportion of gross average earnings in the United Kingdom for each year since 1970; [10204]

(2) what was *(a)* the annual percentage increase in the state pension and *(b)* the year on year April to April retail prices index for each year since 1970. [10259]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is in the table. the rate of increase in the basic pension has been converted to an annual rate where the length of time between upratings was greater or less than 12 months.

As there was no uprating in 1970 the value of the basic pension during that year is shown in the last column of the table as a percentage of average gross earnings at April 1970.

| *Year* | *Month of uprating* | *Rate of basic retirement pension £ per week* | *Increase over previous rate percentage* | *Equivalent annual increase percentage* | *Change in RPI since previous AprilRate as a percentage of average earnings percentage* | *percentage* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1969 | November | 5.00 | — | — | — | — |
| 1970 | — | — | — | — | 5.6 | 19.3 |
| 1971 | September | 6.00 | 20.0 | 10.5 | 9.4 | 20.3 |
| 1972 | October | 6.75 | 12.5 | 11.5 | 6.3 | 19.6 |
| 1973 | October | 7.75 | 14.8 | 14.8 | 9.2 | 19.8 |
| 1974 | July | 10.00 | 29.0 | 40.5 | 15.2 | 22.2 |
| 1975 | April | 11.60 | 16.0 | 21.9 | 21.7 | 21.6 |
| | November | 13.30 | 14.7 | 26.4 | — | 22.0 |
| 1976 | November | 15.30 | 15.0 | 15.0 | 18.9 | 22.6 |
| 1977 | November | 17.50 | 14.4 | 14.4 | 17.5 | 23.7 |
| 1978 | November | 19.50 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 7.9 | 23.2 |
| 1979 | November | 23.30 | 19.5 | 19.5 | 10.1 | 23.2 |
| 1980 | November | 27.15 | 16.5 | 16.5 | 21.8 | 22.6 |
| 1981 | November | 29.60 | 9.0 | 9.0 | 12.0 | 22.4 |
| 1982 | November | 32.85 | 11.0 | 11.0 | 9.4 | 23.1 |
| 1983 | November | 34.05 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 4.0 | 21.7 |
| 1984 | November | 35.80 | 5.1 | 5.1 | 5.2 | 21.4 |
| 1985 | November | 38.30 | 7.0 | 7.0 | 6.9 | 21.4 |
| 1986 | July | 38.70 | 1.0 | 1.6 | 3.0 | 20.5 |
| 1987 | April | 39.50 | 2.1 | 2.8 | 4.2 | 19.9 |
| 1988 | April | 41.15 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 3.9 | 18.8 |
| 1989 | April | 43.60 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 8.0 | 18.2 |

| Year | Month of uprating | Rate of basic retirement pension £ per week | Increase over previous rate percentage | Equivalent annual increase percentage | Change in RPI since previous AprilRate as a percentage of average earnings percentage | percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1990 | April | 46.90 | 7.6 | 7.6 | 9.4 | 17.8 |
| 1991 | April | 52.00 | 10.9 | 10.9 | 6.4 | 18.3 |
| 1992 | April | 54.15 | 4.1 | 4.1 | 4.3 | 17.8 |
| 1993 | April | 56.10 | 3.6 | 3.6 | 1.3 | 17.7 |
| 1994 | April | 57.60 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.6 | 17.7 |
| 1995 | April | 58.85 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 3.3 | 17.5 |
| 1996 | April | 61.15 | 3.9 | 3.9 | n/a | n/a |

*Source:*
"The Abstract of Statistics for Social Security Benefits and Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings", 1995 edition.
Average earnings index (whole economy, unadjusted) (Tables 2.1 and 2.2 of the abstract).
Retail prices index information taken from table 1.1.

### Incapacity Benefit

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the numbers of people in receipt of incapacity benefit who are no longer eligible for invalidity benefit at the most recent date for which information is available. [11088]

**Mr. Burt:** On 13 April 1995, all recipients of invalidity benefit transferred to incapacity benefit at the rate of the benefit in payment. At 31 August 1995, the latest date for which information is available, 1.64 million [1]people were in receipt of incapacity benefit who had, before 13 April 1995, been in receipt of invalidity benefit.

[1]Note: Figures excludes a small number of cases paid clerically.

### National Disability Council

**Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he is in a position to announce the chairman and membership of the National Disability Council. [12066]

**Mr. Burt:** I am delighted to announce that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has appointed David Grayson[1] of Business in the Community, as the chairman of the National Disability Council, and the following council members:

Doug Alker[1], Chief Executive of RNID
Christopher Brocksom, Chief Executive of AXA Equity and Law
Alan Dickson, Deputy Director of The Scottish Spastics Society
Ann Foster[1], Director of The Scottish Consumer Council
Tanni Grey[1], Chairman of the British Wheelchair Racing Association
David Jenkins, General Secretary of the Welsh TUC
Colin Low[1], Vice Chairman of RNIB
Jim McAllister, Divisional Director of Marks and Spencers
Bert Massie[1], Director of RADAR, and member of DPTAC
David Mills, Managing Director of Retail Banking Services, Midland Bank
Martin Reaveley[1], Director of Corporate Finance and Planning, Bass PLC
Phillipa Russell[1], Director of the Council for Disabled Children
David Roberts[1], Founder member of Clwyd People First
Kevin Shinkwin[1], parliamentary advisor to the Muscular Dystrophy Group
Alan Smith, Chairman of NACEPD
Jenny White, Deputy Legal Advisor to the Electricity Association

[1] indicates that the member is either a disabled person or the parent or guardian of a person with disabilities

My right hon. Friend will also be inviting the chairman of the Northern Ireland Disability Council to become a member once he or she has been appointed.

In making these appointments, the Secretary of State has met the commitments given in Parliament that membership will be drawn from throughout Great Britain and sought to provide common membership with the National Advisory Council on the Employment of People with Disabilities and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Council. More than half of the membership of the council are disabled people or the parents or guardians of people with disabilities. They will bring to the council a wide range of experience of disability. the disabilities represented include sensory impairments, mobility difficulties and learning disabilities.

The National Disability Council can make a great contribution to the reduction of discrimination against disabled people and the chairman and members will be crucial to its success. I believe that we have achieved the right balance of experience of business and disability.

## ENVIRONMENT

### City Grants

**Dr. Hampson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, by region, the figures for city grants approvals and achievements since May 1988 in terms of *(a)* schemes approved, *(b)* grants approved *(c)* total private sector investment and *(d)* the gearing ratio and jobs created. [10188]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The following table provides the information requested for city grant applications administered either centrally by my Department, or by English partnerships since 10 November 1993, city challenge partnerships and the urban development corporations.

| Region | Schemes approved[1] | Grants approved £ million | Private investment £ million | Gearing ratio | Jobs created |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North-east | 105 | 104.183 | 824.798 | 7.92 | 8,398 |
| North-west | 139 | 134.003 | 657.063 | 4.90 | 16,185 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 104 | 78.760 | 278.280 | 3.53 | 13,541 |
| Merseyside | 68 | 55.807 | 213.400 | 3.82 | 7,464 |
| West Midlands | 130 | 141.321 | 552.622 | 3.91 | 20,221 |
| East Midlands | 55 | 52.028 | 145.239 | 2.79 | 5,815 |
| Eastern | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| South-west | 12 | 22.894 | 52.472 | 2.29 | 2,939 |
| South-east | 4 | 4.262 | 30.841 | 7.24 | 835 |
| London | 46 | 50.776 | 229.240 | 4.51 | 6,674 |
| Total | 663 | 644.034 | 2,983.955 | 4.63 | 82,072 |

[1] This does not include approved schemes on which grant was not drawn down.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responsibilities local authorities have to house asylum seekers whose applications *(a)* are under consideration and *(b)* have been refused; and if he will make a statement. [11203]

**Mr. Clappison:** At present the homelessness legislation requires local authorities to secure accommodation for asylum seekers who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need, if there is no other accommodation available for them. When the Asylum and Immigration Bill becomes law we propose to make an order that would remove entitlement under the homelessness legislation from those persons who apply for asylum after they have entered this country, and from those asylum seekers who remain in this country pending the outcome of an appeal against an initial negative decision. This will align entitlement under the homelessness legislation with entitlement to housing benefit.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment how much each local authority took from balances to fund budget expenditure in 1995–96. [11596]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I have placed the information in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what would be the effect of an 8 per cent. increase in council tax on *(a)* the total yield of council tax in Great Britain, *(b)* the total yield of council tax in England, *(c)* the council tax bill in England for each valuation band, *(d)* the average council tax in England, expressed as the total yield from the council tax divided by the total number of chargeable dwellings, *(e)* council tax benefit, *(f)* the retail price index and *(g)* index-linked benefits. [11728]

**Mr. Gummer:** The information relating to Wales and Scotland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland.

If council taxes in England had increased in 1995–96 by an additional 8 per cent. compared to actual levels, the approximate effect is estimated as follows:

(b) the gross yield of council tax would increase by £780 million;

(c) average council tax levels, before council tax benefit or transitional relief, would increase

Band A: by £32 to £439

Band B: by £38 to £512

Band C: by £43 to £585

Band D: by £49 to £658

Band E: by £60 to £804

Band F: by £70 to £950

Band G: by £81 to £1,096

Band H: by £97 to £1,316

(d) the average bill per chargeable dwelling, before council tax benefit or transitional relief, would increase by £40 to £538;

(e) council tax benefit would increase by £170 million;

(f) the increase would add around 0.2 percentage points to the percentage change over 12 months in the all items retail prices index.

(g) the precise effect on those benefits linked to the retail prices index would depend on whether this marginal change resulted in benefit levels moving up or staying unchanged. As an approximate guide, an additional 0.2 percentage points on the rate of inflation would add around £80 million to the cost of those benefits in a full year. There would be no effect on those income related benefits which are usually linked to the Rossi index.

### Chicken Litter Fuelled Power Station

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the proposal to establish a chicken litter fuelled power station at Poole farm, near Wellington, Somerset; and if he will make a statement. [11826]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Government office for the south west has received two representations objecting to the proposed electricity generating station at Wellington, Somerset.

Copies of the relevant papers have not yet arrived from the local planning authority, Somerset county council. Upon receipt it will be considered whether the issues raised merit my intervention.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94,

(v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*; [11398]

(2) what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11395]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The tables set out the information available on annual telephone costs and expenditure on consultants respectively.

*Annual telephone costs*

£000

| | 1989–90 | 1991–92 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DoE (Central) | 3,554 | 3,051 | 2,728 | 2,532 | 1,920 |
| Property Holdings | n/a | 385 | 159 | 132 | 145 |
| PSAS | 6,052 | 6,047 | 2,170 | 105 | 50 |
| Total department | 9,606 | 9,483 | 5,057 | 2,769 | 2,115 |
| Planning inspectorate | 0 | 0 | 162 | 77 | 46 |
| Building research establishment | 173 | 194 | 237 | 172 | 108 |

Figures for planning inspectorate for 1989-90 and 1991-92 are included within the departmental total.
The figure for Property Holdings for 1989-90 is included within the figure for PSAS.

*Expenditure on consultants*

£000

| | *1989–90* | *1991–92* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DoE (Central) | 9,835 | 6,547 | 9,195 | 9,567 | 10,739 |
| Property Holdings | n/a | 1,125 | 223 | 204 | 529 |
| PSAS | 177,400 | 182,850 | 25,120 | 752 | 441 |
| Total department | 187,235 | 190,522 | 34,538 | 10,523 | 11,709 |
| Planning inspectorate | 0 | 40 | 632 | 465 | 80 |
| Building research establishment | 31 | 187 | 220 | 212 | 151 |
| The buying agency | n/a | n/a | 9 | 17 | 25 |
| Security facilities executive | n/a | n/a | 56 | 368 | 150 |
| QEII Conference Centre | n/a | n/a | 60 | 10 | 32 |

Figures for planning inspectorate for 1989–90 are included within the departmental total.
The figure for PSAS includes works consultancies.
The figure for Property Holdings for 1989–90 is included within the figure for PSAS.
Excludes expenditure on the Department's strategic IT consultancies.

The remaining information requested on telephone costs and consultancies is not held centrally in the form required and could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

The Department makes use of CCTA's metropolitan telephony service, which provides us with full managed telephony and directory services. The Department, along with other MTS users, maintains a current directory of staff, location and telephone extensions. The MTS service provides an annual estimate of telephony charges.

The Government telephone network connects more than 1,000 Government offices nationwide. As users of the GTN, and GTN dialling codes booklet is available to all staff in this Department. It enables staff to identify the operator in any other Government building for inquiry services.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11397]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The following information gives the average number of sick days per staff member for the calendar years 1992, 1993 and 1994; it covers non-industrial staff in my Department—excluding Health and Safety Executive, Ordnance Survey and PSA Services. Information is not available for earlier years andwill not be available for 1995 until late summer.

1992: 8.0

1993: 8.1

1994: 7.17

*Source:* OHSA sickness absence database.

## HEALTH

### NHS Administration

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure was incurred on *(a)* general and senior managers and *(b)* administrative and clerical staff salaries

in the national health service in each region in each year since 1990–91. [9035]

**Mr. Malone:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 6 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *624–25*. Provisional expenditure for 1994–95 is shown in the table.

*Hospital and community health service salary costs for managerial and administrative and clerical staff 1994–95*

*£ 000*

| | *Managerial expenditure* | *Admin and clerical expenditure* |
|---|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire region | 100,963 | 199,367 |
| Trent region | 59,387 | 139,380 |
| Anglian and Oxford region | 70,363 | 148,005 |
| North Thames region | 122,338 | 285,923 |
| South Thames region | 112,835 | 243,981 |
| South and West region | 91,730 | 183,010 |
| West Midlands region | 70,588 | 166,298 |
| North-west region | 93,474 | 212,515 |
| Special health authorities | 1,633 | 3,650 |
| Total England | 723,361 | 1,582,129 |

*Sources:*
1. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.
2. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

*Notes:*
1. The figures are provisional.
2. Salaries and wages costs incurred by family health services authorities and the special hospitals service authority (HQ London, Broadmoor, Ashworth and Rampton hospitals) and the UK transplant support service are excluded as corresponding costs are not identified on the same basis.
3. Managerial staff consist of general senior managers for health authorities and executive board members and senior managers for NHS trusts.
4. The figures are based upon gross costs including employers' National Insurance and superannuation contributions.

### Early Retirement

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collects on *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* other medical staff taking early retirement. [10931]

**Mr. Malone:** Statistical information about general practitioners and other medical staff are recorded, along with all other groups of national health service employees by the NHS Pensions Agency, and are categorised by reason of termination. This covers the type of retirement and age. Data are not readily identifiable for specific posts.

### Efficiency Scrutiny

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) by how much the total budget of the North Mersey Community Health Trust has been reduced as a result of his efficiency scrutiny; [10713]

(2) what plans he has to maintain the present efficiency scrutiny arrangements into 1996–97, and beyond. [10711]

**Mr. Malone:** The efficiency scrutiny into the burdens of paperwork in national health service trusts and health authorities will complete its report within 90 working days. There are no plans at present to extend its remit beyond the end of March 1996. The efficiency scrutiny team will report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and the Prime Minister's efficiency adviser, Sir Peter Levene, with recommendations for implementations within two years.

The aim of the efficiency scrutiny is to make proposals to cut down on unnecessary bureaucracy in the NHS so that more time and effort can be devoted to patient care. It is not within the terms of reference of the scrutiny to reduce the total budget of any particular trust. Copies of the terms of reference will be placed in the Library.

### Continuing Health Care

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his Department's analysis of the responses to HSG(95)8. [10929]

**Mr. Bowis:** Yes, in due course.

### Medical Negligence Claims

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount of money was paid out by the NHS in relation to medical negligence claims in each of the last five years. [10741]

**Mr. Horam:** Data on medical negligence alone are not collected centrally. For the estimated costs of overall clinical negligence claims, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister for Health gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 6 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *40–42*, for 1991–92 to 1993-294. Figures for 1990–91 and 1994–95 are £60 million and £155 million respectively.

### Promotional Calendars (Cost)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will indicate how much "The New NHS Number is for every 1" desktop calendar cost to the NHS Management Executive to produce and send; to how many people it was sent; and if he will list the recipients. [10736]

**Mr. Horam:** The costs of production and distribution totalled £28,000, and it was sent to 30,000 people. The recipients were general practice managers for distribution within their practices, and those officers with responsibility for implementation of the new NHS number in family health services authorities and acute hospitals.

The purpose of the calendar is to raise awareness of the new NHS number and to provide a visual reminder on a daily basis of the importance of using it. The total cost will be more than offset if as few as 1 per cent. of GP practices use the new NHS number.

### School Dental Service

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pupils in Lancashire were both inspected and re-inspected by the school dental service in each year since 1990. [10874]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally.

### Mental Health Services

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the expenditure on mental health services as a proportion of total NHS spending in each year since 1988–89. [11053]

**Mr. Bowis:** Information in the form requested is not available.

### Elderly Mentally Ill

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how may EMI beds there are in the Sunderland, Hartlepool and Durham health authority areas; and how many there were in each year since 1990. [11092]

**Mr. Horam:** Information is published annually in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library. Information for 1990–91 to 1992–93 is available for individual health authorities. For subsequent years, the information was collected by national health services trust or directly managed unit.

### Tomlinson Projects

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been allocated to Tomlinson projects in each year since the programme started; and what was the allocation in each year to each health commission in the London area. [11110]

**Mr. Malone:** The information requested on the London initiative zone programme, since it was established in 1993, is shown in the table:

*£000*

| *Family health services authority* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Barking and Havering | 1,716 | 1,927 | 2,094 |
| Camden and Islington | 2,920 | 6,036 | 7,095 |
| City and East London | 5,088 | 13,132 | 13,221 |
| Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow | 3,594 | 9,941 | 12,576 |
| Brent and Harrow | 1,210 | 3,292 | 2,048 |
| Enfield and Haringey | 2,786 | 6,808 | 5,258 |
| Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster | 2,436 | 8,182 | 6,029 |
| Redbridge and Waltham Forest | 1,318 | 3,887 | 5,876 |
| Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham | 10,750 | 11,605 | 24,214 |
| Bexley and Greenwich | 3,085 | 2,181 | 7,834 |
| Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth | 3,928 | 4,490 | 4,425 |
| Croydon | 523 | 5,147 | 5,743 |

1. LIZ funds comprise central top-sliced resources together with funds from the Thames regions and local HAs.

2. Figures are based on total LIZ plans, excluding funds carried forward from previous years.

3. The table excludes payments made centrally by the NHS executive and regions in respect of the voluntary sector initiative (1993–94 and 1994–95) and GP educational initiatives (1994–95 and 1995–96).

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the projects funded by Tomlinson moneys to date stating the budget location, name and purpose of each project. [11111]

**Mr. Malone:** Information on individual London initiative zone projects are available from the chief executives of the health authorities concerned. These are:

Camden and Islington HA

Brent and Harrow HA

East London and the City HA

Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster HA

Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA

Enfield HA

New River HA

Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA

Croydon HA

Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA

Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA

Bexley and Greenwich HA

Barking and Havering HA

### Earnings

**Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS employees earn less than £4 an hour. [11152]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally.

### Surgical Beds

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current ratio of surgical beds to head of population *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the northern region and *(c)* at Sunderland general hospital. [11137]

**Mr. Horam:** The information available centrally is shown.

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *England* | |
| Annual average daily available beds | 144,803 |
| Population (mid 1994) | 48,707,459 |
| Ratio (beds per 10,000 population) | 29.7 |
| *Northern Regional Health Authority* | |
| Annual average daily available beds | 10,184 |
| Population (mid 1994) | 2,927,525 |
| Ratio (beds per 10,000 population) | 34.8 |
| *City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust* | |
| Annual average daily available beds | 1,044 |
| Population (mid 1994) | n/a |
| Ratio (beds per 10,000 population) | n/a |

Data on bed availability are collected by broad ward classification. "Surgical beds" has therefore been interpreted as "General and acute" which comprises beds for general patients (including the elderly), the younger physically disabled, neonatal cots not in maternity wards and beds for the terminally ill or those receiving palliative care.

### Sunderland Hospitals

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which premises previously operated by Sunderland Hospitals NHS trust have been deemed surplus to requirements in the trust's site and services review; [11150]

(2) what is the annual maintenance cost of the empty hospital and buildings formerly used by Sunderland City Hospitals NHS trust. [11138]

**Mr. Horam:** These are matters for City Hospitals Sunderland NHS trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. David Graham, chairman of the trust for details.

### Personal Information

**Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research he has evaluated into patients' willingness to share personal health information with NHS administrators; and what studies into patients' views on access to their data by non-clinical staff he proposes to commission; [11472]

(2) what arrangements are in place for patients to give unambiguous consent for the sharing of their identifiable personal health information; and what plans he has to alter such arrangements; [11471]

**Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given when preparing his guidance booklet for the NHS on the protection of patient information to the principle of obtaining informed consent from patients for the sharing of their identifiable personal health information; [1190]

(4) to what extent the Department requires health service bodies to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* control the practice of NHS administrative personnel accessing identifiable personal health information; and if he will make a statement. [11473]

**Mr. Horam:** We issued a consultation document on the protection of patient information in 1994 and have taken into account the many responses received, including from patients' organisations. We shall shortly be promulgating detailed guidance to the national health service. All NHS bodies and staff have a legal duty to keep patient information confidential. This is also a patients charter requirement.

**Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what penalties exist for unauthorised access to identifiable patient health data; and on how many occasions these penalties have been used in each of the last three years. [11475]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *42–43*. The Department of Health does not hold figures about the imposition of legal penalties in such circumstances. National health service employers are responsible for any disciplinary action against staff.

### Surgical Wards

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of dedicated surgical wards required at Sunderland district general hospital to meet the needs of the population of Sunderland and north Easington. [11139]

**Mr. Horam:** This is a matter for Sunderland health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. George Bedell, chairman of the authority, for details.

### NHS Trusts

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *553*, how many trusts have been assessed in respect of their long-term financial viability; and what has been the outcome in each case. [11115]

**Mr. Horam:** The financial viability of all trusts is assessed as a part of each trust's annual business planning cycle. The outcome in the vast majority of cases has been the continued existence of the trusts as they were established.

Trusts are merged or reconfigured for a number of operational reasons. Those which have resulted largely from concerns over their long-term financial viability are:

West Dorset Community Health NHS trust with West Dorset Mental Health NHS trust to form the Dorset Community NHS trust.

Royal Liverpool University NHS trust and Broadgreen NHS trust to form Royal Liverpool University and Broadgreen NHS trust.

There are also two further proposals subject to public consultation for the following trusts:

Louth and District Healthcare NHS trust and Lincoln Hospital NHS trust.

Royal Free NHS trust and the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital NHS trust.

### Public Information Lines

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *812*, if he will list those companies currently operating health information lines on behalf of his Department, the value of the contracts involving these companies and the period of their duration. [11145]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *13–14*. The additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *227*, if he will make a statement indicating the number of calls that have been made to the health information service on a regional health authority basis; and what has been the cost of operating and publicising the health information service to each of the regional health authorities. [11143]

**Mr. Horam:** Details of the number of calls received by the health information service, on a regional basis, since its establishment in April 1992 to the end of December 1995, and details of the cost of providing the health information service, on a national basis, for the financial years 1992–93 to 1995–96, are shown in the tables.

*Number of calls received by the Health Information Service between April 1992 and December 1995*

| | *1992 calls received* | *1993 calls received* | *1994 calls received* | *1995 calls received* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire | 13,415 | 16,394 | 60,358 | 73,958 |
| Trent | 1,665 | 9,366 | 14,571 | 32,009 |

*Number of calls received by the Health Information Service between April 1992 and December 1995*

| | 1992 calls received | 1993 calls received | 1994 calls received | 1995 calls received |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anglia and Oxford | 1,716 | 10,674 | 16,499 | 28,998 |
| North Thames | 5,113 | 20,350 | 30,434 | 62,748 |
| South Thames | 942 | 14,603 | 18,397 | 57,923 |
| West Midlands | 1,545 | 8,370 | 29,394 | 48,886 |
| North and West | 17,059 | 33,107 | 82,541 | 102,637 |
| South and West | 5,839 | 17,893 | 21,398 | 50,028 |
| Pan-Thames[1] | 3,958 | 5,536 | 1,812 | — |
| Total | 51,252 | 136,293 | 275,404 | 457,187 |

[1] College of Health National Waiting Times Helpline—discontinued as part of the Health Information Service.

*Cost of providing the health information service, on regional basis between 1992–93 and 1995–96*

| Region | 1992–93 £ | 1993–94 £ | 1994–95 £ | 1995–96 £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire | 288,201 | 260,000 | 276,223 | 346,120 |
| Trent | 177,181 | 137,859 | 149,637 | 155,193 |
| Anglia and Oxford | 268,000 | 268,000 | 308,000 | 308,000 |
| North Thames | 142,500 | 236,200 | 243,608 | 237,629 |
| South Thames | n/a | 221,714 | 240,777 | 255,210 |
| West Midlands | 102,965 | 165,277 | 151,156 | 241,243 |
| North and West | 331,296 | 344,548 | 421,037 | 573,371 |
| South and West | 197,500 | 248,400 | 254,900 | 221,000 |
| Total | 1,507,643 | 1,881,998 | 2,045,338 | 2,337,766 |

### Intensive Care Beds

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive care *(a)* beds and *(b)* admissions there were for (i) infants, (ii) children and (iii) adults in each health region in each year since 1987. [11197]

**Mr. Horam:** The information available centrally is published in "Bed availability for England" and "Ordinary and day case admissions for England", both of which are available in the Library.

### Speech and Language Therapy

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of expenditure by each health authority in England and Wales for speech and language therapy services for *(a)* children with a record of needs and *(b)* children without a record of needs in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1994. [11589]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not available centrally.

### Childhood Cancer Study

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the United Kingdom childhood cancer study organised by the United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee for Cancer Research is expected to be completed; when the research project was first started; if his Department will ensure that the findings of the report are widely disseminated; and what is the total amount that his Department is contributing to the project. [10662]

**Mr. Horam:** The United Kingdom childhood cancer study organised by the United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee on Cancer Research commenced in April 1992, following preliminary studies from 1 January 1992 to 31 March 1992.

Field work and the collection of data are expected to be completed by the end of 1997 with subsequent analysis of the data.

The findings of the whole report will be submitted for publication in peer reviewed scientific journals. The UKCCCR will also disseminate the results more widely after publication.

The total amount that the Department of Health is contributing to the project is currently £635,853.

### Employment of Children

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many responses to the "Employment of Children" consultation document have so far been received; if he will publish them, what action he will take after the close of consultations; and if he will make a statement. [11544]

**Mr. Bowis:** To date, some 40 responses have been received. I have no plans to publish them. Future action will take into account the views expressed in response to the consultation.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11337]

**Mr. Horam:** The available absenteeism rates for the Department of Health in the years 1992, 1993 and 1994 are shown in the table.

| Year | Number of days sickness absence per staff year |
|---|---|
| 1992 | 9.4 |
| 1993 | 9.7 |
| 1994 | 8.9 |

Information is not available for 1995 nor for the years prior to 1992.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11338]

**Mr. Horam:** Annual telephone costs incurred by the Department and its agencies are as follows:

1990–91: £4,739,561

1991–92: £3,017,000

1992–93: £3,490,000

1993–94: £3,419,000

1994–95: £2,951,740

1995–96: £2,914,000 Estimated outturn

1996–97: £3,734,000 Forecast

The figure for 1996–97 additionally includes the telephone costs of approximately 1,100 staff in the eight new national health service executive regional offices at seven separate sites.

Separate figures for the Department of Health are not available before 1990–91 since such costs were incurred by the combined Departments of Health and of Social Security.

No central records are available for the telephone costs of non-departmental public bodies.

Internal telephone directors are available to all staff in the Department, its agencies, and non-departmental public bodies.

### Transplant Patients

**Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to health authorities and trusts in the light of the recent case of Mr. Peter Sumners; if he will conduct an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the kidney transplant to Mr. Peter Sumners; what steps he has taken to minimise the risk to transplant patients in the light of the experience of Mr. Peter Sumners; and if he will make a statement. [11832]

**Mr. Horam:** The question of whether to conduct an investigation into this case, which was as a result of transplant which took place in 1986, is for the local trust. The decision about the suitability of a donor organ for transplant is a clinical one; however, we are confident that the stringent protocols that are now in place will exclude the possibility of such an incident in the future.

### Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

**Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has evaluated regarding the possible causes of MRSA; and what advice he has issued to doctors regarding prescribing practice in the light of increases in the incidence of MRSA outbreaks. [11834]

**Mr. Horam:** Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus is the term used for strains on the bacterium staphylococcus aureus which have become resistant, principally to methicillin, but also to other antibiotics. Clinicians are expected to consider a number of factors, including resistance to infection, before prescribing antibiotics for a patient.

**Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of *(a)* beds and *(b)* wards closed and i) admissions and (ii) operations postponed or cancelled as a result of outbreaks of MRSA. [11833]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

**Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the financial cost of MRSA in terms of isolating and treating patients; and what action he is taking to reduce or control the incidence of MRSA outbreaks. [11835]

**Mr. Horam:** Information on the costs of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) on 22 January, *Official Report*,columns *16–17* for information on the action the Department is taking to reduce or control the incidence of outbreaks of MRSA.

### Meningitis

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to ensure early diagnosis of and fast treatment for bacterial meningitis. [11726]

**Mr. Horam:** Guidance on the early management and treatment of cases and contacts of meningitis has been issued by the Department of Health, the Public Health Laboratory Service and the National Meningitis Trust, which receive funding from the Department of Health. In October 1995, the chief medical officer wrote to all doctors and health authorities alerting them to the expected winter rise in cases of meningococcal infection and reminding doctors of the benefits of early administration of benzylpenicillin. Directors of public health were reminded in November of the need for local plans to respond to outbreaks of meningococcal infection, especially those involving schools. Since issuing its guidelines on control of meningococcal infection in 1989, the PHLS has issued regular updates. The guidelines are sent to all DPHs and local consultants in communicable disease control, the most recent being published in the communicable disease report of 8 December 1995.

The Department and the National Meningitis Trust have collaborated in providing an information leaflet for parents of small children and for teenagers. The leaflet is included in the college bag for students, a group where there is a higher risk of meningitis than for other adults.

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make available vaccination against bacterial meningitis for all children. [11727]

**Mr. Horam:** There is no vaccine available against the most common form of meningococcal infection, meningitis group B. Vaccine is available against group C meningitis but this vaccine is not appropriate for use on a routine basis. The vaccine is not effective in children under age two, the group at highest risk of group C meningitis, and in older individuals the protection it provides is only short lived. Because the available vaccine is not very effective, the independent expert committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which advises the United Kingdom Health Departments, does not recommend the meningitis C vaccine for general immunisation. The vaccine may be used in clearly identified target groups, such as school contacts, whenever local circumstances indicate. No country in the world uses this vaccine for all children.

The Department of Health has invested considerable resources in trials of new meningococcal vaccines.

Haemophilus influenzae b (Hib) used to be the most common form of bacterial meningitis in the under-fives, but Hib meningitis has now been virtually eliminated since the introduction of Hib vaccine into the childhood immunisation programme in 1992.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Democratic Accountability

9. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to improve the democratic accountability of the Northern Ireland Office. [9634]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** Our overall objective is, as part of a three-stranded process, to establish locally accountable political arrangements in Northern Ireland, on a widely accepted basis.

Until there is agreement on such arrangements and they are in place, I want to improve the democratic accountability of the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments. I need therefore to consult the Northern Ireland parties which I shall shortly do. The remit of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee is, for example, an area with a promising potential.

### Republican Terrorism

10. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* violent attacks and *(b)* murders have been committed by republican terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland in the last year. [9635]

**Sir John Wheeler:** In the period 15 January to 14 January 1996 there were 225 punishment attacks, of which 144 have been attributed to republican groups. Over the same period there have been 10 terrorist-related deaths, of which eight have been attributed to republican groups.

### Arms and Explosives

12. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current positions taken by paramilitary organisations in Ulster on the surrender of weapons. [9637]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The international body concluded that the paramilitaries will not decommission any arms prior to all-party negotiaions. We see no sufficient reason why they should not begin. But no one should be allowed to block the path of peace. That is why we hope that an elective process may now be considered by the parties which, together with the recommendations the body has made, may well offer an alternative means to generating the necessary confidence which the body found to be lacking.

### Paramilitary Murders

13. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will give the number of murders committed in Northeren Ireland involving the use of firearms since the declaration of a ceasefire by paramilitary organisations in the Province. [9638]

**Sir John Wheeler:** Since the Provisional IRA ceasefire on 1 September 1994 there have been 17 murders committed in Northern Ireland which involved the use of firearms. Of these, 10 have been categorised by the RUC as having a terrosit involvement.

### Peace Process

14. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent developments in the peace process. [9639]

20. **Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current political situation in Northern Ireland and recent progress on the peace process. [9646]

21. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made on the Government's "twin-track" approach to the Northern Ireland peace process [9647]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I refer the hon. member to the replies I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and to the hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice).

19. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the impact of the peace process on living standards in the Province. [9644]

**Mr. Ancram:** It is not possible to link the peace process directly to any general measure of the standard of living in Northern Ireland. however, in the first 12 months after the ceasefire employment increased by almost 11,000—1.9 per cent.—to the highest level ever recorded; unemployment fell by just over 9,000—9.5 per cent.—to its lowest level for 14 years and house prices increased, on average, by 5 per cent.

### Inward Investment

15. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current annual level of inward investment in Northern Ireland; and what was the level prior to the ceasefire. [9640]

**Mr. Ancram:** During the nine months of the current financial year to 31 December 1995 Northern Ireland has secured eight inward investment projects promoting 2,306 jobs. In the 12 months of 1994–95 there were 10 projects promoting 1,969 jobs, and in the 12 months of 1993–94 there were 13 projects promoting 2,309 jobs.

### Food Companies

16. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what grants are available to food companies wishing to conduct inward investment in Northern Ireland. [9641]

**Mr. Ancram:** The range of grants available to food companies wishing to invest in Northern Ireland is the same as that for any other potential inward investor engaged in manufacturing industry or in internationally tradeable services.

### Mitchell Commission

17. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of the Mitchell Commission. [9642]

25. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy in respect of the form the decommissioning of weapons and ordnance by paramilitary groups should take; and if he will make a statement. [9651]

28. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made on the decommissioning of paramilitary arms. [9655]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I refer hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink).

### Shootings and Beatings

18. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current levels of shootings and punishment beatings in Northern Ireland. [9643]

**Sir John Wheeler:** I strongly condemn these wicked attacks on people. Such attacks divide the community and destroy the trust in Northern Ireland. The Government's position is clear. These murders, senseless shootings and attacks are appalling and must cease. There is no excuse of any kind. I am in no doubt that terrorists are involved in all such incidents and I call on all those genuinely committed to peaceful methods unreservedly to condemn such acts.

### Economic Prospects

22. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the prospects for the economy of Northern Ireland during 1996. [9648]

**Mr. Ancram:** Prospects for the Northern Ireland economy are very encouraging. Business confidence is high, employment is at record levels and output and trade are increasing. With continuing peace we can look forward to this excellent progress being maintained.

### Pensioners

23. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* pensioners on income support in Northern Ireland. [9649]

**Mr. Moss:** The latest available figures show that at September 1994 there were 219,109 pensioners in Northern Ireland and at November 1995 there were 65,931 pensioners—excluding partners over pensionable age—in receipt of income support.

### Licensed Weapons

24. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many licensed weapons were in private hands in Northern Ireland; and what proportion of these weapons are owned by *(a)* Catholics and *(b)* Protestants. [9650]

**Sir John Wheeler:** At 30 November 1995 there were a total of 133,869 weapons held on 88,092 firearms certificates received under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981.

There is no information held which would indicate the religious background of an applicant.

### Housing Executive

26. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future proposals involving the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. [9652]

**Mr. Moss:** The housing policy review entitled "Building on Success" was published on 19 December and copies placed in the Library. The conclusions confirm the Executive's role as a single, comprehensive, regional housing authority for Northern Ireland, and also propose to strengthen and enhance that role. I would welcome comments on those proposals by 31 March.

### Elderly Physically Handicapped

27. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the care of the elderly physically handicapped in Northern Ireland. [9653]

**Mr. Moss:** Care services for elderly physically disabled, and other vulnerable people, in Northern Ireland are provided on the basis of individual assessed health and personal social services care needs. In securing the delivery of services which respond flexibly and sensitively to the needs of individuals, and the relatives and friends who care for them, boards are expected to ensure that priority is given to those in greatest need and to secure value for money.

### Nursery Education

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many four-year-olds are currently receiving education; what proportion of their age group this represents; what is the cost to public funds; and if he will make a statement. [10168]

**Mr. Ancram:** Available statistics relate to pupils' age at 1 July. 26,089 four-year-olds were receiving education at the 1995 census date. This represents 100 per cent. of the four-year-old age group, as this is the age of commencement of compulsory schooling. The cost to public funds for the education of four-year-olds cannot be separately identified.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11401]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The estimate number of days absence for non-industrial staff in *(d)* 1993–94 was 335,780 and in *(e)* 1994–95 was 362,438. Information for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90 and *(c)* 1991–92 is not available

and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The estimated number of days lost in the first six months of 1995–96 was 165,765.

### Child Care

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average money spent per capita on child care in Northern Ireland; and what is the figure for English local authorities. [10311]

**Mr. Moss:** The information is not available in the form requested. HPSS bodies produce statements in support of the annual accounts which provide supplementary analyses of the expenditure in the accounts over programme of care. One programme of care is family and child care. The total expenditure on this category in Northern Ireland for 1993–94 amounted to £44 million. This expenditure figure has been related to the child population in Northern Ireland 1993 to give an average cost per child of £100. The equivalent figure for English local authorities is not held centrally.

### Care of the Elderly

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidelines he has issued about the provision of care to the elderly living in the community. [10565]

**Mr. Moss:** Policy and practice guidance has been issued by my Department to health and social services boards in relation to their community care responsibilities. "People First: Community Care In Northern Ireland in the 1990s" was issued in March 1990 and practice guidance on care management and assessment was issued in August 1991. In addition, the social services inspectorate produced a report on assessment and care management arrangements in Northern Ireland in June 1995.

### Radioactive Land

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now publish and place in the Library a map showing the changing areas of land in Northern Ireland to which the restrictions consequent upon the Chernobyl incident apply, indicating the dates of the different changes and the levels of radioactivity at each such date in those areas at the latest available date; and when he estimates all the remaining restrictions will be removed. [9515]

**Mr. Ancram:** On each occasion that derestriction takes place a press release is issued along with a small scale map outlining the changes per derestriction. Arrangements have been made to have copies of these maps placed in the Library. Derestriction is based on monitoring levels of radioactivity in live sheep and can be considered only where the levels are found to be below the action level of 1,000 becquerels per kilogramme.

Although the continued downward trend is encouraging, it is not possible to indicate at this time when all restrictions may be removed.

**Mr. Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish and place in the Library a map showing the area and land use, of the areas of land in Northern Ireland to which the restrictions consequent upon the Chernobyl incident have applied; and what uptake of radioactive material by trees in such areas there has been. [9516]

**Mr. Ancram:** On each occasion that derestriction takes place a press release is issued, along with a small-scale map outlining the changes. Arrangements have been made to have copies of these maps placed in the Library. These maps do not indicate the land use, which in the main is rough grazing with some forestry. There is no data available on uptake of radioactive material by trees.

### Incontinence Pads

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is in relation to the supply of incontinence pads to those who require them because of disability; what plans he has to review these arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [9210]

**Mr. Moss:** The organisation of continence services in Northern Ireland and the manner in which they are delivered, including the provision of incontinence pads, are matters for health and social services boards and trusts. They are under a general obligation to provide these services where the need exists and in the light of their resources and priorities. There are no current plans to review these arrangements.

### Fire Authority

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to change the membership of the Fire Authority; and if he will ensure that present representation from local authorities is maintained. [9862]

**Mr. Moss:** I am currently reviewing the constitution of the Fire Authority. No decision has yet been taken, but there will be full consideration about any proposed changes.

### Rural College, Draperstown

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons are employed at the Rural college at Draperstown, County Londonderry; how many are *(a)* Catholics and *(b)* Protestants; and if he will make a statement. [9860]

**Mr. Ancram:** Staff at the Rural college, Draperstown are employed directly by the college. I am therefore not in a position to answer the question.

### Six Mile Water (Effluent)

**Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many consented discharges are in operation on the Six Mile Water; and what was the river flow regime used in granting these consent discharges. [9915]

**Mr. Moss:** Four consents granted by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland under the Water Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 for effluent discharges to the Six Mile Water are currently in operation. The consents are based on the low flow in the river, known as the Q95, which is the flow exceeded for 95 per cent. of the time.

### Water and Sewerage Systems

**Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* water treatment plants and *(b)* sewage treatment plants are operating in County Antrim. [9914]

**Mr. Moss:** The Department of the Environment's Water Executive operates 17 water treatment works and 158 sewage treatment works in County Antrim.

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to improve the water and sewerage systems serving *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Mid Ulster. [10575]

**Mr. Moss:** The Water Executive will continue the programme of improvements commenced six years ago to enable it to meet the standards set by EC directives on drinking water quality, urban waste water treatment and bathing waters. New sources of water supply will be developed and refinements made to the water distribution system and sewerage system to make them more effective in dealing with current and future demand for services. On top of the £370 million already spent in the last six years on these objectives throughout Northern Ireland a further £66 million has been committed for the 1996–97 year. In Mid-Ulster planned capital investment over the next five years amounts to £35 million with particular emphasis being placed on strengthening the water supply infrastructure serving the towns of Omagh and Cookstown.

### Power Stations

**Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many power stations in Northern Ireland use aluminium sulphate in the treatment of water used in cooling towers; and what arrangements are in place for the disposal of the residue. [9913]

**Mr. Moss:** None of the four power stations in Northern Ireland use towers for cooling water. Consequently, aluminium sulphate is not used for this purpose.

### Road Deaths and Injuries

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of road deaths and serious injuries in the years 1994 and 1995. [10577]

**Mr. Moss:** The number of road users killed in 1994 was 157 and the provisional figures for 1995 is 144. The number seriously injured in 1994 was 1,648 and the provisional figure for the 11 months to 30 November 1995 is 1,520. good progress is being made towards achieving the Northern Ireland road safety target of reducing the number of people killed and seriously injured on Northern Ireland's roads by one third, compared with the average for 1981 to 1985, by the year 2000.

### Health Boards (Private Finance Initiative)

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many private finance initiative schemes he *(a)* has agreed and *(b)* is considering in respect of Northern Ireland health boards. [10566]

**Sir John Wheeler:** No scheme under the private finance initiative has been approved to date in the Northern Ireland health boards. One scheme has been approved to proceed to tender stage and eight other cases are currently under consideration which may lead to private finance solutions.

### Psychiatric Community Nurses

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the change in the number of psychiatric community nurses since 1989 in each of the Northern Ireland health boards. [10564]

**Mr. Moss:** The information is as follows:

*Community psychiatric nurses for each health board in Northern Ireland*

| | Eastern Board | | Northern Board | | Southern Board | | Western Board | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | WTE | Number | WTE | Number | WTE | Number | WTE |
| 1991 | 61 | 61.00 | 12 | 12.00 | 16 | 16.00 | 26 | 26.00 |
| 1992 | 67 | 66.80 | 18 | 18.00 | 13 | 13.00 | 24 | 24.00 |
| 1993 | 72 | 72.00 | 24 | 24.00 | 18 | 18.00 | 32 | 32.00 |
| 1994 | 68 | 66.80 | 22 | 22.00 | 16 | 16.00 | 40 | 40.00 |
| 1995 | 66 | 65.50 | 26 | 25.40 | 17 | 17.00 | 40 | 39.60 |

WTE = Whole time equivalent. Number = Head count (staff in post).

### General Practitioner Fundholding

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evaluation has been made of the results of the general practitioner fundholding initiative in the west of the Province. [10573]

**Mr. Moss:** The Western health and social services board is responsible for the monitoring of the GP fundholding scheme within its area and no separate evaluation of the scheme's operation there has been undertaken. On the basis of monitoring reports supplied by the board, I am satisfied that the scheme is working well in the Western board area and that patients of fundholding GPs are receiving a high standard of service.

### Homelessness

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if accommodation approved by the Northern Ireland tourist board is used by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to accommodate the homeless. [10316]

**Mr. Moss:** This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, whose chief executive has advised me that he is aware of one establishment approved by the Northern Ireland tourist board and used by the Executive to accommodate the homeless. While tourist board approval may exist for some other properties used by the Executive for similar purposes, a property's suitability is

determined by the Executive on the basis of its own technical inspections and tourist board approved status is neither a pre-requisite nor the subject of inquiry by the Executive. In the light of recent interest, I understand that the chief executives of the tourist board and the Executive will be meeting to discuss these matters.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations have been received about the need for proper liaison between the RUC, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Northern Ireland tourist board and health and social services authorities on the placement of homeless families or individuals; and what response has been given. [10317]

**Mr. Moss:** I understand that a representation has been made to my noble friend who has responsibility for the Department of Economic Development about liaison between the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and other agencies on the placement of homeless applicants including instances where the accommodation used by the Housing Executive has attained the tourist board's approval status. The reply indicated that there was no evidence that the standard of accommodation in tourist board approved establishments has deteriorated as a result of the placing of homeless there and that present liaison arrangements were satisfactory.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about liaison arrangements between the RUC, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the health and social services authorities on the placement of homeless people with a criminal record. [10315]

**Mr. Moss:** This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose chief executive has advised me that, when considering both the temporary and permanent housing needs of homeless applicants, the Executive will liaise where appropriate with the RUC, the Health and Social Services Board and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. Liaison arrangements operate on a case by case basis at local level between the Executive's district office staff and their counterparts in the agencies involved.

Regional inter-agency meetings involving the Executive, the Health and Social Services Board and the Probation Board are held at least twice a year to discuss general issues relating to homelessness.

## WALES

### Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is, in respect of the nursery voucher scheme in Wales, *(a)* the amount of new money he intends to make available, *(b)* the amount he intends to reduce from the budget allocation for local authorities, *(c)* the cost of providing a full time place for a four-year-old pupil, *(d)* the number of four-year-olds taking up nursery places in April 1997, *(e)* the number of places he estimates (i) local authorities, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) the private sector will provide and *(f)* the number of places available in Ysgolion Meithrin. [9047]

**Mr. Richards:** The total cost of the scheme in 1997–98 is not expected to exceed £43 million. The scheme will be funded by a mixture of new money and a proportion of present local authority expenditure on provision for four-year-olds in the maintained sector. There will be a one-off transfer of money from the local authorities total, but this will be at the all Wales level and not deducted from individual authorities' budgets. The maximum amount of this transfer will not exceed a sum equivalent to the value of the voucher multiplied by the number of four-year-olds receiving education in the maintained sector. A final decision on the relevant levels of new money and present expenditure funding will be taken in the context of the public expenditure settlement for 1997–98.

The cost of providing a full-time place for a four-year-old pupil will vary according to the sort of provision made and the sector in which it is made.

The number of four-year-olds taking up places in April 1997 will depend on parental choice, though I would not expect it to be less than current levels. The sectors in which places are taken up will also depend on parental choice, which will be enhanced by the voucher scheme.

### Regeneration Scheme (Caernarfon)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the expenditure to date under the provision of the 1992 regeneration scheme for the town of Caernarfon; and how many new jobs have so far been facilitated by this expenditure. [9335]

**Mr. Hague:** The Welsh Office's strategic development scheme has contributed £1.11 million for the period 1993–94 to 1994–95 towards environmental improvements and infrastructure works in Caernarfon. The Welsh Development Agency has contributed £2.91 million for the same period. Information on the number of jobs created to date is not available. However, the agency will shortly be conducting an evaluation to determine the number of jobs created and other results of the regeneration programme.

### Unemployment

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in *(a)* Alyn and Deeside and *(b)* Clwyd are (i) long-term unemployed and (ii) unemployed in the age group 18 to 24 years; and if he will make a statement. [9554]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** In October 1995 the number of claimants in the Alyn and Deeside constituency who were long-term unemployed—over 52 weeks—was 617; the number of claimants in the age group 18 to 24 years was 621. The corresponding figures for Clwyd were 3,794 and 3,780, respectively. Over the last two years, the numbers in each of these categories have fallen by between a fifth and a third.

### Helplines

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the helplines, or schemes which include a helpline service, for which his Department provides any funding, stating which are *(a)* independent organisations, *(b)* run by his Department or agencies of his Department or *(c)* of another classification; how many

calls each received in each of the last five years; and how much money each received from his Department in each of the last five years. [9802]

**Mr. Hague:** Information in the format requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In 1995–96, my Department is funding the following helplines run by external organisations.

| *Organisation* | *Helpline* | *Welsh office funding in 1995–96 £* |
|---|---|---|
| ADAS | Countryside and Agricultural Information Service (CAIS) | Not separately identified |
| Arena Network | Help and advice on environmental issues for businesses | 1,100 |
| 8 business development consortia | Business connect | [1]500,000 |
| Cardiff Bay Development Corporation | Groundwater enquiry line | Not separately identified |
| Carmarthen Area Blind Society | Helpline for the visually impaired | Not separately identified |
| Childline Cymru/Wales | Childline | 73,000 |
| Clwyd Social Services Department | Carers helpline | 6,000 |
| County Hospital, Pontypool | Cardiac rehabilitation project | separately identified |
| Gwent Training and Enterprise Council | Adult prospects | 3,250 |
| Gwynedd Carers Outreach | Carers helpline | Not separately identified |
| Healthcare Management Information Services | Health Information Wales | 63,000 |
| Healthcare Management Information Services | Health Information Wales—Waiting Times Information Service | 1,000 |
| Mid Glamorgan Carers Support Group | Carers helpline | Not separately identified |
| Network Scotland (on behalf of all UK Health Departments) | National AIDS and Drugs Helpline | 34,000 |
| Newport MIND | Crisis helpline | 500 |
| Pennell Kerr Forster | Helpline for GP fundholders with accounting queries | 300 |
| Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Service, Merthyr | Rape and sexual abuse helpline | Not separately identified |
| South Glamorgan Social Services Department | Community Alcohol Team helpline | 1,800 |
| Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS) | Support helpline | 10,700 |
| West Glamorgan Health Authority | National Incontinence Helpline 1996 | 200 |
| West Wales Energy Group | Local energy advice | Not separately identified |

[1] This represents Welsh Office support in 1995–96 for the development of the Business Connect network, including information technology.

In addition, my Department operates the following helplines:

| *Helpline* | *Cost to Welsh Office in 1995–96* | *Number of calls in 1995–96 (estimate)* |
|---|---|---|
| Citizen's charter freephone | 275 | 100 |
| Help and advice on energy efficiency | 1,500 | 3,000 |

## Schools (Deficit Budgets)

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the grant-maintained and *(b)* the locally-managed schools which had deficit budgets in the last financial year for which information is available, indicating in each case the number of years deficits have been carried over, the measures each school has been asked to take to get rid of the deficits and the legal obligations on school governors if the deficits are not removed. [9475]

**Mr. Richards** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The information requested is as follows:

The audited accounts for 1994–95 show that two grant-maintained schools—Cwmcarn in Gwent and Bishop Vaughan Catholic comprehensive in West Glamorgan—had deficits at the end of March 1995. This is the first year in which Bishop Vaughan had a deficit; that for Cwmcarn was carried over from 1993–94.

The financial memorandum agreed between the Welsh Office and grant-maintained schools says that governing bodies must plan and conduct their affairs so as to remain solvent. If it becomes apparent to its governors that their school is in overall deficit, they must inform the Welsh Office. Officials then discuss with the school a strategy to extinguish the deficit. The Department is currently in discussion with both schools on action appropriate to eliminate the deficits.

Should the governing body fail to implement the agreed strategy, then it is open to the Secretary of State to appoint additional governors to the governing body in accordance with section 67 of the Education Act 1993. If, however, it is his opinion that the governing body's actions are prejudicial to the provision of education at the school then, under section 64 of the 1993 Act, he can replace all or any of the first governors. In extreme cases, where the Secretary of State is of the view that the school is

unsuitable to continue, he can, under section 109 of the Act, give the school notice of his proposed date for cessation of his duty to maintain the school.

As regards LEA-maintained schools, the position as detailed in the section 42 outturn statements for the period 1990–91 to 1994–95 is as follows:

| *Local Education Authority* | *Number of years in which school has had a deficit* |
|---|---|
| *CLWYD* | |
| *Primary schools* | |
| St. Ethelwood's, Shotton | 2 |
| Llanarmon-yn-Ial | 3 |
| *Secondary schools* | |
| Denbigh High School | 2 |
| *Special schools* | |
| Gwersyllt | 1 |
| *DYFED* | |
| *Primary schools* | |
| Gorslas | 1 |
| Ffarmers | 1 |
| Llanboidy | 1 |
| Llangennech Infants | 1 |
| Crymych | 1 |
| Llanarth | 1 |
| Blaenporth | 1 |
| Fishguard Juniors | 2 |
| Mynachlogddu | 2 |
| Narberth | 2 |
| Tregaron | 2 |
| Mathry | 2 |
| Bwlchygroes | 3 |
| Llangeitho | 3 |
| Llandyfaelog | 3 |
| Llangynin | 4 |
| Ffairfach | 4 |
| Coedmor | 4 |
| Alltwalis | 4 |
| New Inn | 4 |
| Pencader | 4 |
| Llansaint | 4 |
| Moylegrove | 4 |
| Llannon | 4 |
| Ysbyty Ystwyth | 4 |
| Angle | 4 |
| Llangwm | 4 |
| *Secondary schools* | |
| Ysgol Dewi Sant | 1 |
| Lampeter | 1 |
| Glanymor | 1 |
| St. John Lloyd RC | 1 |
| Ysgol Pantycelyn | 2 |
| Fishguard | 2 |
| Graig | 2 |
| *GWENT* | |
| *Primary schools* | |
| Brynglas J and I | 1 |
| Bryngwyn J and I | 1 |
| Cefn Fforest Junior | 1 |
| Hillside J and I | 1 |
| Ringland Junior | 1 |
| Varteg J and I | 1 |
| Llanyravon J and I | 2 |
| *GWYNEDD* | |
| *Primary schools* | |
| Nebo | 1 |
| Trefriw | 1 |
| Brynsiencyn | 1 |
| Pencarnisiog | 1 |
| Faenol | 2 |
| Llangoed | 3 |
| *Secondary schools* | |
| Friars | 2 |
| *Special schools* | |
| Y Gogarth | 1 |
| *MID GLAMORGAN* | |
| *Primary schools* | |
| Cwmaman Infants | 1 |
| YGG Abercynon | 1 |
| Cwmbach Church Primary | 1 |
| Blaen-y-Cwm | 1 |
| Cymer Infants | 1 |
| Dunraven | 1 |
| Llwynpia | 1 |
| Pentre | 1 |
| Penyrenglyn Infants | 1 |
| YGG Ynyswen | 1 |
| Coed yr Esgob | 1 |
| Gellideg Infants | 1 |
| Gellifaelog | 1 |
| Goetre Infants | 1 |
| Ynysowen | 1 |
| YG Rhyd y Grug | 1 |
| St. Illtyd's | 1 |
| St. Brides C in W | 1 |
| Bargoed Infants | 1 |
| Hengoed Primary | 1 |
| Nant y Parc | 1 |
| Abertaf | 2 |
| Blaenrhondda | 2 |
| Llangewydd | 4 |
| Pencoed Juniors | 4 |
| Trallwng Infants | 5 |
| *Secondary schools* | |
| YG Rhydfelen | 1 |
| Cardinal Newman RC | 1 |
| Vaynor and Penderyn | 1 |
| POWYS | |
| *Primary schools* | |
| Archdeacon Griffiths | 1 |
| Builth Wells | 1 |
| Gungrog C in W | 1 |
| Llandinam | 1 |
| Llanfaes | 1 |
| Llangynidr | 1 |
| Oldford Infants | 1 |
| Rhayader C in W | 1 |
| Talgarth | 1 |
| Tregynon | 1 |
| Whitton (Aided) | 1 |
| Castle Caereinion C in W | 2 |
| Hay-on-Wye | 2 |
| Ladywell Green N and I | 2 |
| Llangorse C in W | 2 |
| Nantmel C in W | 2 |
| Ysgol Maesydre | 2 |
| Cwmdu C in W | 3 |
| Cwmtwrch | 3 |
| Guilsfield | 3 |
| Montgomery C in W | 3 |
| Mount St. Juniors | 3 |
| Trecastle | 3 |
| Trefonnen C in W | 3 |
| Forden C in W | 4 |

| Local Education Authority | Number of years in which school has had a deficit |
|---|---|
| Llangurig | 4 |
| Manafon C in W | 4 |
| Radnor Valley | 4 |
| Banw | 5 |
| Clyro | 5 |
| Maesyrhandir | 5 |
| Sarn C in W (Aided) | 5 |
| *Secondary schools* | |
| Gwernyfed | 1 |
| Ysgol Bro Ddyfi | 1 |
| Maesydderwen | 1 |
| Crickhowell | 2 |
| *South Glamorgan* | |
| *Primary schools* | |
| Pendoylan C in W | 1 |
| St. David's (Vale) | 1 |
| Ysgol Sant Curig | 1 |
| Fairfield | 3 |
| *Secondary schools* | |
| Radyr | 2 |
| Llanedeyrn | 4 |

Local management of schools schemes in general prohibit governing bodies from planning deliberately for deficits, except to the extent that the LEA may think it reasonable to make provision in its scheme to allow schools, in certain specified circumstances, to anticipate their budget shares for the following year in order to finance some major planned item of expenditure for which the full cost cannot readily be accommodated within the current year's budget share. Where deficits nevertheless arise, LMS schemes must make appropriate provision for their recovery, normally from the following year's budget share, except where clear practical considerations preclude recovery on this timescale. It is for LEAs to pursue any appropriate action in respect of deficits incurred by LEA maintained schools.

## Repossessions

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the extent of repossessions in Wales over the past two years; and what are his estimates of likely trends in *(a)* repossessions and *(b)* negative equity in 1996. [10258]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Information is not recorded centrally on the number of cases in which mortgage possession orders lead to warrants to have the defendants evicted. However, recent figures on the number of possession orders and suspended orders are given in the table. Estimates of likely trends in repossessions and negative equity are not available for 1996.

| | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *[1]1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mortgage possession orders | 3,958 | 3,403 | 2,297 | 1,485 | 1,245 |
| Suspended orders | 3,457 | 3,673 | 3,598 | 2,253 | 2,008 |

*Source:*
Lord Chancellor's Department.
*Note:*
[1] Figures are for the first 3 quarters of 1995.

Estimates of likely trends in repossessions and negative equity are not available for 1996.

## Bristol Channel (Dredging)

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the study on the impact of dredging on the coastal environment in the Bristol channel referred to in his answer of 2 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *140*, to be completed. [10912]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Invitations to tender will be issued shortly. The study will commence as soon as a suitable contractor has been chosen. The work is expected to take two to three years to complete.

## Council of Ministers

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has attended meetings of the Council of Ministers. [10696]

**Mr. Hague:** None to date. Members of the Government attending meetings of the Council of Ministers speak on behalf of the whole United Kingdom, including Wales.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meetings of the Council of Ministers dealing with responsibilities held by the Welsh Office have been convened since he took up his duties as Secretary of State for Wales. [10695]

**Mr. Hague:** Between 5 July 1995 and 19 January 1996, the Council of the European Union met on 19 occasions when the title of the Council could in some way be related to responsibilities held by the Welsh Office as set out in the 1995 departmental report of the Welsh Office.

## CADW

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many offices CADW currently has in Wales. [10702]

**Mr. Hague:** This is a matter for the agency and I have asked the chief executive, Mr. T. J. Cassidy, to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from T. J. Cassidy to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question in which you ask how many offices Cadw currently has in Wales.

The Agency has only a single administrative office and this is located at Brunel House here in Cardiff, although it will be relocated into the main Welsh Office building in Cathays Park later this year. The Agency also has three works management units at Caerphilly and Neath these will be centralised at Crickhowell in April—and at Caernarfon. There are responsible for the management of industrial staff and the conservation maintenance programme for the estate in care.

## Community Councils

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many community councils there were in Wales *(a)* 1976 and *(b)* 1986; and how many there are currently. [10675]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

## Temporary Traffic Lights, Bryncoedifor

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how long the temporary traffic lights system has been in

operation at Bryncoedifor on the Bala to Dolgellau road; and if he will make a statement. [10708]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Gentleman the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) on 24 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *415*.

### Severn Flood Barrage

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated as to a River Severn flood barrage in the Llandrinio area; and if he will make a statement. [11257]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11360]

**Mr. Hague:** The information requested is included in the following table.

Expenditure on advertising and press and public relations by my Department and its executive agency CADW for the years requested are set out in the table below. Figures are not held centrally for NDPBs.

| *Year* | *Advertising* | *Press and public relations* |
|---|---|---|
| *Welsh Office* | | |
| 1979–80 | 61 | 451 |
| 1989–90 | 411 | 2,245 |
| 1991–92 | 349 | 2,089 |
| 1993–94 | 275 | 1,704 |
| 1994–95 | 255 | 2,068 |
| 1995–96 (i) to date | 352 | 964 |
| (ii) estimate outturn | 465 | 2,055 |
| 1996–07 estimate | 408 | 2,187 |
| *CADW* | | |
| 1979–80 | n/a | [1]n/a |
| 1989-90 | n/a | n/a |
| 1991–92 | n/a | n/a |
| 1993–94 | 58 | 370 |
| 1994–95 | 35 | 471 |
| 1995–96 (i) to date | 26 | 312 |
| (ii) estimate outturn | 26 | 374 |
| 1996–97 estimate | 26 | 375 |

CADW was set up as an executive agency in April 1992. [1] Figures before 1992–93 are not readily available and can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Expenditure on advertising includes television, radio and press advertising costs. Figures for press and public relations includes press and publicity staff costs, press cutting services and the cost of purchasing other forms of publicity material.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11362]

**Mr. Hague:** The information requested is included in the following list.

(a) 1979–80: No records available
1989–90: £906,700 (actual)
1991–92: £1,159,874 (actual)
1993–94: £1,314,015 (actual)
1994–95: £1,221,344 (actual)
1995–96: £834,483 (spend to date)
1996–97: Not yet finalised

(b) 1979–80: No Agencies
1989–90: No Agencies
1991–92: £38,866 (actual)
1993–94: £65,763 (actual)
1994–95: £32,033 (actual)
1995–96: £55,671 (spend to date)
1996–97: £57,700 (estimate)

(c) Not available centrally.

(d) Internal directories are available to all staff in my Department and it's Agencies. Information is not available centrally on the position of NDPB's.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11359]

**Mr. Hague:** Expenditure on management and other consultants engaged by the Welsh Office is as follows:

| | *£000* |
|---|---|
| 1979–80 | not applicable |
| 1989–90 | 342 |
| 1991–92 | 1,109 |
| 1993–94 | 1,454 |
| 1994–95 | 805 |
| 1995–96 to end—December | 202 |

My Department's plans for using external consultants in 1996–97 have not yet been finalised. There are no central records of expenditure on consultants by non-departmental public bodies, or the savings resulting from consultancy work.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11361]

**Mr. Hague:** The average number of working days sickness absence per member of staff by calendar year was as follows:

1992: 9.82

1993: 10.1

1994: 9.14

Statistics on a comparable basis are not available prior to 1992. Statistics for 1995 are not yet available.

### South Glamorgan Health Authority

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority in relation to the cancellation of all extra-contractual referrals until the end of the current financial year. [11905]

**Mr. Hague:** My Department was made aware of the health authority's policy decision prior to its introduction.

### General Practitioners

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the proposals to provide general practitioner out-of-hours health care, and the process of public consultation in Mid Glamorgan and in Wales. [11729]

**Mr. Richards:** The agreement reached last year between the Government and the British Medical Association provides the opportunity for GPs to organise their emergency out-of-hours services in ways that will maintain and improve patient services.

The arrangements for implementing the agreement at a local level rests with the relevant family health services authority.

### Retail Shopping Developments

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which superstore projects have received public funding from *(a)* regional selective assistance grants and *(b)* other grants in each of the counties of Wales; what are the amounts awarded; and if he will make a statement. [11730]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** This information is not readily available in the form requested. I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning out-of-town retail parks. [11731]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend's policy is set out in planning policy guidance note No. 6 "Town Centres and Retail Development". Planning policy guidance (Wales) which was issued for consultation in July 1995 contains revised guidance on retail development.

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representation he has received in the last three years concerning the impact of new superstores and out-of-town retail parks on existing shopping centres. [11732]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend and I have received various representations in that time from individuals, companies, local authorities and other organisations relating both to specific retail proposals and to retail development generally.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Friday 26 January 1996*

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Juvenile Offenders

**Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average cost of a case in the juvenile court from first hearing to completion. [10867]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The unit cost for court time for criminal cases in the youth court is estimated to be £140 in 1995–96, or £180 where an application for legal aid is made. These unit costs are average costs, and cover both trials and guilty pleas. These figures are based on the total revenue provision for the magistrates' courts, including local authorities' 20 per cent. contribution, and case load figures and weightings derived from the management information system for magistrates courts which are currently being reviewed. They do not take into account capital costs.

For defence costs paid through legal aid, it is not possible to identify separately the costs of proceedings in the youth court from all criminal cases dealt with in the magistrates courts. Most cases are remunerated under the standard fee scheme, and the level of the fee will depend on the nature and complexity of the proceedings. The average cost of a magistrates courts criminal bill in 1995–96 is £460.

### Queen's Counsel

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what number and percentage of the English Bar are Queen's Counsel. [10869]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** At 1 October 1995, there were 891 Queen's Counsel in practice at the English Bar. This comprises 10.48 per cent. of all barristers in private practice.

### Capital Building Programme

**Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if he will list each law court's capital buildings programme, costing more than £1 million completed in each of the years 1979–80 to 1992–93 by or on behalf of his Department, or local magistrates' committees, together with the cost expressed in 1995–96 prices. [10861]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** A schedule of all Crown, combined court and county court schemes is at annex A. The readily available information on magistrates court schemes is at annex B. The Department does not hold detailed records of all magistrates court schemes completed prior to 1992, when responsibility transferred from the Home Office.

*Annex A: Crown County and combined court building projects*

*£ million*

| *Title of scheme* | *Type of court* | *Works cost cash* | *Works cost 1995–96 prices* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1979–80* | | 0 | 0 |
| *1980–81* | | | |
| Wood Green 1 CRASH | Crown | 1.25 | 2.71 |
| Leicester | Crown | 4.42 | 9.59 |
| Romford | County | 1.03 | 2.23 |
| Nottingham 1 | Crown | 2.23 | 4.83 |
| Birmingham Newton Street | County | 1.10 | 2.38 |
| Snaresbrook | Crown | 2.78 | 6.03 |
| Total | | 12.80 | 27.77 |
| *1981–82* | | | |
| Burnley | Crown | 1.50 | 2.97 |
| Kings Lyn | Crown | 1.12 | 2.21 |
| Bolton | Comb | 4.00 | 7.91 |
| Total | | 6.61 | 13.09 |
| *1982–83* | | | |
| Portsmouth | Comb | 7.00 | 12.93 |
| Chelmsford | Crown | 5.61 | 10.36 |
| Leeds | Comb | 9.68 | 17.88 |
| Southwark | Crown | 12.60 | 23.27 |
| Total | | 34.89 | 64.43 |
| *1983–84* | | | |
| RCJ Crypt | High | 2.47 | 4.35 |
| Maidstone | Comb | 10.20 | 18.00 |
| Total | | 12.67 | 22.36 |
| *1984–85* | | | |
| Liverpool | Comb | 43.44 | 73.03 |
| Snaresbrook Rebuild (Fire) | Crown | 1.40 | 2.35 |
| Total | | 44.84 | 75.38 |
| *1985–86* | | | |
| Oxford | Comb | 5.17 | 8.23 |
| Swindon | Comb | 2.36 | 3.76 |
| Salisbury | Crown | 1.18 | 1.88 |
| Total | | 8.71 | 13.87 |
| *1986–87* | | | |
| Isleworth D. O. G. House | Crown | 4.43 | 6.86 |
| Milton Keynes | County | 1.17 | 1.81 |
| Guildford | Crown | 4.70 | 7.27 |
| Manchester Wood St. Phase 1 | Crown | 10.13 | 15.67 |
| Peterborough | Comb | 3.96 | 6.12 |
| Southampton | Comb | 7.08 | 10.95 |
| Total | | 31.46 | 48.67 |
| *1987–88* | | | |
| Birmingham | Crown | 8.87 | 13.03 |
| Newcastle Moot Hall | Crown | 1.68 | 2.46 |
| Nottingham 2 and 3 | Crown | 6.18 | 9.08 |
| Norwich | Comb | 7.02 | 10.31 |
| Swansea | Crown | 5.15 | 7.57 |
| Total | | 28.90 | 42.45 |
| *1988–89* | | | |
| Lambeth | County | 1.14 | 1.57 |
| Coventry | Comb | 5.25 | 7.23 |
| Telford | County | 1.05 | 1.45 |
| Snaresbrook CRASH | Crown | 2.50 | 3.44 |
| St. Dunstans House | High | 1.67 | 2.30 |

*Annex A: Crown County and combined court building projects*

*£ million*

| *Title of scheme* | *Type of court* | *Works cost cash* | *Works cost 1995–96 prices* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Truro | Comb | 4.93 | 6.79 |
| Middlesex Guildhall | Crown | 6.90 | 9.49 |
| Grimsby | Comb | 4.84 | 6.66 |
| Derby | Comb | 7.40 | 10.18 |
| Croydon | Comb | 15.13 | 20.82 |
| Total | | 50.82 | 69.93 |
| *1989–90* | | | |
| Doncaster | Crown | 3.42 | 4.41 |
| RCJ 12 additional | HC | 11.36 | 14.62 |
| Manchester Cr Sq/Wd St 2/3 | Comb | 4.97 | 6.39 |
| Taunton | Crown | 2.79 | 3.59 |
| Wood Green Ph2 | Crown | 15.26 | 19.64 |
| Total | | 37.80 | 48.65 |
| *1990–91* | | | |
| Wolverhampton | Comb | 9.17 | 10.92 |
| RCJ Thomas More | High | 2.54 | 3.03 |
| Newcastle Quayside | Comb | 17.13 | 20.41 |
| Total | | 28.84 | 34.35 |
| *1991–92* | | | |
| Northampton | Comb | 11.49 | 12.88 |
| Teesside | Comb | 15.09 | 16.92 |
| Hull | Co-loc | 11.28 | 12.64 |
| Stoke | Comb | 9.50 | 10.65 |
| Stafford | Comb | 10.35 | 11.60 |
| Harrow | Crown | 17.61 | 19.74 |
| Lincoln | County | 2.31 | 2.59 |
| Luton | Crown | 9.96 | 11.17 |
| Warrington | Comb | 7.48 | 8.38 |
| Newport | Crown | 10.90 | 12.22 |
| Total | | 105.96 | 118.79 |
| *1992–93* | | | |
| Carlisle | Comb | 9.29 | 10.01 |
| St. Albans | Crown | 16.34 | 17.60 |
| 13–14 Park Crescent | Offices | 1.62 | 1.75 |
| Bradford | Comb | 18.85 | 20.30 |
| Chester | Crown | 6.55 | 7.05 |
| Borough | Crown | 19.06 | 20.53 |
| Dartford | County | 2.16 | 2.33 |
| Total | | 73.87 | 79.56 |
| Grand Total | | 478.16 | 659.28 |

*Annex B: Magistrates' court building projects*

*£ million*

| *Scheme* | *Actual cost* | *Cost at 1995–96 prices* |
|---|---|---|
| *1981–82* | | |
| Lancaster | 1.925 | 3.810 |
| *1987–88* | | |
| Merton | 3.196 | 4.695 |
| Lewes | 2.394 | 3.517 |
| *1988–89* | | |
| Lowestoft | 2.099 | 2.888 |
| Brighton | 2.289 | 3.150 |
| Port Talbot | 1.415 | 1.947 |
| Stockport | 4.630 | 6.371 |
| Bath | 2.098 | 2.887 |
| Dewsbury | 2.394 | 3.294 |

*Annex B: Magistrates' court building projects*

*£ million*

| *Scheme* | *Actual cost* | *Cost at 1995–96 prices* |
|---|---|---|
| *1989–90* | | |
| Brent | 7.782 | 10.015 |
| Cardiff | 7.401 | 9.525 |
| Hertford | 4.0 | 5.148 |
| Oldbury | 2.795 | 3.597 |
| Woking | 2.66 | 3.423 |
| Thames | 5.086 | 6.546 |
| *1990–91* | | |
| Bootle | 2.935 | 3.496 |
| Bury | 3.541 | 4.110 |
| Chester | 3.7 | 4.407 |
| Basildon | 2.7 | 3.216 |
| Great Yarmouth | 3.167 | 3.772 |
| Harrogate | 2.351 | 2.662 |
| Lincoln | 4.113 | 4.899 |
| Milton Keynes | 4.587 | 5.463 |
| Newton Aycliffe | 1.657 | 1.973 |
| Wigan | 5.077 | 6.047 |
| City of London | 3.99 | 4.752 |
| *1991–92* | | |
| Haywards Heath | 2.576 | 2.888 |
| Kendal | 1.552 | 1.740 |
| Wimbledon | 3.196 | 3.583 |
| Leicester | 7.432 | 8.331 |
| *1992–93* | | |
| Bedlington | 2.848 | 3.067 |
| Woolwich | 3.294 | 3.548 |
| Newport (IOW) | 3.406 | 3.668 |
| Taunton | 2.503 | 2.696 |

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Fireworks

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for changing the law on fireworks. [12486]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The control of fireworks in Northern Ireland is governed by the Explosives Act 1875 as amended, the Explosives Acts (Northern Ireland) 1924 and 1970, together with the Explosives (Control of Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1970. Fireworks in the Province also come under the scope of consumer safety legislation.

The 1970 regulations were introduced in special circumstances 25 years ago, and have remained unchanged since then. They were introduced primarily because of the security situation and the real fear that the setting-off of fireworks, particularly so-called "bangers" by young people, could be misinterpreted by security force patrols as terrorist action with potentially serious consequences for the innocent participants. There was also concern at that time about the rising number of accidents and injuries caused by fireworks. There seems little doubt that the present regulations have contributed to the low level of injuries from fireworks in Northern Ireland.

However, the present system is inherently bureaucratic and costly because it requires any person who wishes to purchase or use fireworks—with two minor exceptions—to obtain a licence from the Secretary of State. Failure to obtain such a licence is an offence. The present arrangements therefore consume an inordinate amount of police and administrative resources. This situation contrasts sharply with the legal position in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I am aware that there have been criticisms levelled at the present law, to the effect that it was inadequate and should be strengthened. Paradoxically, I have also heard claims that the present legal controls are disproportionate and unnecessary and should therefore be repealed. Whatever the law on fireworks should be, it is clearly essential that it should allow for the efficient use of public resources; pay due regard to public safety yet be no more restrictive than absolutely necessary, and be capable of being effectively applied and not open to abuse.

In the light of all these factors, I asked my officials in late 1994 to undertake a thorough, painstaking review of the law on fireworks, to see whether it was still relevant and effective in today's circumstances and to consider ways in which it might be changed. The proposals, which I am releasing today for wider public consultation, are the outcome of that review. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library of the House. As the paper points out, before I make any final decisions about what changes are required, I should like to hear from those individuals, organisations and agencies which have an interest in the manufacture, retail sale, safety and use of fireworks in Northern Ireland. To that end, I am writing today to Northern Ireland hon. Members and my officials are similarly writing to the political parties, and other interested groups inviting comment and proposals on what changes to the law they would like to see.

My intention would be to introduce the necessary amending legislation during 1996.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Charter Marks (Police Authorities)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account he takes of the variation in the opening hours of police stations or their closure contrary to local police wish when considering the award of a charter mark to a police authority. [10868]

**Mr. Willetts:** Charter mark is an award for organisations that provide an excellent service to the public. Police forces may apply for a charter mark if they consider that they meet the criteria. User satisfaction and consultation and choice form two of the criteria that applicants have to meet.

### Deregulation Advisory Committee

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the members of the Deregulation Advisory Committee stating, for each member, the firm they are employed by; and how many people that firm employs. [11942]

**Mr. Freeman:** There are 16 members of the deregulation task force, which is chaired by the right hon. Francis Maude of Morgan Stanley and Co Ltd.

The other members are:

David Band (Barclays de Zoete Wedd); David Campbell (Laporte Fine Organics Ltd); Maurice Denyer (Fowler Bros (Cowfold) Ltd); Michael Fallon (Quality Care Homes plc); Mike Fisher (Whale Tankers Ltd); George Goring (The Goring hotel); Teresa Graham (Baker Tilly); Janet Morgan (Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts); Archie Norman (Asda Group plc); Timothy Parker (C&J Clark Ltd); David Parry (formerly BP); Tony Rammelt (Regis Europe Ltd); Roger Singleton (Barnardo's); Dan Wright (Albion Automotive Ltd); and Peter Wyman (Coopers and Lybrand).

Figures detailing the number of people employed by each of the firms mentioned are not readily available. However, members have been drawn from a wide range of firms which vary greatly in size, as well as from the charitable sector.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Housing (Backlogs)

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the backlog of unmet housing need; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement. [10515]

**Mr. Curry:** The Department does not produce estimates of backlog of unmet housing need. It does, however, monitor a range of indicators of housing stress. These show housing stress has been falling. The Department has provided the Environment Select Committee with a note on this as part of the Committee's inquiry into housing need, and I have today placed a copy of this note in the Library.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities that have made oral representations to Ministers as part of the consultation on his proposals for local government finance for 1996–97, showing in each case the Minister seen by the authority, the duration of the meeting and the main topics raised. [11992]

**Mr. Gummer:** The table lists authorities which made oral representations to me and other Ministers in my Department on the proposed local government finance settlement for England for 1996–97. The main topics raised in the meetings are listed on the table. No note was made of the duration of meetings but I and other Ministers have sought to make time available for the fullest consultation.

*1996–97 Settlement meetings with local authorities*

| | *Minister* | *Main topics* |
|---|---|---|
| *County councils* | | |
| Berkshire | Sir Paul Beresford | Flood, defence, Fire SSA, Landfill tax, reserves. |
| Buckinghamshire | Robert B. Jones | Education, social services, council taxes, area cost. |
| Derbyshire | Robert B. Jones | Education, landfill tax, reorganisation costs, capping, voluntary sector. |

*1996–97 Settlement meetings with local authorities*

| | Minister | Main topics |
|---|---|---|
| Devon | David Curry | Education, reserves, fire SSA, landfill tax, social services, capping. |
| Hampshire | Robert B. Jones | Capping, landfill tax, social services, fire SSA, reorganisation costs, area cost. |
| Hereford and Worcestershire | David Curry | Capping, area cost, fire SSA, social services, education. |
| Nottinghamshire | David Curry | Teachers' pay, area cost, landfill tax, pensions, road accidents, capital allocations. |
| Lancashire | David Curry | Area cost, deprivation, community care, capital financing, education, landfill tax. |
| Oxfordshire | David Curry | Education, social services, landfill tax, capping, staff redundancies. |
| Somerset | David Curry | Education, reserves, social services, benefits, area cost. |
| Warwickshire | David Curry | Education, capping. |
| West Sussex | David Curry | Landfill tax, pensions, additional educational needs, area cost. |
| *Shire districts* | | |
| Berwick (Northunberland) | Sir Paul Beresford | Visitors, concurrent services, capital financing, rent allowances, sparsity. |
| Blaby (Leicestershire) | Sir Paul Beresford | SSA, council taxes. |
| Braintree (Essex) | Sir Paul Beresford | Population data, interest receipts, rent allowances, concurrent services. |
| Castle Morpeth (Northumberland) | Sir Paul Beresford | Capping, sparsity, concurrent services, capital financing, interest receipts, rent allowances. |
| Castle Point (Essex) | Sir Paul Beresford | SSA methodology, council tax benefit, efficiency savings, pension costs, capping. |
| Derwentside (Durham) | Sir Paul Beresford | Deprivation, population, density, capital financing, capping, reserves. |
| Harlow (Essex) | Sir Paul Beresford | Population data, SSA methodology, new town issues, capping, non-domestic rates. |
| Havant (Hampshire) | Sir Paul Beresford | SSA, rent allowance data. |
| Horsham (West Sussex) | Sir Paul Beresford | Population data, reserves, efficiency savings, capping. |
| King's Lynn (Norfolk) | Sir Paul Beresford | Reserves, efficiency, sparsity. |
| Milton Keynes (Buckinghamshire) | Sir Paul Beresford | Population data, CCT, capital financing, reorganisation, open spaces. |
| Newcastle (Staffordshire) | James Clappison | Social and economic conditions, scaling factor, concurrent services. |
| Northampton | Sir Paul Beresford | Overnight visitors, concurrent services, recycling, capital financing, fixed plant leases. |
| North Kesteven (Lincolnshire) | Sir Paul Beresford | Council taxes, rent allowances, RAF population, single regeneration budget. |
| North Warwickshire | Sir Paul Beresford | SSA, concurrent services, capital financing, social deprivation. |
| Nottingham | Sir Paul Beresford | SSA, day visitors, economic index, area cost, reorganisation. |
| Plymouth (Devon) | Sir Paul Beresford | Population, concurrent services, reorganisation, capital. |
| Purbeck (Dorset) | Sir Paul Beresford | Council taxes, capital financing, flood relief. |
| Salisbury (Wiltshire) | Sir Paul Beresford | New burdens, council taxes, SSA methodology, rent allowances. |
| South Bedfordshire | James Clappison | Council taxes, capping, reserves. |
| South Lakeland (Cumbria) | David Curry | Council taxes, sparsity, day visitors, housing, national parks, area cost. |
| Three Rivers (Hertfordshire) | David Curry | Discretionary spending, council taxes, capital allocations, staff costs. |
| Uttlesford (Essex) | Sir Paul Beresford | Rent allowances, concurrent services, precepts, sparsity, reserves, Rural White Paper. |
| Wansbeck (Northumbria) | Sir Paul Beresford | Capping, social deprivation, capital financing, sparsity, concurrent services. |
| Watford (Hertfordshire) | Sir Paul Beresford | Day visitors, area cost, concurrent services, retail growth. |
| Wear Valley (Durham) | Sir Paul Beresford | Social and economic conditions, reserves, pensions, council taxes. |
| Welwyn Hatfield (Hertfordshire) | Sir Paul Beresford | Council taxes, efficiency savings, capital allocation, population data. |
| West Devon (sparsely populated district councils | David Curry | Sparsity, day visitors, population data. |
| *Metropolitan districts* | | |
| Birmingham | Secretary of State | Boundary change, data, education, commutation, housing subsidy. |
| Bradford | David Curry | Rent allowances, education, area cost, interest receipts, s.11, capital. |
| Core Cities | David Curry | Children's SSA, social index, area cost, nursery vouchers, education, capital financing. |
| Doncaster | Robert. B. Jones | Capping, other services SSA, capital financing, Met. rail grant. |
| Kirklees | David Curry | Area cost, education, highways, rent allowances, capital financing, Met. rail grant. |
| Liverpool | Robert B. Jones | Council taxes, HRA subsidy, social index, social services, education, capital, area cost, Met. rail grant. |
| Rochdale | Robert B. Jones | Education. social services, landfill tax, capital. |
| Rotherham | James Clappison | Capping, inflation, severance costs, PTA levy, Supertram, capital, social index. |

*1996–97 Settlement meetings with local authorities*

| | Minister | Main topics |
|---|---|---|
| St. Helens | James Clappison | HRA subsidy, superannuation, capital financing, landfill tax, waste disposal, Met. rail grant. |
| Sheffield | David Curry | Highways, capping, capital financing, waste disposal, capital pension and severance costs. |
| Solihull | Sir Paul Beresford | Area cost, education, social services, levies, highways. |
| South Yorkshire Districts | David Curry | Sheffield Supertram. |
| Stockport | James Clappison | Waste disposal and passenger transport levies. |
| Wigan | David Curry | Area cost, landfill tax, receipts, superannuation, non-domestic rate relief. |
| *London boroughs* | | |
| Brent | Sir Paul Beresford | SSA reduction grant, waste authority, education, asylum seekers, sparsity, area cost, capital financing. |
| Bexley and Havering | Secretary of State | Social services. |
| Camden | Sir Paul Beresford | Education, damping, asylum seekers, receipts, capital financing. |
| Enfield | Sir Paul Beresford | Education, social services, other services, non-domestic rates. |
| Greenwich | Sir Paul Beresford | Education data, transitional relief, area cost, density, children's social services. |
| Hackney | Sir Paul Beresford | SSA reduction grant, social services, independent schools, refugees. |
| Hillingdon | Sir Paul Beresford | Homelessness, refugees, special educational needs. |
| Kensington and Chelsea | David Curry | Unaccompanied refugee children. |
| Kingston | Sir Paul Beresford | Area cost, rent allowances, social services, education, landfill tax. |
| Lambeth | Sir Paul Beresford | SSA reduction grant, education. |
| Merton | Sir Paul Beresford | Area cost, capital financing, concessionary fares, social services. |
| Newham | Sir Paul Beresford | Area cost, capital financing, homelessness, social services, refugees. |
| Richmond | Sir Paul Beresford | Education, waste disposal, council taxes. |
| Southwark | Sir Paul Beresford | Area cost, transitional relief, education data. |
| Westminster | James Clappison | Education, refugees, council taxes, area cost. |
| *Fire authorities* | | |
| Cleveland | James Clappison | Chemical works, reorganisation, Fire SSA, capping. |
| London | David Curry | Pay and pension costs, capital, staffing, capping. |
| Merseyside | Sir Paul Beresford | Pensions, capping, population. |
| South Yorkshire | Sir Paul Beresford | Reserves, pensions, capping. |
| Tyne and Wear | Sir Paul Beresford | Capping, staffing, pensions, reserves. |
| West Midlands | David Curry | Staffing, safety promotion, pensions. |

*1996–97 Settlement meetings with local authorities*

| | Minister | Main topics |
|---|---|---|
| *Unitary authorities* | | |
| Avon unitaries | David Curry | Reorganisation costs, capping, area cost. |
| East Riding Yorkshire | Robert B. Jones | Reserves, education, social services, transitional costs. |
| Isle of Wight | Sir Paul Beresford | Area cost, fire, community care, education, waste disposal. |
| Middlesbrough | Robert B. Jones | Capping, transitional costs. |
| North Lincolnshire | Sir Paul Beresford | Reserves, transitional costs, social and economic conditions. |
| North East Lincolnshire | Sir Paul Beresford | Reserves, inherited expenditure, capping, transitional costs. |
| Redcar and Cleveland | Sir Paul Beresford | Council taxes, reserves, capping. |
| South Gloucestershire | David Curry | Disaggregation, community care, education, transitional costs. |
| *Local Authority Associations* | | |
| Consultative Council on Local Government Finance | Secretary of State David Curry | Pensions, capital, level of settlement, pay, social services, landfill tax, council taxes, refugees, district services, capping, education, area cost. |
| | | Total: 84 meetings |

## Asylum Seekers

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will public *(a)* the current cost of providing housing to asylum seekers broken down by type of landlord, numbers of people and by regional location and *(b)* any guidance or procedures issued which are currently in force on the housing of asylum seekers. [12107]

**Mr. Clappison:** Information about the cost of housing asylum seekers is not held centrally. Guidance on dealing with homelessness applications from asylum seekers is included in the "Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities" (revised third edition), a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House on publication in December 1994.

## Water Pollution

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the date of infringement, *(b)* the date of prosecution, *(c)* the nature of the offence with special reference to pollution, water abstraction and water quality infringements and *(d)* any resultant convictions, for each prosecution against a water company by (i) the drinking water inspectorate and (ii) the National Rivers Authority for each year since water privatisation. [9510]

**Mr. Gummer** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The arrangements for privatisation introduced a much more comprehensive and effective regime ensuring that water undertakers and sewage undertakers adhere to the legal requirements and are subject to enforcement or

prosecution if they do not do so. This system has given greatly enhanced protection of water consumers and the environment. The figures demonstrate that this is so.

When there is an infringement of a drinking water standard, the main weapon is enforcement to secure improvements to quality; prosecution is only available when the infringement is so serious that water unfit for human consumption has been supplied.

Between 1990 and 1994, the drinking water inspectorate, on my behalf, has initiated almost 2,000 enforcement actions against the water companies. Many of these resulted in the companies concerned taking action very quickly to rectify the infringement and the remainder, where action could not be completed quickly, resulted in the water companies concerned giving legally binding undertakings to take action by a specified date to improve drinking water quality.

Severn-Trent Water Ltd. pleaded guilty at Hereford Crown court on 24 April 1995 to three charges brought under section 70 of the Water Industry Act 1991 for the offence of supplying water unfit for human consumption and was fined £45,000. The prosecution was brought by me following an investigation by the drinking water inspectorate into a serious drinking water contamination incident on or about 15 April 1994 affecting a large number of consumers in the Worcester area and beyond following pollution of the River Severn.

The number of prosecutions of the privatised water and sewerage companies by the National Rivers Authority for water pollution offences, their dates and the number of resulting convictions for each year since 1989–90 were set out in the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *914-16*.

The tables show the information on water pollution infringements, corresponding to that given previously on prosecutions and convictions, plus equivalent information for water abstractions.

*Table 1: Water pollution offences—Infringement dates*

| *Company* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North-west | — | 3.7.90 | 19.5.91 | 4.10.91 | 27.8.91 | 31.8.93 | 23.11.94 |
| | | | 28.5.91 | 28.1.92 | 21.5.92 | 21.9.93 | |
| | | | | 21.9.92 | 27.4.92 | 11.1.94 | |
| | | | | 23.4.92 | 10.10.91 | 30.3.94 | |
| | | | | 13.8.92 | 5.2.93 | 30.11.93 | |
| | | | | | 8.8.92 | 31.1.94 | |
| | | | | | 11.5.93 | 8.7.93 | |
| | | | | | 17.8.93 | 23.9.93 | |
| | | | | | 3.7.93 | 9.3.94 | |
| | | | | | 19.9.93 | 1.7.94 | |
| | | | | | | 8.8.94 | |
| | | | | | | 28.5.94 | |
| Southern | — | 4.1.90 | 20.9.90 | 5.4.91 | 15.6.92 | 24.11.93 | — |
| | | | 7.11.90 | | | | |
| | | | 24.12.90 | | | | |
| | | | 7.11.90 | | | | |
| South-west | — | 20.5.90 | — | 1.8.91 | — | — | — |
| | | | | 30.11.92 | | | |
| Wessex | — | 3.6.90 | — | 23.6.91 | 29.6.92 | 21.4.94 | — |
| | | 3.8.90 | | 24.2.92 | 31.7.92 | | |
| | | | | 8.6.92 | 18.2.93 | | |
| Thames | — | 8.3.90 | 13.11.90 | 1.7.91 | 1.5.92 | 3.11.93 | 24.7.94 |
| | | 12.3.90 | 16.5.90 | 27.4.92 | 1.1.91 | 20.4.94 | |
| | | 7.6.90 | 30.7.90 | 5.7.92 | 6.5.93 | 11.5.94 | |
| | | | 10.12.90 | 15.2.91 | 4.5.93 | 15.8.94 | |
| | | | 30.1.91 | 13.2.92 | 5.7.93 | | |
| | | | 6.2.91 | | 24.9.93 | | |
| | | | 2.7.91 | | 21.6.93 | | |
| Northumbrian | 9.9.89 | 3.5.90 | 9.7.91 | 13.12.91 | — | — | — |
| | | 7.5.90 | 30.7.91 | 22.5.92 | | | |
| | | 14.8.90 | | | | | |
| | | 22.9.90 | | | | | |
| Anglian | — | 15.5.90 | 1.1.90 | 18.8.91 | 14.2.93 | 23.11.93 | - |
| | | 23.3.90 | 20.2.91 | 29.7.91 | | 21.12.93 | |
| | | 12.7.90 | 23.11.90 | 27.6.91 | | | |
| | | | 26.11.90 | 22.8.91 | | | |
| | | | 1.4.91 | 3.1.92 | | | |
| | | | 13.5.91 | | | | |

*Table 1: Water pollution offences—Infringement dates*

| *Company* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yorkshire | 28.9.89 | 7.12.89 | 27.9.90<br>25.10.90<br>6.9.90<br>14.5.90<br>4.6.90<br>23.10.91 | 16.4.91 | 18.10.91<br>24.11.92<br>26.8.91<br>26.8.91<br>9.3.92<br>20.8.92<br>18.6.92<br>28.7.92<br>16.9.92<br>18.11.92<br>'17.12.92 | 7.6.93 | — |
| Severn Trent | — | 2.2.90<br>14.11.89 | 5.10.90<br>23.10.90<br>27.9.90<br>29.7.90<br>'4.2.91<br>27.9.91<br>25.3.91 | 11.5.92<br>7.11.91 and<br>3.5.92 | 27.5.92<br>7.11.92<br>10.2.93<br>15.2.93<br>20.9.93 | 26.8.93 and<br>31.9.93<br>13.10.94<br>28.7.91 | 16.8.94<br>28.11.94<br>8.7.94<br>9.5.95 |
| Welsh | — | 6.12.89<br>13.12.89<br>11.9.89<br>23.9.89<br>8.3.90<br>28.8.90 | 23.5.90<br>10.11.90<br>11.1.91<br>14.9.90<br>14.9.90<br>6.12.90<br>5.11.90<br>31.1.91<br>31.1.91<br>31.1.91<br>30.10.90<br>28.9.90<br>22.3.91<br>3.6.91<br>8.4.91 | 21.6.91<br>7.6.91<br>16.7.91<br>28.8.91<br>5.8.91<br>3.9.92<br>30.6.92<br>23.2.92<br>16.12.92 | 18.3.93 | 16.6.93 | 15.9.94 |

1. The infringement dates shown correspond to those for prosecutions given O.R. 18 December 1995, cols 914–916. Eg the first infringement date shown for North West in 1991–92 relates to the first prosecution date shown for that company and year.
' Indicates that the date of infringement could not be determined from the available data.

*Table 2: Water abstraction—Infringement dates*

| *Company* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Southern | — | — | — | — | June 93 | 14.6.84 to 20.6.94 | — |
| Anglian | — | 14.8.90 and 15.8.90 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Northumbrian | — | — | — | — | — | 27 dates from 16.6.94 to 16.8.94 | — |
| Severn Trent | — | — | 29.11.91 to 1.12.91<br>27.12.91 to 28.12.91 | — | — | — | — |

1. The prosecution dates relate to the earlier infringements shown for each company.
2. All prosecutions resulted in convictions.

*Table 3: Water abstraction prosecution dates*

| *Company* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Southern | — | — | — | — | 30.11.93 | 24.11.94 | — |
| Anglian | — | 10.12.90 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Northumbrian | — | — | — | — | — | — | 10.5.95 |
| Severn Trent | — | — | — | 9.2.93 | — | — | — |

1. The prosecution dates relate to the earlier infringements shown for each company.
2. All prosecutions resulted in convictions.

## HEALTH

### NHS (Management Costs)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were *(a)* the management costs and *(b)* the establishment of the national health service in England in (i) 1988–89 and in (ii) 1994–95; and what estimate he has made of changes in those figures over the current planning period. [9827]

**Mr. Malone:** Information on management costs is not available on a comparable basis for 1988–89 and 1994–95.

As we announced in October, we are requiring a cash reduction of 5 per cent. in the costs of running health authorities and trust management costs in 1996–97 compared with the 1995–96 planned spend. The savings generated from these cost reductions will be available for patient care.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the redundancy and early retirement costs per head in respect of his proposed reduction in national health service managers. [9828]

**Mr. Malone:** It is not possible centrally to estimate the redundancy or early retirement costs of staff who are made redundant or retire early as a result of reductions in the costs of running health authorities and in trust management costs.

### Doctors and Nurses (Recruitment)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for a national recruitment campaign for doctors and nurses. [10749]

**Mr. Malone:** There is a long-term information campaign to young people aged 12 to 18 years, those over 18 and their advisers, providing materials designed to encourage a flow of suitably qualified, high calibre and well-informed applicants for training as nurses, midwives, health visitors and professionals allied to medicine, and to retain them in the national health service when qualified.

Last year, we accepted the recommendation of the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee to increase medical student intake to 500 to reach a target intake of 4,970 by the year 2,000. The overall number of both medical students and doctors has increased steadily and will continue to do so. Entry to the medical profession—medical students—is over-subscribed in terms of applications to medical schools.

It is for local employers to determine their human resources strategies and to take appropriate action to recruit and retain sufficient qualified staff to deliver those services which they are contracted to supply.

### National Review of Contracting

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the 1995 national review of contracting will be published; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [10930]

**Mr. Malone:** The 1995 review of contracting will be finalised in March. We do not intend to circulate the review, but key messages will be incorporated in wider purchasing guidance. A copy of the review will be placed in the Library when it is finalised.

### Public Information Lines

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *812*, if he will list the eight main information lines under the jurisdiction of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the information given out by these information lines. [11146]

**Mr. Horam:** Information on the eight main information lines are as listed. Unless stated otherwise, all these services are available free of charge and are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

*Health information service 0800 66 55 44*

The health information service is a national network of local telephone helplines. By dialling the national telephone number callers are automatically routed through to their local helpline service. The helplines give information and advice about NHS services, waiting times for treatment, common illnesses and treatments, maintaining and improving health, NHS complaints procedures and local NHS charter standards. The helplines are open 10.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday, but may vary locally. Calls are confidential. The health information service cannot give a medical diagnosis.

*National drugs helpline 0800 77 66 00*

The national drugs helpline offers a complete range of confidential advice, information and support. Callers are able to speak to trained, experienced advisors who will respond to requests for basic information about drugs and solvents, through to information about local services and to helping those concerned about their own or others drug problems.

Leaflets and literature are supplied to callers on request. The service is also available in a range of other languages.

*National Aids helpline 0800 567 123*

The national AIDS helpline offers advice and information about HIV and AIDS. Callers can also request free leaflets on aspects of HIV and AIDS. Calls to the helpline are confidential.

*Health literature line/organ donor telephone service 0800 555 777*

The health literature line is the telephone ordering service for free Department of Health publications on a range of health issues. Publications available free of charge include "The Patient's Charter", "A Traveller's Guide to Health" (a guide to fee or reduced cost emergency medical treatment abroad), and the NHS league tables.

The organ donor telephone service issue registration forms for the NHS organ donor register and answer some related questions.

*Blood donor telephone service 0345 711 711*

The blood donor telephone service offers advice to people who would like to become a blood donor or who want to know where their nearest blood donor centre or session is. Calls to the service are charged at local call rates.

*Drinkline 0345 711 711 (UK only); 0171 332 0202 (London only)*

The drinkline service informs callers about alcohol, helps callers who are worried about their own drinking, supports families and friends of people with drinking problems and puts people in touch with local alcohol advisory services where appropriate. Calls to the service are charged at local call rates.

*Sexwise 0800 282930*

The sexwise telephone service offers advice and counselling on sexual matters for young people. Calls to the helpline are confidential. The line is open from 7am to midnight seven days a week.

### Cosmetic Surgery

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects of the European Specialist Medical Qualifications Order 1995 when implemented on the private cosmetic surgery industry; and if he will make a statement. [11593]

**Mr. Malone:** None. The European Specialist Medical Qualifications Order implements the United Kingdom's obligations under European Council directive 93/16/EEC. This sets minimum standards for specialist medical training and facilitates the free movement of doctors throughout the European community through the mutual recognition of their diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications. It was implemented following a full consultation exercise and extensive discussions with representatives of the medical profession and the General Medical Council.

### Temazepam

**Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in respect of medical conditions for which treatment using temazepam is essential and where no alternatives are available. [11259]

**Mr. Bowis:** None.

### GP Co-operatives

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the quality of service provided by general practitioner co-operatives. [11868]

**Mr. Malone:** I have been impressed by the quality of service in the general practitioner co-operatives I have visited. GPs, whether providing services individually or as members of co-operatives, retain full responsibility for the quality of care they offer.

### NHS Staff Assaults

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many attacks against NHS staff have been reported in each of the last five years. [11870]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 18 December 1995, column *948*.

### Human Embryos

**Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what scientific research has been commissioned by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority concerning the freezing of human embryos; when the research was commissioned and published; and if he will list the actual and expected dates of completion and publication. [12160]

**Mr. Horam:** The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has no powers to commission research. The authority's report to United Kingdom Health Ministers on the statutory storage period for embryos refers, at paragraphs 24 to 25, to work done to review current scientific knowledge.

Copies of the report are available in the Library.

**Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of the research material considered by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in relation to its report on the statutory storage period for human embryos. [12158]

**Mr. Horam:** I have placed in the Library a copy of a bibliography, supplied by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which was prepared by its working group on embryo freezing.

**Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's responses given by clinics to the Authority's Survey to questions concerning the freezing of human embryos. [12159]

**Mr. Horam:** I shall be writing to the hon. Member following my meeting with him on 24 January 1996.

### Manchester Health Commission

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *21*, if he will publish in the *Official Report* the joint press statement issued by the Under-Secretary following his meeting of 17 January with representatives of the Manchester Health Commission and the city's community health councils; and when he expects to be able to announce the outcome of his consideration of potential solutions to the problems raised with him in respect of health councils. [11994]

**Mr. Horam:** The text of the press statement, issued on 17 January, is as follows:

"Mr John Horam, Parliamentary Secretary of Health, today met representatives of Manchester Health Commission and the three community health councils which cover the city of Manchester.

The visitors gave a presentation on their criticisms of the current formula for weighted capitation, under which the level of funding received by the commission is adjusted to take account of the age and needs of the local population.

The Minister also heard an account of the health needs of the people of Manchester, as measured against the targets set out in the Government's "Health of the Nation" initiative.

He was told that the city has some of the worst figures in the country for cervical cancer, lung cancer, coronary heart disease, psychiatric illness, dental decay and infant mortality.

The Minister heard about intense pressures on community and acute hospital services throughout the year.

He was told that the city's health service continues to make vigorous efforts to make the best use of resources available, but was nevertheless one of only two authorities in the entire country to receive no growth money for 1996–97.

Mr Horam listened sympathetically and said he respected the fact that the commission and the three community health councils had joined forces to represent Manchester as a whole.

He said he fully understood there was an exceptional problem in Manchester which needed to be addressed. Further work was in hand to try to refine the weighted capitation formula and he hoped that any subsequent refinement would deliver a good result for Manchester from 1997–98.

He also said that if there was anything that could be done in a transitional way, he would certainly be sympathetic to Manchester's problems."

The representations form Manchester were mainly concerned with the impact on their funding of certain elements of the weighted capitation formula. Work is in hand to review the elements of the formula concerned and the results should be ready to inform 1997–98 allocations.

## TREASURY

### Mortgage Tax Relief

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from the tax year 1996–97, what the mortgage tax relief will be for home income plans. [11045]

**Mr. Jack:** Tax relief for interest paid by someone over 65 who takes out a loan, secured on their home, to buy and life annuity, often called a home income plan, is given at the basic rate of income tax. For the tax year 1996–97, this will be 24 per cent.

### Corporation Tax

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the redeployment of staff from corporation tax pay and file to self-assessment development within the Inland Revenue on the collection of corporation tax arrears. [11120]

**Mr. Jack:** There has been no impact on the collection of corporation tax arrears as a result of the redeployment of staff from CT pay and file to self-assessment development.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the extent to which EDS has complied with conditions set out in the original contract on the Inland Revenue's corporation tax pay and file system; and what changes to the terms of that contract were subsequently made by the Inland Revenue. [11122]

**Mr. Jack:** Since taking over computer operations in July 1994, EDS has complied fully with the relevant condition in the original contract which required it to deliver the existing levels of service.

Subsequently detailed service levels have been agreed for each system and EDS has met or exceeded the key performance criteria in relation to CT pay and file. These contractual service levels have recently been enhanced to reflect the increased stability and maturity of the system.

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* Inland Revenue staff and *(b)* contracted staff have been transferred from corporation tax pay and file to computer environment for self-assessment in each quarter of 1995. [11119]

**Mr. Jack:** The Inland Revenue and EDS—its private sector information technology partner—have managed a team of appropriately skilled people in the development, implementation and subsequent maintenance of CT pay and file alongside the development of self-assessment. Those people have been deployed in line with the priorities from time to time.

The table shows the broad balance of movement of staff from CT pay and file to self-assessment as the former moved from its development and implementation phases into live running.

| | *Revenue staff* | *Contractors* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Quarter January 1995 to March 1995 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Quarter April 1995 to June 1995 | 8.5 | 5.5 | 14 |
| Quarter July 1995 to September 1995 | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Quarter October 1995 to December 1995 | 12 | 9 | 21 |
| Total | 25.5 | 16.5 | 42 |

### Taxation

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was, in constant 1995 figures, the value of tax receipts from lifetime transfers in each year 1974 in respect of *(a)* capital transfer tax and *(b)* inheritance tax. [11124]

(2) what was, in constant 1995 figures, the value of tax receipts on death in each year since 1970 of *(a)* estate duty, *(b)* capital transfer tax and *(c)* inheritance tax, indicating when each type of tax replaced another. [11123]

**Mr. Jack:** The available information is as follows:

*£ million at 1994–95 prices*[1]

| *Year* | *Net receipts from lifetime transfers chargeable when made* | *Net receipts from transfers chargeable at death* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Estate Duty* | *Capital transfer tax/inheritance tax* |
| 1970–71 | — | 2,775 | — |
| 1971–72 | — | 3,214 | — |
| 1972–73 | — | 3,023 | — |
| 1973–74 | — | 2,536 | — |
| 1974–75 | — | 1,746 | — |
| 1975–76 | 5 | 870 | 480 |
| 1976–77 | 77 | 449 | 861 |
| 1977–78 | 74 | 277 | 917 |
| 1978–79 | 94 | 132 | 830 |
| 1979–80 | 77 | 79 | 908 |
| 1980–81 | 66 | 56 | 815 |
| 1981–82 | 57 | 32 | 851 |
| 1982–83 | 68 | 21 | 814 |
| 1983–84 | 53 | 15 | 958 |
| 1984–85 | 95 | 10 | 962 |
| 1985–86 | 81 | 9 | 1,260 |
| 1986–87 | 87 | 10 | 1,373 |
| 1987–88 | 64 | — | 1,450 |
| 1988–89 | 53 | — | 1,356 |
| 1989–90 | 44 | — | 1,472 |
| 1990–91 | 44 | — | 1,418 |
| 1991–92 | 48 | — | 1,369 |
| 1992–93 | 46 | — | 1,224 |
| 1993–94 | 29 | — | 1,328 |
| 1994–95 | 24 | — | 1,387 |

[1] Converted using the GDP market price deflator.

For deaths on or after 13 March 1975, capital transfer tax—CTT—replaced estate duty and applied to transfers made after 26 March 1974. CTT was replaced by inheritance tax—IHT—for transfers on or after 18 March 1986. The figures for estate duty exclude receipts in Northern Ireland before 1973–74. Small residual amounts of estate duty receipts from 1987–88 are included with receipts from inheritance tax and capital transfer tax, separate estimates of which are not available.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10974]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The information requested for the Chancellor's Department, expressed in thousands of pounds, is as follows:

| | £000 |
|---|---|
| (i) Legal fees | — |
| (ii) Publicity costs | 4 |
| (iii) Accountancy fees | — |
| (iv) Management consultancy fees | 75 |
| Total | 79 |

The overwhelming majority of the expenditure was incurred in the last financial year, so the difference between real and cash terms is insignificant. Conventional procurement often involves such costs too.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10975]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The information requested for the Chancellor's Departments, expressed in thousands of pounds, is as follows:

| | £000 |
|---|---|
| (i) Staff costs | 61 |
| (ii) Information technology | — |
| (iii) Other costs | — |
| Total | 61 |

The overwhelming majority of the expenditure was incurred in the last financial year, so the difference between real and cash terms is insignificant.

In the case of individual projects, if the private finance route had not been the route preferred, traditional public sector procurement methods would, in any case, have incurred tendering costs. The important issue is that the chosen method should be that which provides best overall value for money for the taxpayer.

### National Lottery

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue accruing to the Treasury from all national lottery operations so far. [11903]

**Mr. Waldegrave** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The total amount of lottery duty accruing to the Exchequer was £559 million at the end of December 1995. Lottery duty was set at a level that should ensure that the displacement of consumer spending by spending on lottery tickets is neutral in its effect on Government revenue. The total amount of funds received by the national lottery distribution fund was £1,374 million over the same period.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Museums

**Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what method is used by non-charging national museums to count the numbers of their visitors; and what assessment she has made of *(a)* the accuracy of the method and *(b)* the auditing of the figures. [7055]

**Mr. Sproat:** It is for the trustees of each national museum to determine how to assess the number of visitors, and the different methods used for this purpose by different museums. In the context of the review of museum policy which I am currently undertaking, and given the importance of having accurate figures for visitors, my officials will be writing to each of the national museum and galleries that the Department sponsors asking them what methods they use to count visitors, what arrangements they have for ensuring accuracy of the figures, and how they conduct their audit of figures.

### National Lottery (Disbursements)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the disbursements made by the National Lottery Charities Board to organisations in *(a)* Heywood and Middleton and *(b)* the Greater Manchester area. [11054]

**Mr. Sackville:** I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. and learned Friend has written to all hon. Members on each occasion that the National Lottery Charities Board has made grants, enclosing a list of the grants. I understand that the charities board has also written to individual Members whenever a grant has been made in their constituency.

This information is available in the Library.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### CD-ROM Industry

**Mrs. Ann Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of developments in the United Kingdom CD-ROM industry. [11127]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** This is an active and fast-moving market for which reliable and comprehensive data are sparse. A number of reports have been commissioned by

my Department, either alone or in conjunction with the European Commission, analysing specific aspects of the CD-ROM market. The reports reached various conclusions. I am placing copies of them in the Library of the House.

### Gas Consumer Council

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received as to how this year's allocation to the Gas Consumer Council will affect its safety advisory service. [11721]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I have received no such representations.

### Trade Unions

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those organisations where trade unions have been de-recognised each year since 1985; and how many employees were involved in each case. [11943]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The Government do not hold records on organisations where trade unions have been de-recognised or on the number of employees involved in each case.

### Viners of Sheffield plc

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from businesses in Sheffield regarding Viners of Sheffield plc; and if he will make a statement. [10835]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I have received representations which my hon. Friend passed to me from eight businesses and one trade association objecting to the company name "Viners of Sheffield public limited company". My officials will be writing to the company seeking its comments.

### Training

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to encourage the development of training for young entrepreneurs. [10900]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the measures outlined by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment in his reply of 25 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *336–37*.

### Anglo-French Electricity Interconnector

**Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list on a quarterly basis the ratio of electricity supplied via the cable link to and from France and the United Kingdom for the years 1993–94 and 1994–95. [10628]

**Mr. Page:** In 1993–94 and 1994–95, the interconnector was exclusively used to import electricity from France.

### Disability Discrimination Act

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated cost during 1996 of industrial tribunal proceedings under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [11676]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** No firm estimate of the cost of industrial tribunal proceedings in 1996 can be made until a commencement date has been set for the employment provisions contained in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. However, it is likely that these provisions will come into effect around the end of the year and, if so, the costs of proceedings (if any) in 1996 will be negligible.

### Public Sector Research Establishments

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the timetable for the prior options reviews of public sector research establishments outlined in the Government's response to the multi-departmental scrutiny of public sector research establishments (Cm 2991). [12682]

**Mr. Lang:** The Government's response to the efficiency scrutiny announced our intention to carry out a programme of prior options reviews of public sector research establishments, with a view to the major part of the work being completed by the end of 1996.

Each review will address the relationship of establishments to others in similar or related fields and consider, amongst other things, the potential for privatisation or rationalisation. The results of these reviews will be considered by Ministers collectively.

The reviews will be carried out by the parent or sponsor Department or research council and are being phased as set out in the timetable. Each review will be announced and there will be an opportunity for interested parties to comment. Some of these announcements have already been made.

I am placing a copy of the guidelines for the conduct of these reviews in the Library of the House.

*Period 1: Reporting to ministers by March 1996*

| *Establishment* | *Parent or sponsor department/research council* |
|---|---|
| ADAS R and D | Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food |
| Central Science Laboratory | Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food |
| Directorate of Fisheries Research | Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food |
| Horticulture Research International | Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food |
| Fisheries Research Services | Scottish Office |
| Macaulay Land Use Research Institute | Scottish Office |
| Scottish Agricultural Science Agency | Scottish Office |
| Scottish Crop Research Institute | Scottish Office |
| Institute of Arable Crops Research | Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council |
| Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research | Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council |
| John Innes Centre | Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council |
| Silsoe Research Institute | Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council |
| Forestry Commission Research Laboratories | Forestry Commission |
| Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton Laboratories | Office of Science and Technology/Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils |
| Building Research Establishment | Department of the Environment |

*Period 1: Reporting to ministers by March 1996*

| *Establishment* | *Parent or sponsor department/research council* |
|---|---|
| Health and Safety Laboratory | Health and Safety Executive |
| National Weights and Measures Laboratory | Department of Trade and Industry |
| Police Scientific Development Branch | Home Office |

*Period 2: Reporting to Ministers by July 1996*

| *Establishment* | *Parent or Sponsor Department/Research Council* |
|---|---|
| Veterinary Laboratories Agency | Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food |
| Moredun Research Institute | Scottish Office |
| Hannah Research Institute | Scottish Office |
| Babraham Institute | Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council |
| Institute for Animal Health | Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council |
| Roslin Institute | Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council |
| British Geological Survey | Natural Environment Research Council |
| Centre for Coastal and Marine Sciences (comprising: Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory, Plymouth Marine Laboratory, Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory) | Natural Environment Research Council |
| Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (comprising: Institute of Freshwater Ecology, Institute of Hydrology, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology) | Natural Environment Research Council |

*Period 3: Reporting to Ministers by December 1996*

| *Establishment* | *Parent or Sponsor Department/Research Council* |
|---|---|
| National Institute for Biological Standards and Control | Department of Health |
| National Radiological Protection Board | Department of Health |
| Public Health Laboratory Service | Department of Health |
| Rowett Research Institute | Scottish Office |
| Institute of Food Research | Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council |
| Dunn Nutrition Unit | Medical Research Council |
| Radiobiology Unit | Medical Research Council |
| Reproductive Biology Unit | Medical Research Council |
| Toxicology Unit | Medical Research Council |
| Virology Unit | Medical Research Council |

## BMARC

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has anything to add to his answers of 19 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *59* and 14 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *797*, about BMARC. [12681]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The work of licence recovery, examination and cataloguing undertaken since the start of the BMARC affair has led to the identification of a number of export licence applications whose existence was not known at the time of the answers given on 19 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *59*, and 14 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *796*.

The problem of retrieving export licence documentation is complicated by the large volumes of papers involved, and the fact that the archived papers are not stored by company name. In order to retrieve papers it is necessary first to use various databases to identify the individual applications made by any given company; then to establish the individual reference numbers relating to the applications concerned; and finally to use these to identify the relevant archive locations. It is only following these steps that the papers can be called back and inspected.

While verifying and cataloguing the new findings, an unrelated search of licence application papers carried out towards the end of last year showed some weaknesses in the systems used for indexing applications. A wider search was then put in hand, with the aim of seeing whether the identification and recovery of any of BMARC's licence applications might have been hindered by similar problems. This further work led to the discovery of an additional batch of applications.

In the light of all these findings, it is necessary to update the figures provided in the answers given on 19 June 1995 and 14 July 1995. The figure for the number of export licence applications made by BMARC—including the period when the company was known as Astra Defence Systems—for which papers have been recovered from my Department's archives and which were dealt with under the military list between 1985 and 1990, should be increased in total by 43 over the figure which was given on 14 July 1995. The breakdown by year is as follows:

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1985 | 148 |
| 1986 | 133 |
| 1987 | 186 |
| 1988 | 134 |
| 1989 | 105 |
| 1990 | 174 |
| Total | 880 |

In addition, over the same period, a further five cases have been identified of index records apparently relating to BMARC export licence applications, but where the absence of any surviving documentation makes it impossible to confirm this.

I am bringing these new findings to the attention of the Trade and Industry Committee in view of its current inquiry into the granting licences to BMARC for the export of naval guns to Singapore.

## Departmental Publicity

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been spent by his Department on publicity and media relations for each year since 1990. [12482]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Expenditure from centrally managed budgets on publicity and media relations, excluding staff costs, has been as follows:

1990–91: £16,413,000
1991–92: £10,918,000
1992–93: £10,633,000
1993–94: £9,377,000
1994–95: £8,931,000

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92 (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11390]

**Mr. John M. Taylor** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Details of departmental telephone costs prior to 1991–92 are not readily available. Comparison of the figures for successive years must be treated with caution as they are affected by major accommodation moves and, for the DTI agencies and regional Government offices, only include the use of the Government telephone network, other charges being met from local budgets.

1991–92: £3.2 million

1992–93: £4.2 million

1993–94: £3.9 million

1994–95: £2.9 million

1995–96: £3.3 million (anticipated)

Internal telephone directories are available to staff in the Department and its agencies. Non-departmental public bodies are not listed in these but can receive copies.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations [11388]

**Mr. Taylor** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Total Departmental expenditure on publicity is not held centrally and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Total advertising expenditure from centrally managed budgets for the years in question is as follows:

1979–80: £1,554,000

1989–90: £10,492,000

1991–92: £966,000

1993–94: £784,000

1994–95: £561,000

1995–96: £530,000 (spend to end December 1995)

The budgets for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are not broken down by media.

Press and public relation costs, as reflected through the costs associated with the Department's press office, are as follows:

1993–94: £1,987,000

1994–95: £1,766,000

1995–96: £1,212,000 (spend to end December 1995)

Budgets for 1995–96 and 1996–97 do not specifically separate out press and public relations costs. For the comparable expenditure in earlier years, I refer the hon. Member to answer given by my hon. Friend the then Minister for Energy on 2 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *492–93*.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11389]

**Mr. John M. Taylor** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The sickness absence database of the Occupational Health and Safety Agency shows the average number of days sick leave per employee for the Department is:

| *Calendar years* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1990 | 8.5 |
| 1991 | 8.4 |
| 1992 | 8.2 |
| 1993 | 8.9 |
| 1994 | 7.0 |

Comparable statistics are not available for earlier years. The 1995 figure is not expected to be published until August 1996.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Agriculture Council

**Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 22 and 23 January; and if he will make a statement. [11850]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** No decisions were taken at this short meeting. The only substantial item was a further discussion of the Commission's proposals for changes to the arrangements for bananas. The Commissioner expressed his intention of making some additional proposals with a view to securing agreement: but member states' views remain deeply divided. I underlined the need to protect the interests of the African, Caribbean and Pacific suppliers of bananas, in line with the Community's commitments.

The presidency held a dinner at which there was "informal" discussion of the use of hormones for fattening beef cattle, in the light of the scientific conference organised by the Commission last year.

During the Council, I took the opportunity to question the Commissioner about his promised proposals on the welfare of calves reared for veal. He said he expected to be able to table these very shortly.

### Oil Dispersant Policy

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the conclusions of the review that the Government have been carrying out into oil dispersant policy; and if he will make a statement. [12065]

**Mr. Baldry:** The hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) announced to the House in April 1993 that the Government would conduct a review of oil dispersant policy. Two scientific reports were commissioned and published and we prepared a consultation paper setting out proposed improvements which was circulated to over 600 bodies. Sixty-four responses were received. We have responded on issues where suggestions were made; in general, there was broad agreement to our plans and we have now prepared a final report completing the review. We have concluded that it would be fully justified to retain oil dispersants as the UK's primary means of combating oil spills at sea in order to protect economic and environmental resources, although oil dispersants may not be appropriate in all instances. All products will continue to be required to pass efficacy and toxicity tests. These tests will, in future, incorporate some minor improvements designed further to protect the marine environment. I have initiated the development of protocols, in conjunction with the industry, that will enable bioremediation products to be licensed in the UK. These could, in due course, make an important contribution to clean-up operations. There will also be new arrangements for labelling products in line with our policies on openness. In carrying out the review, I have also managed to achieve modest deregulatory gains by enabling manufacturers to submit their own test results. Finally, I intend to publish a booklet explaining the approval process which will include a code of good spraying practice. A copy of the final report has been placed in the Library of both Houses.

### Set-aside Payments

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount paid in set-aside payments in each year since its inception; and what is the average amount paid each year per farm. [11256]

**Mr. Baldry:** Under the five-year set-aside scheme—and, in 1992–93 only, the one-year set-aside scheme—the Agriculture Departments made total payments of:

1989–90: £9,846,000

1990–91: £19,110,000

1991–92: £25,102,000

1992–93: £31,111,000

1993–94: £25,078,000

1994–95: £15,108,000

For set-aside under the arable area payments scheme, the Agriculture Departments paid £142,080,000 in 1993–94 and £200,440,000 in 1994–95.

Payments under both schemes for 1995–96 are not complete but at the beginning of the year were estimated as £225,125,000 for the arable area payments scheme and £7,483,000 for the five-year set-aside scheme.

Under the arable area payments scheme, payments are made against claims which may relate to more than one agricultural holding. Under the five-year set-aside scheme, more than one payment per farm could be made as separate agreements were allowed for different areas of land on the same farm. Hence, it is not possible to calculate an average amount paid each year per farm.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Benefits Agency

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of the Benefits Agency offices in Seaham and Peterlee. [10913]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on the future of the Benefit Agency (BA) offices in Seaham and Peterlee.

As you are aware, the North Durham District is undertaking a long term review of its organisation. There is, however, no intention at present to close the Seaham and Peterlee offices. The aim of the Benefit Agency is to provide a high standard of service to all our customers and any organisational changes in North Durham District will be made with the assurance that this standard will be maintained.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

### Hardship Allowance (Greater Manchester)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people are currently claiming hardship allowance in the Greater Manchester area. [11036]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 25 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many young people are currently claiming hardship allowance in the Greater Manchester Area.

The District offices that cover the Greater Manchester Area are Oldham, Manchester Central, Manchester South, Manchester Trinity, North Cheshire, Sale/East Cheshire, Salford, Stockport, and Tameside.

The total number of young people who claimed hardship allowance in these offices in November 1995 was 482. This figure is provisional and may be subject to change. This is the latest figure available.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

### Habitual Residence Rules

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest calculation of the numbers and percentage of the total of appeals against decisions by his Department on the habitual residence rules that have been successful. [12203]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Disability Living Allowance

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* adults and *(b)* children in receipt of disability living allowance mobility component are

estimated to lose benefit for a period in hospital exceeding four weeks and 12 weeks in each of the next three years. [11995]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information is in the table.

| *Losers* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adults | 35,000 | 35,000 | 40,000 |
| Children | 5,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| Total | 40,000 | 45,000 | 45,000 |

Estimates rounded to nearest 5,000 and should be treated with caution.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in receipt of the disability living allowance mobility component have arrangements with firms other than Motability for the hire or purchase of *(a)* cars and *(b)* wheelchairs. [11996]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The information is not available.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the expected savings to his Department of *(a)* removing and *(b)* reducing the disability living allowance mobility component for hospital stays in respect of (i) children and (ii) adults in *(x)* 1996–97, *(y)* 1997–98 and *(z)* 1998–99. [11998]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The information is in the table:

*£ million*

| *Cash* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *(i) Children* | | | |
| (a) Removing | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| (b) Reducing | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| *(ii) Adults* | | | |
| (a) Removing | 5 | 15 | 20 |
| (b) Reducing | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Total | 30 | 40 | 45 |

[1] Denotes an estimate less than £2.5 million. Estimates rounded to nearest £5 million. Totals may not sum owing to rounding.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the additional cost or savings which will be made to the Exchequer as a consequence of the implementation of clause 10 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill; what representations he has received on the implementation of clause 10 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill; and if he will place copies of all such representations in the Library. [12105]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is set out in the table.

*£ million*

| | 1996–97 | 1997–98 | 1998–99 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Estimated savings | 5 | 15 | 25 |

1. Costs rounded to nearest £5 million. 2. It has been assumed that the average award of Child Benefit is £18.85 per week.

One letter has been received concerning the implementation of clause 10, and several from members of the public in support of the principle that child benefit should not be paid to people coming from abroad. Correspondence is not normally published without the express permission of the writer.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Saudi Arabia

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Saudi Arabian Government on *(a)* the detention of 70 members of the Indian Christian Fellowship followed by the imprisonment of seven leaders at Alkhobar on 22 December and *(b)* the imprisonment of three Filipino Christians in Riyadh last October; and if he will make a statement. [10322]

**Mr. Hanley:** We and our EU partners discuss human rights regularly with the Saudi Arabian Government. However, we have made no representations to the Saudis on the specific cases referred to by the hon. Member which we understand did not involve British citizens. We understand from the Indian embassy in Riyadh that those of its citizens who were being detained in connection with their attendance at a religious gathering have now been released.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11915]

**Mr. Hanley:** The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its agencies are not currently users of the positive about disabled people symbol. However, we implement many of its recommendations on external and internal recruitment and promotion.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11382]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]*: The information requested is not readily available and could be partially provided only at disproportionate cost. But the annual telephony cost figures are available for:

| | *Diplomatic wing* £ | *Aid wing* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | — | 452,070 |
| 1991–92 | 6,077,642 00 | 458,224 |
| 1993–94 | 5,947,217 00 | 511,399 |
| 1994–95 | 6,088,960 71 | 489,796 |
| 1995–96 | [1]5,335,000 00 | [1]486,000 |
| 1996–97 | [1]4,986,789 00 | 486,000 |

[1] Estimate

| | Agencies | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Wiston House* £ | *NRI* £ |
| 1991–92 | 2,462.00 | 193,251 |
| 1993–94 | 2,797.00 | 188,765 |
| 1994–95 | 3,714.00 | 217,506 |
| 1995–96 | [1]4,000.00 | [1]191,785 |
| 1996–97 | [1]4,000.00 | [1]185,000 |

[1] Estimate.

Our department makes use of CCTA's Metropolitan Telephony Service—MTS—which provides us with fully managed telephony and directory services. The MTS service provides an annual estimate of telephony charges.

Internal telephone directories are available to all staff in the United Kingdom and at major UK diplomatic missions overseas.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11379]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Consultants are employed in a number of roles, including contracted services and the design and management of projects. The work of external consultants is only one factor to be taken into consideration in assessing the results of such projects.

The table contains figures for expenditure on consultants for the years 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96. The table also contains estimates for 1996–97. Figures exclude the cost of consultants engaged on projects under the bilateral aid programme. The bulk of expenditure within the diplomatic wing was for technical expertise on capital projects and information technology.

Figures for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

| | *Diplomatic wing* £ million | *Aid wing* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 14.2 | 618,700 |
| 1994–95 | 13.6 | 505,300 |
| 1995–96 (to date) | 10.5 | 621,500 |
| 1995–96 (estimated outturn) | 15.8 | 869,000 |
| 1996–97 (estimate) | 13.5 | 530,000 |

### Qualified Majority Voting

**Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions on which decisions have been taken by qualified majority voting under title V of the Maastricht treaty on European Union; and if he will make a statement. [11260]

**Mr. David Davis:** No decisions have been taken using qualified majority voting under title V of the Maastricht treaty. The common foreign and security policy operates by unanimity. Article J.3.2 allows for use of qualified majority voting only in the implementation of joint actions and after prior unanimous agreement.

## SCOTLAND

### Non-departmental Public Bodies

**Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which members of which non-departmental public bodies are current local authority councillors; how much time annually each spends on each body; and what is the salary paid for each position. [8473]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Fifty-five local authority councillors currently hold Secretary of State appointments to executive non-departmental public bodies, health boards and NHS trusts. These appointments are made on an individual basis, and not as a representative of any particular interest or group. The details are as set out in the table. The time spent is the minimum required and appointees usually will spend additional time, for example, in preparing for meetings or serving on sub-committees. The figures exclude appointments by local authorities to bodies on which they have statutory representation.

| *Body* | *Rank* | *Number* | *Salary £* | *Minimum annual time spent* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| New Town Development Corporations | D/Chairman | 3 | 10,578 | 52 days |
| | Members | 9 | 4,777 | 26 days |
| Scottish Homes | Member | 1 | 6,830 | 24 days |
| Mainland Health Boards | Members | 7 | 5,000 | 36 days |
| Mainland NHS Trusts | Members | 16 | 5,000 | 36 days |
| Scottish Examination Board | Members | 6 | Nil | 4 days |
| Scottish Enterprise | Member | 1 | 7,600 | 14 days |
| Highlands and Islands Enterprise[1] | Member | 1 | 7,595 | 14 days |
| Scottish Community Education Council[1] | Member | 1 | Nil | 4 meetings |
| Scottish Sports Council | Member | 1 | Nil | 11 meetings |
| SCOTVEC | Member | 1 | Nil | 5 days |
| Scottish Arts Council | Members | 2 | Nil | 4 days |
| Scottish Environment Protection Agency | Members | 3 | 5,000 | 24 days |
| Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council | Members | 2 | 3,000 | 24 days |
| | | 2 | 5,000 | 48 days |

[1] Same person.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the helplines, or schemes which include a helpline service, for which his Department provides any funding, stating which are *(a)* independent organisations, *(b)* run by his Department or agencies of his Department or *(c)* of another classification; how many calls each received in each of the last five years; and how much money each received from his Department in each of the last five years. [9801]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The Scottish Office contributes to two UK-wide national helplines. The Scottish figures recorded by financial year are set out in the following table:

| *Helpline* | *Year commenced* | *Amount paid by The Scottish Office to operating company £* | *Number of calls* |
|---|---|---|---|
| National AIDS | 1990–91 | 143,000 | 91,371 |
| | 1991–92 | 156,000 | 170,184 |
| | 1992–93 | 193,000 | 11,543 |
| | 1993–94 | 197,000 | 73,442 |
| | 1994–95 | 197,000 | 60,021 |
| | [1]1995–96 | 137,100 | [4]45,108 |
| Drugline Scotland | 1992–93 | 294,000 | 23,800 |
| | 1993–94 | 158,000 | 17,604 |
| | [2]1994–95 | 164,000 | 19,649 |
| | [3]1995–96 | — | — |

[1] Integrated National AIDS and Drugs Helpline commenced 1 April 1995.
[2] Drugline Scotland integrated into National Drugs Helpline.
[3] See National Aids Helpline Figures.

A joint "Get Qualified" campaign was run for two periods of three months in 1995 with the Department of Education and Science. The Scottish Office figures are:

| *Year* | *Amount(£) paid by the Scottish Office to operating company* | *Number of calls* |
|---|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 1,680 | 6,935 |

*One Scotland-only Helpline in contracted out by the Scottish Office to an operating company:*

| *Helpline* | *Year commenced* | *Amount (£) paid by the Scottish Office to operating company* | *Number of calls* |
|---|---|---|---|
| NHS Helpline | [1]29 October 1992 | 90,188 | 2,143 |
| | 1993 | 225,738 | 12,521 |
| | 1994 | 215,338 | 24,017 |
| | 1995 | 196,982 | 14,736 |

[1] Figures recorded by calendar year.

The Scottish Office runs an inquiry line operated by its own staff:

| *Helpline* | *Year commenced* | *Scottish Office costs £* | *Number of calls* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Inquiry line | October 1993 | [1]171,000 | 1,989 |
| | 1994 | 5,000 | 3,594 |
| | 1995 | 5,000 | 3,459 |

[1] Includes establishment and initial publicity costs.

### Generic Support Workers

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* information relating to generic support workers has been issued by the NHS management executive in Scotland to NHS trusts and health boards. [10335]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** No guidance or information has been issued.

### Garage and Motor Repair Businesses

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce provisions for garage and motor repair businesses to register with local authorities in Scotland. [10428]

**Mr. Kynoch:** My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

### Ancillary Health Workers

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the numbers of ancillary workers employed by in-houses teams at *(a)* Edinburgh royal infirmary, *(b)* Western general hospital, *(c)* Lay hospital and *(d)* Hairmyers Stonehouse hospital. [10336]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** This information is not held centrally.

### Queen's Counsels

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what number and percentage of the Scottish Bar are Queen's counsel. [10870]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** There are 135 Queen's Counsel, who represent 22.3 per cent. of the membership of the Faculty of Advocates.

### Census

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make representations to the language sub-group of the 2001 census working group on content and question wording regarding the inclusion of a question relating to the Scots language in the 2001 census; [11167]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the uses of information which could be obtained through the inclusion of a question relating to the Scots language in the 2001 census; and if he will make a statement. [11168]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *805*.

### Maternity Services (Lothian)

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his office requires a response from Lothian Health on its proposals in respect of maternity services; and what the consequence of Lothian Health failing to meet that deadline would be. [11616]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** It is for Lothian health board to bring forward its proposals on the future configuration of maternity services when it has completed its considerations. I understand that the board is currently undertaking a further public consultation until 28 February 1996 on its proposals for maternity services. I look forward to seeing the board's final proposals as soon as possible thereafter.

### Nursery Education

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the proportion of families in Scotland which have state nursery education available to them in each education authority for children aged *(a)* three to four and *(b)* four to five years. [11089]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** We do not hold information on the basis of families. The table shows the number of children at education authority nursery schools at September 1994 expressed as a percentage of the General Register Office's mid-1994 population estimates for three and four-year-olds.

*Percentage of children attending education authority nursery schools at September 1994*

| *Education authority* | *Percentage of pupils aged 3* | *Percentage of pupils aged 4* |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland | 19.8 | 55.9 |
| Borders | 2.4 | 36.0 |
| Central | 19.5 | 71.8 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 10.1 | 74.4 |
| Fife | 16.8 | 83.4 |
| Grampian | 10.1 | 64.5 |
| Highland | 4.6 | 29.6 |
| Lothian | 27.4 | 75.4 |
| Strathclyde | 22.6 | 43.3 |
| Tayside | 23.0 | 63.4 |
| Orkney | 17.4 | 61.6 |
| Shetland | 20.4 | 51.2 |
| Western Isles | 0.0 | 0.0 |

*Percentage of children attending education authority nursery schools at September 1994*

| *Education authority* | *Percentage of pupils aged 3* | *Percentage of pupils aged 4* |
|---|---|---|
| *Strathclyde divisions:* | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 2.2 | 4.9 |
| Ayr | 15.0 | 38.8 |
| Dunbarton | 14.5 | 35.1 |
| Glasgow | 42.1 | 62.9 |
| Lanark | 13.5 | 31.1 |
| Renfrew | 16.8 | 42.3 |

*Sources:*

GRO(S) Mid year population estimates 1994 Annual School Census 1994.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each regional authority in Scotland the number of nursery places provided, broken down by *(a)* part time and *(b)* full time, for (i) the year before statutory schooling and (ii) the period before that. [11549]

**Mr. Robertson:** The latest available information in respect of education authority nursery schools and classes is given in the table.

*Number of children attending education authority nursery schools and classes, September 1994*

| | *Aged 3 and under*[1] | | *Aged 4 and over*[1] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Full time* | *Part time* | *Full time* | *Part time* |
| Scotland | 530 | 12,919 | 2,444 | 33,867 |
| Borders | — | 31 | — | 457 |
| Central | 1 | 735 | 21 | 2,410 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 1 | 207 | 4 | 1,322 |
| Fife | 27 | 788 | 74 | 3,700 |
| Grampian | 15 | 683 | 240 | 4,210 |
| Highland | — | 125 | — | 807 |
| Lothian | 116 | 2,596 | 740 | 6,202 |
| Strathclyde | 352 | 6,484 | 858 | 11,845 |
| Tayside | 18 | 1,142 | 507 | 2,542 |
| Orkney | — | 61 | — | 189 |
| Shetland | — | 67 | — | 183 |
| Western Isles | — | — | — | — |

[1] Age at 31 December 1994.

Other pre-school care providers such as private nurseries, playgroups and day care centres may also provide education, but there will be no clear way of establishing this until the quality assurance arrangements planned under the Government's pre-school education vouchers initiative have been set up.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much each regional authority in Scotland spends on nursery education. [11550]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The total gross revenue expenditure on nursery education in 1993–94—the last year for which figures are available—by each region and islands council was as shown in the table. The figures cover revenue expenditure directly related to nursery education, and do not include any apportionment of administration or miscellaneous services attributed to nursery education.

*Gross expenditure on nursery education 1993–94*

| | *Nursery education £000* |
|---|---|
| Borders | 61 |
| Central | 3,109 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 936 |
| Fife | 4,238 |
| Grampian | 5,209 |
| Highland | 969 |
| Lothian | 11,305 |
| Strathclyde | 31,126 |
| Tayside | 4,697 |
| Orkney | 138 |
| Shetland | 409 |
| Western Isles | 0 |
| Scotland total | 62,197 |

*Source:*

Local Financial Returns (1993-94).

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current grant-aided expenditure for nursery education for each regional authority; and how the figures are calculated. [11551]

**Mr. Kynoch:** There is not a separate grant-aided expenditure assessment for the total cost of nursery education. There is, however, an assessment for the cost of nursery teaching staff. Its distribution for the current year is shown in the table.

| | *Grant-aided expenditure (£000)* |
|---|---|
| Borders | 399 |
| Central | 1,082 |
| Dumfries | 585 |
| Fife | 1,479 |
| Grampian | 2,211 |
| Highland | 860 |
| Lothian | 3,017 |
| Strathclyde | 9,599 |
| Tayside | 1,545 |
| Orkney | 92 |
| Shetland | 108 |
| Western Isles | 127 |
| Total | 21,104 |

The total amount for this assessment is decided each year by the Secretary of State. It is apportioned between relevant authorities pro-rata to the population aged three and four in each authority, based on the most recent available mid-year population estimate provided by the General Register Office of Scotland.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children in Scotland currently receive some form of nursery education in the year before statutory schooling, broken down by *(a)* the different types of provision and *(b)* region. [11559]

**Mr. Robertson:** The latest available information in respect of education authority nursery schools and classes is given in the table.

*Number of children attending education authority nursery schools and classes*

| | *Children age 4 and over*[1] |
|---|---|
| *Scotland* | *36, 311* |
| Borders | 457 |
| Central | 2,431 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 1,326 |
| Fife | 3,774 |
| Grampian | 4,450 |
| Highland | 807 |
| Lothian | 6,942 |
| Strathclyde | 12,703 |
| Tayside | 3,049 |
| Orkney | 189 |
| Shetland | 183 |
| Western Isles | 0 |

[1] Age at 31 December 1994.

Other pre-school care providers such as private nurseries, playgroups and day care centres may also provide education, but there will be no clear way of establishing this until the quality assurance arrangements planned under the Government's pre-school education vouchers initiative have been set up.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of children whose parents are currently paying for nursery education in the year before statutory schooling. [11561]

**Mr. Robertson:** I have made no such estimate.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what figures he has received from each regional authority for the cost of a part-time nursery education place in its area. [11556]

**Mr. Robertson** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]*: These costs are not collected routinely. Participation in the pilot will give authorities an impetus systematically to collect such data, which would be part of our overall review of the initial phase.

## Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans to make the implementation statement on the nursery vouchers scheme, foreseen in the consultation paper issued on 15 August. [11548]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** I made it on 11 December 1995.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the impact of the proposed nursery voucher scheme on nursery provision for three-year-olds. [11552]

**Mr. Robertson:** The nursery voucher initiative is not intended to have any impact on nursery provision for three-year-olds. I shall, however, keep this issue under review in course of the pilot year.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many extra nursery places he expects the nursery voucher scheme to create in its first year. [11553]

**Mr. Robertson:** The scheme will be driven by parental choice and parental demand.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of how children with special needs will be affected by the nursery voucher scheme. [11554]

**Mr. Robertson:** The powers and duties of local authorities to make provision for children with special educational needs will not be affected by the Government's nursery education initiative.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received concerning the proposed nursery voucher scheme; and how many of those representations were *(a)* in support of and *(b)* opposed to the scheme. [11555]

**Mr. Robertson:** In response to the formal consultation launched in August, my Department received over 170 replies.

Without exception, consultees welcomed the Government's commitment to extend education for children in the pre-school year, but there was concern about the implications of the voucher initiative. These concerns will be addressed in the pilot year.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the planned cost of the nursery voucher pilot project. [11558]

**Mr. Robertson:** Some £3 million of new money is being made available in 1996–97 for the pilot phase. There will, in addition, be funding which was hitherto part of participating authorities' nursery education provision.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money he plans to withhold from local authority settlements in consideration of the nursery voucher scheme; and by what mechanisms. [11560]

**Mr. Robertson:** In the 1996–97 pilot year, each participating local authority will be asked to agree to pay to the Scottish Office, or have deducted from grant, a sum equal to the voucher value multiplied by the base number of places provided by that authority and filled in the previous year. The mechanism for future years will be discussed with authorities.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to prevent a black market in nursery vouchers. [11562]

**Mr. Robertson:** A range of precautions will be taken to guard against dishonesty. For obvious reasons, these cannot be made public.

## EC Nitrates Directive

**Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about implementation of the EC nitrates directive (91/676/EEC) in Scotland; and when he expects to announce the decision regarding the designation of nitrate-vulnerable zones. [12171]

**Mr. Kynoch:** In June 1994, the Government consulted publicly on two areas proposed as candidates for designation as nitrate—vulnerable zones in Scotland—the catchments of the Balmalcolm groundwater borehole in Fife and the River Ythan in Grampian. Some 189 replies were received.

Following careful consideration of the responses and the extent to which each of these areas meet the criteria laid down in the directive, it has been decided to designate the catchment of the Balmalcolm borehole as an NVZ.

Since a final link between higher levels of nitrate and the increased growth of the algae enteromorpha has yet to be determined scientifically, the Government have decided not to designate the catchment of the River Ythan as an NVZ on this occasion. There will, however, be continuing research into the extent of any link between the growth of the algae in the estuary and nitrate from agricultural sources in the catchment. A further review of the case for designation of NVZs throughout Scotland will take place, as required by the directive, by 19 December 1997 and this review will take account of the additional research.

The Government will now make it a priority to promote good practice in the use of nitrates by farmers throughout the Ythan catchment in line with the code of good practice "Prevention of Environmental Pollution from Agricultural Activity".

I can also announce that the Government have today issued a consultation paper on regulatory proposals and the action programme necessary to give effect to the directive's requirements in NVZs in Scotland. A copy of the proposals is available in the Library of the House. Comments are sought by 25 March 1996.

## Local Government Reform

**Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the preparation of notional budgets for the new unitary authorities. [12172]

**Mr. Kynoch:** I have today laid before the House, in terms of section 94A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992—as inserted by section 24 of the Local Government, etc. (Scotland) Act 1994—the notional amounts report 1996. Subject to the approval of the report, the amounts specified therein for each of the new councils will be used as the baseline for considering any capping action in 1996–97. I announced my provisional capping principles for that year in my reply to a question from my right hon. Friends the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *585–87*.

## Mobile Phones

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9764]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* Mobile phones and car phones are purchased on an as-required basis. Agreements are entered into with the supplier for the provision of airtime for a 12-month minimum period with 90 days notification of cancellation thereafter. The number of mobile phones

held by the Scottish Office and its executive agencies is 454. These have been provided by the following suppliers:

Vodaphone; Cellnet; BT Mobile; Vodac Direct; HSW Systems; Mobile Direct; Veecom; Woodend Communications; Woodend Cellular: Comware.

The total operating cost per annum is approximately £135,000.

### Elderly People (NHS Services)

**Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his Department has made of changes in the costs of providing NHS treatments and services to elderly people in Scotland *(a)* over the last 10 years and *(b)* over the next 10 years. [11041]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The aim for all groups is to secure the most effective package of health and social care services, both in hospital and the community, that meet the specific needs of individuals and where appropriate, their carers.

Assessment of needs for care services for the elderly is primarily a matter for health boards and local authorities. Demographic change has led to the cost of providing NHS care and treatment for this age group increasing over the last 10 years by approximately 1 per cent. a year. On the same basis, the forecast to year 2005–06 is for an increase of about 0.9 per cent. per annum. In practice, these cost pressures will continue to be offset by further improvements in efficiency and quality of care.

### Health Boards

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance his Department has issued to Scottish health boards in respect of retention of surpluses in their budgets at the end of the 1994–95 financial year. [11102]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Guidance is contained in the "Scottish Accounting Manual" which is issued to all health boards. This states that an underdrawing of up to 1 per cent. of a health board's cash limit may be carried forward from one year to another and that any overdrawing will be carried forward as a first charge against the following year's cash limit. There is, however, flexibility to allow a larger carry forward. Requests from health boards for carry forward in excess of 1 per cent. are considered on their merits.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his answer of 7 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *367*, (1) if the under-drawings in the 1994–95 budgets of Greater Glasgow health board and Borders health board were carried forward into the 1995–96 budgets of these bodies; [11148]

(2) what was the outcome of his Department's discussions with the senior management of Greater Glasgow health board and Borders health board, concerning these bodies' under-drawing of their budgets for 1994–95. [11149]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Final agreement has been reached with senior management of Greater Glasgow health board and Borders health board concerning the carry forward of underdrawings in 1994–95. Borders health board carry forward is £815,925 which is the same amount it underdrew. Greater Glasgow health board carry forward is £8,043,180 which is £1,837,000 less than its underdrawing. The difference relates to ring fenced funds which cannot normally be carried forward.

## Rail Privatisation

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what total payment *(a)* has been and *(b)* is projected to be made to Strathclyde regional council to provide for the additional costs of supporting rail services arising from the privatisation of British Rail. [11316]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** In 1994–95, £79,103,000 was paid to Strathclyde regional council to cover the additional costs to it in that year resulting from rail restructuring. The Scottish Office expects to pay about £60 million to cover comparable costs in the current financial year. With effect from 1 April 1996, future costs will be met through provision in the annual local government finance settlements for the constituent authorities in the Strathclyde passenger transport authority.

## School Meals

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each regional and island council in Scotland for each academic year since 1979–80 the average price of a school meal in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [11103]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The average cost to pupils of school meals is not collected centrally. Pupils can obtain either a fixed meal at a set charge or a cafeteria style meal for which the charge will vary depending on the individual pupil's choice. The table gives details of the fixed price meal charge levied by each education authority in each year since 1979. The level of the charge made is at the discretion of the education authority.

*Charge for a fixed price meal at January of each year shown*

*Pence*

| *Education Authority* | *1980* | *1981* | *1982* | *1983* | *1984* | *1985* | *1986* | *1987* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Borders | 35 | 35 | 40 | 42 | 44 | 46 | 48 | 50 |
| Central | 35 | 35 | 35 | 40 | 45 | 45 | 50 | 55 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 35 | 40 | 45 | 50 | 50 | 52 | 55 | 58 |
| Fife | 35 | 35 | 40 | 45 | 48 | 50 | 52 | 55 |
| Grampian: | | | | | | | | |
| Primary | 35 | 35 | 42 | 42 | 45 | 50 | 55 | 58 |
| Secondary | n/a | n/a | 45 | 45 | 55 | 60 | 65 | 68 |
| Highland | 35 | 41 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 55 | 55 | 65 |
| Lothian: | | | | | | | | |
| Primary | 35 | 35 | 35 | 45 | 45 | 50 | 50 | 50 |
| Secondary | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 55 | 55 | 55 |
| Strathclyde | 35 | 40 | 45 | 50 | 53 | 55 | 58 | 61 |
| Tayside: | | | | | | | | |
| Primary | 35 | 40 | 45 | 50 | 45 | 50 | 55 | 60 |
| Secondary | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 50 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Orkney: | | | | | | | | |
| Primary | 35 | 35 | 40 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 55 | 60 |
| Secondary | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Shetland | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 | 45 | 50 | 50 | 55 |
| Western Isles | 35 | 35 | 40 | 45 | 60 | 60 | 65 | 65 |

n/a = not available.

*Pence*

| *Education Authority* | *1988* | *1989* | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Borders | 50 | 50 | 50 | 55 | 60 | 65 | 65 | 70 |
| Central | 58 | 60 | 62 | 68 | 72 | 75 | 80 | 85 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 61 | 60 | 60 | [1]65 | [1]65 | [1]65 | [1]65 | [1]65 |
| | — | — | — | [2]55 | [2]55 | [2]55 | [4]70 | [4]70 |
| | — | — | — | — | — | — | [2]55 | — |
| Fife | 50 | 50 | 50 | 60 | n/a | 60 | 65 | 65 |
| Grampian: | | | | | | | | |
| Primary | 60 | 63 | n/a | n/a | n/a | 83 | 87 | 87 |
| Secondary | 70 | 73 | n/a | n/a | n/a | 97 | 100 | n/a |
| Highland | 65 | 70 | 74 | 80 | 85 | 90 | 90 | 100 |
| Lothian: | | | | | | | | |
| Primary | 50 | 55 | 55 | 60 | 70 | 75 | 80 | 90 |
| Secondary | 55 | 60 | 60 | 65 | 75 | 80 | 90 | 100 |
| Strathclyde | 63 | 64 | 67 | 79 | n/a | 83 | 89 | 93 |
| Tayside: | | | | | | | | |
| Primary | 60 | 65 | 65 | 65 | 65 | 65 | 65 | 65 |
| Secondary | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 70 |
| Orkney: | | | | | | | | |
| Primary | 60 | 60 | 70 | 70 | 70 | 70 | 70 | 80 |
| Secondary | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 75 | 80 | 80 | 90 |
| Shetland | 60 | 60 | 65 | 75 | 75 | 80 | 85 | 90 |
| Western Isles | 65 | 70 | 70 | 70 | 75 | 80 | 85 | n/a |

n/a = not available.
[1] Standard meal.
[2] Mini-meal.
[3] Primary.
[4] Secondary.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each regional and island council in Scotland and for each sub-division within the Strathclyde regional council area for each academic year since 1979–80 for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools (i) the total number of children in education, (ii) how many children are in receipt of free school meals and (iii) the percentage of children in receipt of free school meals. [11104]

**Mr. Robertson:** Information on the uptake of free school meals for the school sessions 1979–80 to 1992–93 is not available for separate primary and secondary sectors. Information by sector has been collected only from 1993–94 school session onwards.

The following tables show at table 1—the number of pupils registered in education authority primary schools; table 2—the number of pupils registered in education authority secondary schools; table 3—the total number of pupils in education authority schools, including nursery and special schools, taking free school meals at the annual January census; table 4—the percentage of all pupils in education authority schools, including nursery and special schools, taking free meals at the annual January census; and table 5—the numbers and percentages of primary and secondary pupils taking free school meals for the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school sessions.

*Table 1: Number of pupils in Education Authority primary schools at September in session*

| | Session | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Education Authority* | *1979–80* | *1980–81* | *1981–82* | *1982–83* | *1983–84* | *1984–85* | *[1]1985–86* | *[1]1986–87* |
| Sector | All | All | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Scotland | 545,161 | 518,492 | 492,645 | 467,971 | 448,009 | 437,538 | 435,454 | 433,459 |
| Borders | 10,135 | 9,643 | 9,156 | 8,686 | 8,353 | 8,219 | 8,246 | 8,213 |
| Central | 29,737 | 28,559 | 27,258 | 25,850 | 24,897 | 24,287 | 24,158 | 23,754 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 15,069 | 14,223 | 13,457 | 12,799 | 12,480 | 12,285 | 12,313 | 12,321 |
| Fife | 36,766 | 35,103 | 33,733 | 32,257 | 31,388 | 31,005 | 31,105 | 30,602 |
| Grampian | 49,831 | 48,352 | 47,128 | 45,767 | 43,827 | 43,274 | 43,156 | 42,941 |
| Highland | 22,000 | 21,275 | 20,568 | 19,822 | 19,460 | 19,168 | 19,290 | 19,394 |
| Lothian | 71,816 | 68,112 | 64,688 | 61,461 | 58,327 | 55,745 | 54,964 | 54,386 |
| Strathclyde | 261,721 | 247,143 | 232,691 | 219,231 | 208,934 | 204,311 | 203,521 | 203,337 |
| Tayside | 39,694 | 37,925 | 35,964 | 34,278 | 32,757 | 31,871 | 31,335 | 31,298 |
| Orkney | 2,000 | 1,923 | 1,886 | 1,910 | 1,910 | 1,866 | 1,825 | 1,826 |
| Shetland | 2,711 | 2,705 | 2,681 | 2,564 | 2,478 | 2,388 | 2,386 | 2,387 |
| Western Isles | 3,681 | 3,529 | 3,435 | 3,346 | 3,198 | 3,119 | 3,155 | 3,000 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 6,880 | 6,484 | 6,215 | 6,094 | 5,898 | 5,708 | 5,727 | 5,687 |
| Ayr | 43,074 | 40,924 | 38,380 | 36,045 | 34,686 | 33,927 | 33,711 | 33,689 |
| Dunbarton | 36,923 | 35,235 | 33,744 | 32,275 | 31,064 | 30,602 | 30,581 | 30,514 |
| Glasgow | 75,160 | 69,773 | 64,682 | 60,602 | 57,123 | 55,593 | 55,553 | 55,593 |
| Lanark | 60,175 | 57,303 | 54,284 | 50,743 | 48,491 | 47,324 | 46,941 | 46,884 |
| Renfrew | 39,509 | 37,424 | 35,386 | 33,472 | 31,672 | 31,157 | 31,008 | 30,970 |

[1] Estimated figures due to teacher industrial action.

*at September in session*

| | Session | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Education Authority* | *1987–88* | *1988–89* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
| Sector | All | All | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Scotland | 430,919 | 432,760 | 437,072 | 440,591 | 440,808 | 438,974 | 438,401 | 438,011 |
| Borders | 8,164 | 8,327 | 8,411 | 8,525 | 8,520 | 8,551 | 8,613 | 8,610 |
| Central | 23,516 | 23,520 | 23,682 | 23,709 | 23,428 | 23,388 | 23,249 | 23,100 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 12,302 | 12,405 | 12,733 | 12,848 | 12,772 | 12,936 | 12,882 | 12,820 |
| Fife | 30,554 | 30,555 | 30,908 | 31,206 | 31,188 | 31,140 | 31,082 | 30,965 |
| Grampian | 43,041 | 42,985 | 43,374 | 43,898 | 44,203 | 44,566 | 44,795 | 45,006 |
| Highland | 19,278 | 19,331 | 19,527 | 19,549 | 19,653 | 19,369 | 19,152 | 19,001 |
| Lothian | 54,363 | 54,588 | 55,201 | 55,898 | 56,270 | 56,560 | 57,514 | 58,007 |
| Strathclyde | 201,508 | 202,713 | 204,628 | 205,873 | 205,614 | 203,152 | 201,762 | 200,980 |
| Tayside | 31,108 | 31,375 | 31,769 | 32,312 | 32,467 | 32,658 | 32,684 | 32,846 |
| Orkney | 1,787 | 1,827 | 1,783 | 1,787 | 1,801 | 1,832 | 1,821 | 1,841 |
| Shetland | 2,370 | 2,338 | 2,257 | 2,230 | 2,244 | 2,189 | 2,206 | 2,231 |
| Western Isles | 2,928 | 2,796 | 2,799 | 2,756 | 2,648 | 2,633 | 2,641 | 2,604 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 5,721 | 5,705 | 5,742 | 5,770 | 5,664 | 5,375 | 5,402 | 5,389 |
| Ayr | 33,441 | 33,633 | 34,093 | 34,171 | 34,263 | 34,013 | 33,771 | 33,667 |
| Dunbarton | 30,321 | 30,281 | 30,396 | 30,505 | 30,244 | 29,663 | 29,332 | 29,161 |
| Glasgow | 54,759 | 55,307 | 55,887 | 56,588 | 56,985 | 56,699 | 56,303 | 55,846 |
| Lanark | 46,355 | 46,565 | 47,067 | 47,171 | 46,702 | 45,875 | 45,328 | 45,043 |
| Renfrew | 30,911 | 31,222 | 31,443 | 31,668 | 31,756 | 31,527 | 31,626 | 31,874 |

*Table 2: Number of pupils in Education Authority secondary schools at September in session*

| Education Authority | Session 1979–80 | 1980–81 | 1981–82 | 1982–83 | 1983–84 | 1984–85 | [1]1985–86 | [1]1986–87 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sector | All | All | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Scotland | 410,242 | 407,844 | 404,575 | 399,075 | 390,368 | 376,071 | 360,645 | 344,369 |
| Borders | 7,351 | 7,411 | 7,423 | 7,501 | 7,417 | 7,140 | 6,907 | 6,684 |
| Central | 22,236 | 22,283 | 22,209 | 21,910 | 21,479 | 20,866 | 20,120 | 19,300 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 11,403 | 11,611 | 11,838 | 11,814 | 11,569 | 11,181 | 10,747 | 10,204 |
| Fife | 26,624 | 26,792 | 26,847 | 26,665 | 26,194 | 25,208 | 24,371 | 23,606 |
| Grampian | 34,471 | 34,444 | 34,603 | 34,866 | 35,366 | 34,635 | 34,216 | 33,247 |
| Highland | 16,113 | 16,128 | 16,119 | 16,021 | 15,958 | 15,629 | 15,183 | 14,853 |
| Lothian | 52,720 | 52,316 | 51,515 | 50,240 | 48,981 | 47,685 | 45,415 | 43,328 |
| Strathclyde | 203,995 | 201,712 | 198,957 | 195,428 | 189,219 | 180,499 | 171,505 | 162,258 |
| Tayside | 29,666 | 29,248 | 29,064 | 28,667 | 28,131 | 27,293 | 26,388 | 25,221 |
| Orkney | 1,496 | 1,541 | 1,521 | 1,496 | 1,464 | 1,443 | 1,414 | 1,376 |
| Shetland | 1,618 | 1,631 | 1,702 | 1,715 | 1,797 | 1,760 | 1,740 | 1,709 |
| Western Isles | 2,549 | 2,727 | 2,777 | 2,752 | 2,793 | 2,732 | 2,639 | 2,583 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 4,881 | 5,073 | 5,080 | 5,183 | 5,065 | 4,940 | 4,797 | 4,518 |
| Ayr | 31,467 | 31,607 | 31,710 | 31,627 | 30,927 | 29,954 | 28,615 | 27,322 |
| Dunbarton | 27,448 | 27,333 | 27,320 | 26,884 | 26,331 | 25,562 | 24,797 | 24,072 |
| Glasgow | 61,666 | 59,690 | 57,665 | 55,438 | 52,752 | 48,540 | 44,959 | 41,184 |
| Lanark | 47,445 | 47,280 | 47,016 | 46,644 | 45,072 | 43,308 | 41,088 | 39,026 |
| Renfrew | 31,088 | 30,729 | 30,166 | 29,652 | 29,072 | 28,195 | 27,249 | 162,258 |

[1] Estimated figures due to teacher industrial action.

*at September in session*

| Education authority | Session 1987–88 | 1988–89 | 1989–90 | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sector | All | All | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Scotland | 327,056 | 311,563 | 298,453 | 293,569 | 296,455 | 303,056 | 311,255 | 314,904 |
| Borders | 6,326 | 5,990 | 5,846 | 5,814 | 5,905 | 5,989 | 6,182 | 6,296 |
| Central | 18,379 | 17,641 | 16,817 | 16,537 | 16,699 | 17,017 | 17,212 | 17,285 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 9,802 | 9,345 | 9,015 | 8,889 | 8,922 | 9,105 | 9,400 | 9,464 |
| Fife | 22,454 | 21,727 | 21,026 | 21,035 | 21,247 | 21,652 | 22,413 | 22,699 |
| Grampian | 31,790 | 30,831 | 29,589 | 29,402 | 29,988 | 30,610 | 31,386 | 31,831 |
| Highland | 14,348 | 14,043 | 13,663 | 13,640 | 14,015 | 14,516 | 14,995 | 15,212 |
| Lothian | 41,187 | 39,132 | 37,361 | 35,988 | 36,091 | 36,647 | 37,641 | 38,020 |
| Strathclyde | 153,292 | 144,548 | 137,574 | 135,040 | 136,193 | 139,722 | 143,606 | 145,307 |
| Tayside | 24,001 | 22,985 | 22,272 | 21,962 | 22,045 | 22,380 | 22,986 | 23,343 |
| Orkney | 1,338 | 1,281 | 1,332 | 1,329 | 1,386 | 1,412 | 1,448 | 1,439 |
| Shetland | 1,663 | 1,643 | 1,623 | 1,635 | 1,651 | 1,757 | 1,761 | 1,766 |
| Western Isles | 2,476 | 2,397 | 2,335 | 2,298 | 2,303 | 2,249 | 2,225 | 2,242 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 4,421 | 4,255 | 4,098 | 4,013 | 4,083 | 4,092 | 4,180 | 4,244 |
| Ayr | 26,182 | 25,004 | 23,815 | 23,351 | 23,330 | 23,855 | 24,622 | 25,028 |
| Dunbarton | 22,918 | 22,375 | 21,638 | 21,216 | 21,527 | 22,465 | 22,927 | 23,256 |
| Glasgow | 37,907 | 34,623 | 32,303 | 31,594 | 31,659 | 32,140 | 32,728 | 32,993 |
| Lanark | 37,074 | 34,889 | 33,085 | 32,561 | 32,969 | 33,805 | 34,933 | 35,335 |
| Renfrew | 24,790 | 23,402 | 22,635 | 22,305 | 22,625 | 23,365 | 24,216 | 24,451 |

*Table 3: Number of pupils in Education Authority schools taking free school meals at January in session*

| Education Authority | Session 1979–80 | 1980–81 | 1981–82 | 1982–83 | 1983–84 | 1984–85 | [1]1985–86 | [1]1986–87 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sector | All | All | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Scotland | 122,618 | 114,711 | 124,547 | 132,953 | 129,335 | 136,669 | 136,627 | 143,194 |
| Borders | 1,365 | 773 | 966 | 1,097 | 1,113 | 1,136 | 1,065 | 1,203 |
| Central | 4,708 | 5,084 | 5,853 | 6,584 | 6,443 | 7,311 | 6,975 | 8,046 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 2,851 | 2,017 | 2,265 | 2,705 | 2,718 | 2,765 | 2,950 | 2,826 |
| Fife | 6,443 | 6,146 | 6,935 | 7,263 | 6,719 | 8,639 | 8,172 | 9,025 |
| Grampian | 5,935 | 3,225 | 3,709 | 4,117 | 4,318 | 4,704 | 4,800 | 5,593 |
| Highland | 3,674 | 2,339 | 2,813 | 3,415 | 3,438 | 4,312 | 4,355 | 4,643 |
| Lothian | 14,655 | 13,162 | 14,145 | 12,854 | 12,413 | 14,201 | 13,711 | 14,689 |
| Strathclyde | 72,881 | 74,565 | 79,406 | 85,426 | 82,348 | 84,096 | 84,659 | 87,362 |

*Table 3: Number of pupils in Education Authority schools taking free school meals at January in session*

| Education Authority | Session 1979–80 | 1980–81 | 1981–82 | 1982–83 | 1983–84 | 1984–85 | [1]1985–86 | [1]1986–87 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tayside | 8,208 | 5,610 | 6,597 | 7,380 | 7,702 | 7,854 | 8,154 | 7,921 |
| Orkney | 385 | 412 | 389 | 520 | 512 | 477 | 429 | 438 |
| Shetland | 155 | 163 | 189 | 183 | 236 | 246 | 232 | 270 |
| Western Isles | 1,358 | 1,215 | 1,280 | 1,409 | 1,375 | 928 | 1,125 | 1,178 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 1,497 | 1,336 | 1,443 | 1,563 | 1,525 | 1,469 | 1,510 | 1,560 |
| Ayr | 10,592 | 10,579 | 10,801 | 12,295 | 12,690 | 13,202 | 12,540 | 13,266 |
| Dunbarton | 5,734 | 5,823 | 6,838 | 7,972 | 7,385 | 8,103 | 8,622 | 9,340 |
| Glasgow | 31,743 | 32,913 | 34,156 | 36,045 | 33,791 | 33,947 | 34,059 | 34,671 |
| Lanark | 15,135 | 15,885 | 16,631 | 17,172 | 17,316 | 16,959 | 16,759 | 16,823 |
| Renfrew | 8,180 | 8,029 | 9,537 | 10,379 | 9,641 | 10,416 | 11,169 | 11,702 |

[1] Contains some estimated data.

*at January in session*

| Education Authority | Session 1987–88 | 1988–89 | 1989–90 | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sector | All | All | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Scotland | 145,219 | 105,232 | 99,303 | 101,915 | 107,186 | 107,709 | 121,479 | 121,123 |
| Borders | 1,184 | 522 | 779 | 650 | 751 | 683 | 721 | 750 |
| Central | 7,740 | 5,448 | 4,985 | 5,170 | 5,402 | 5,476 | 5,931 | 6,176 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 2,994 | 1,755 | 1,656 | 1,769 | 1,889 | 2,017 | 2,102 | 2,155 |
| Fife | 8,927 | 6,227 | 6,123 | 6,432 | 7,017 | 7,080 | 8,065 | 8,283 |
| Grampian | 5,967 | 4,068 | 4,099 | 4,375 | 5,177 | 5,695 | 5,721 | 6,182 |
| Highland | 4,960 | 3,395 | 2,967 | 2,881 | 3,024 | 3,270 | 4,015 | 3,918 |
| Lothian | 15,773 | 12,219 | 11,710 | 12,330 | 12,857 | 13,551 | 15,190 | 15,358 |
| Strathclyde | 87,147 | 63,905 | 59,853 | 61,169 | 63,682 | 62,436 | 71,981 | 70,595 |
| Tayside | 8,720 | 6,562 | 6,121 | 6,199 | 6,396 | 6,520 | 6,732 | 6,723 |
| Orkney | 432 | 193 | 183 | 179 | 208 | 201 | 220 | 232 |
| Shetland | 263 | 146 | 142 | 160 | 210 | 226 | 236 | 250 |
| Western Isles | 1,112 | 792 | 685 | 601 | 573 | 554 | 565 | 501 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 1,555 | 950 | 861 | 896 | 1,040 | 1,150 | 1,224 | 1,210 |
| Ayr | 12,899 | 8,718 | 8,512 | 8,887 | 9,460 | 9,942 | 10,451 | 10,016 |
| Dunbarton | 9,027 | 6,806 | 6,046 | 6,184 | 6,486 | 6,477 | 7,568 | 7,595 |
| Glasgow | 35,337 | 27,053 | 25,188 | 26,243 | 27,093 | 25,040 | 29,948 | 29,196 |
| Lanark | 16,585 | 11,450 | 10,865 | 10,861 | 11,137 | 11,843 | 13,663 | 13,660 |
| Renfrew | 11,744 | 8,928 | 8,381 | 8,098 | 8,466 | 7,984 | 9,127 | 8,918 |

*Table 4: Percentage of pupils in Education Authority schools taking free school meals at January in session*

| Education Authority | Session 1979–80 | 1980–81 | 1981–82 | 1982–83 | 1983–84 | 1984–85 | [1]1985–86 | [1]1986–87 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sector | All | All | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Scotland | 14.0 | 13.2 | 15.1 | 16.3 | 17.1 | 18.2 | 18.6 | 19.6 |
| Borders | 8.4 | 4.8 | 6.5 | 7.3 | 7.6 | 8.1 | 7.7 | 8.7 |
| Central | 9.9 | 10.6 | 13.0 | 14.8 | 15.2 | 17.6 | 17.1 | 19.5 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 11.8 | 8.4 | 10.1 | 12.0 | 12.4 | 13.3 | 13.8 | 14.1 |
| Fife | 10.7 | 10.3 | 12.1 | 12.8 | 12.8 | 16.4 | 15.4 | 16.9 |
| Grampian | 7.5 | 4.1 | 5.0 | 5.6 | 5.9 | 6.5 | 6.8 | 7.9 |
| Highland | 10.4 | 6.8 | 8.4 | 10.2 | 10.8 | 13.3 | 13.4 | 15.0 |
| Lothian | 12.6 | 11.5 | 13.0 | 12.1 | 12.5 | 14.2 | 14.2 | 15.3 |
| Strathclyde | 17.3 | 18.0 | 20.3 | 22.1 | 23.4 | 24.1 | 24.8 | 25.7 |
| Tayside | 12.7 | 8.6 | 10.4 | 11.9 | 13.5 | 13.7 | 15.1 | 15.1 |
| Orkney | 11.9 | 13.0 | 13.7 | 15.9 | 16.0 | 15.3 | 14.8 | 14.4 |
| Shetland | 3.9 | 4.0 | 4.6 | 4.5 | 5.9 | 6.3 | 5.9 | 6.9 |
| Western Isles | 23.6 | 20.9 | 23.4 | 25.7 | 24.5 | 17.4 | 21.9 | 23.7 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 14.1 | 12.6 | 13.9 | 15.3 | 15.7 | 15.3 | 16.1 | 16.9 |
| Ayr | 15.5 | 15.9 | 17.6 | 19.6 | 21.3 | 22.9 | 22.1 | 23.4 |
| Dunbarton | 9.9 | 10.2 | 12.5 | 14.8 | 15.1 | 15.6 | 17.0 | 18.1 |
| Glasgow | 26.2 | 27.1 | 30.0 | 32.6 | 35.0 | 35.9 | 36.6 | 38.5 |
| Lanark | 15.7 | 16.7 | 18.4 | 19.2 | 21.1 | 21.2 | 21.8 | 21.6 |
| Renfrew | 12.5 | 12.6 | 15.7 | 17.3 | 17.6 | 19.0 | 20.6 | 21.7 |

*at January in session*

| Education Authority | Session 1987–88 | 1988–89 | 1989–90 | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sector | All | All | All | All | All | All | All | All |
| Scotland | 19.9 | 14.8 | 14.1 | 14.6 | 15.4 | 15.7 | 16.7 | 16.6 |
| Borders | 8.5 | 3.8 | 5.7 | 4.7 | 5.5 | 4.9 | 5.1 | 5.1 |
| Central | 18.9 | 14.1 | 12.8 | 13.5 | 14.3 | 14.4 | 14.8 | 15.6 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 14.5 | 8.8 | 8.1 | 8.8 | 9.4 | 9.9 | 9.7 | 10.1 |
| Fife | 16.9 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 12.6 | 13.7 | 14.0 | 15.1 | 15.2 |
| Grampian | 8.3 | 5.7 | 5.3 | 6.1 | 7.5 | 8.0 | 7.7 | 8.2 |
| Highland | 15.8 | 11.1 | 9.5 | 9.4 | 9.8 | 10.5 | 12.4 | 12.0 |
| Lothian | 16.6 | 13.0 | 12.8 | 13.6 | 14.0 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 15.8 |
| Strathclyde | 25.8 | 19.4 | 18.8 | 19.2 | 20.1 | 20.4 | 21.8 | 21.7 |
| Tayside | 16.4 | 12.5 | 11.9 | 11.9 | 12.2 | 12.2 | 12.9 | 12.1 |
| Orkney | 14.5 | 6.6 | 6.1 | 6.0 | 6.9 | 6.3 | 7.0 | 6.9 |
| Shetland | 6.8 | 3.8 | 3.8 | 4.1 | 5.6 | 5.9 | 6.1 | 6.2 |
| Western Isles | 22.9 | 18.0 | 14.7 | 13.1 | 12.3 | 12.6 | 12.1 | 11.2 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 16.4 | 10.4 | 9.6 | 9.9 | 11.6 | 13.5 | 13.8 | 13.5 |
| Ayr | 22.5 | 15.8 | 15.9 | 16.5 | 17.5 | 19.7 | 19.5 | 18.8 |
| Dunbarton | 17.6 | 13.5 | 12.3 | 12.9 | 13.7 | 13.3 | 15.5 | 15.6 |
| Glasgow | 39.6 | 31.7 | 30.9 | 31.5 | 32.4 | 32.2 | 34.0 | 34.1 |
| Lanark | 21.4 | 15.3 | 14.9 | 14.8 | 15.6 | 17.0 | 17.9 | 18.1 |
| Renfrew | 22.1 | 16.6 | 16.3 | 15.9 | 16.6 | 15.8 | 16.8 | 16.5 |

*Number of pupils in education authority schools taking free school meals*
*at January in session*

| Education Authority | Session 1993–94 Primary Number | Primary Percentage | Secondary Number | Secondary Percentage | 1994–95 Primary Number | Primary Percentage | Secondary Number | Secondary Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Scotland* | 84,970 | 20.5 | 30,286 | 11.3 | 84,645 | 20.6 | 30,578 | 11.3 |
| Borders | 578 | 7.0 | 130 | 2.4 | 590 | 7.1 | 137 | 2.4 |
| Central | 4,155 | 19.0 | 1,312 | 8.7 | 4,219 | 19.5 | 1,505 | 10.2 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 1,539 | 12.6 | 546 | 6.4 | 1,599 | 13.1 | 540 | 6.5 |
| Fife | 5,642 | 19.1 | 1,951 | 10.1 | 5,832 | 19.9 | 2,018 | 9.7 |
| Grampian | 4,174 | 9.8 | 1,295 | 4.8 | 4,378 | 10.3 | 1,487 | 5.3 |
| Highland | 2,797 | 15.4 | 1,107 | 8.3 | 2,747 | 15.2 | 1,085 | 7.9 |
| Lothian | 10,951 | 19.9 | 3,200 | 9.8 | 10,963 | 19.9 | 3,361 | 10.4 |
| Strathclyde | 49,664 | 26.3 | 19,058 | 15.6 | 48,805 | 26.3 | 18,677 | 15.3 |
| Tayside | 4,786 | 15.4 | 1,392 | 7.4 | 4,868 | 15.6 | 1,484 | 7.4 |
| Orkney | 158 | 9.2 | 47 | 3.8 | 161 | 8.9 | 46 | 3.5 |
| Shetland | 174 | 8.4 | 47 | 3.0 | 180 | 8.5 | 53 | 3.3 |
| Western Isles | 352 | 14.0 | 201 | 9.4 | 303 | 12.2 | 185 | 9.3 |
| *Strathclyde Divisions:* | | | | | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute | 806 | 15.8 | 396 | 10.8 | 776 | 15.2 | 410 | 10.9 |
| Ayr | 7,325 | 23.0 | 2,832 | 13.3 | 7,343 | 23.3 | 2,466 | 11.6 |
| Dunbarton | 4,891 | 17.8 | 2,313 | 12.3 | 4,771 | 17.5 | 2,559 | 13.2 |
| Glasgow | 21,158 | 41.2 | 7,035 | 26.4 | 20,656 | 41.5 | 6,708 | 25.6 |
| Lanark | 9,435 | 22.1 | 3,737 | 12.3 | 9,355 | 22.1 | 3,821 | 12.5 |
| Renfrew | 6,049 | 20.2 | 2,745 | 12.9 | 5,904 | 19.9 | 2,713 | 12.8 |

1. Contains some estimated data.

### Schools Development Programme

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to require the provision of resource material relating to leaving home education as part of the social development programme in schools. [11177]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The Government have no plans to require the provision of such material.

In 1993, the Scottish Office education department published national guidelines on personal and social development 5–14. Among other things the aims of this document include helping pupils to develop life skills to enable them to participate effectively and safely in society and to take increasing responsibility for their own lives. This document provides a basis for school managers to include leaving home education in the curriculum if they should consider it to be appropriate for their schools.

### Housing Education

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to instruct Scottish Homes to take steps to *(a)* provide funding for and *(b)* promote a national housing education development unit. [11178]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to do so.

### Students

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women from (i) the Irish Republic and (ii) Northern Ireland were studying at universities at the latest date for which figures are available as (1) undergraduates and (2) graduate students. [11516]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The latest available, but provisional, figures are for those studying at Scottish higher education institutions in 1994–95, and are as follows:

| | *Postgraduate* | | *Undergraduate* | | *Total* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Irish Republic* | *Northern Ireland* | *Irish Republic* | *Northern Ireland* | *Irish Republic* | *Northern Ireland* |
| Male | 104 | 19 | 542 | 234 | 646 | 253 |
| Female | 102 | 15 | 417 | 279 | 519 | 294 |
| Total | 206 | 34 | 959 | 513 | 1,165 | 547 |

### Parole

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he held in respect of, and what estimate he has made of the costs of, the parole restrictions on early release which he recently announced. [11636]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend is consulting now on his proposals for changes to the arrangements governing the early release of prisoners in Scotland. A consultation document—"Making the Punishment Fit the Crime"—was published on 15 January and has been circulated to a wide range of interested parties in Scotland. We look forward to receiving responses which have been requested by 15 March.

In the light of responses, we shall then publish a White Paper containing specific proposals and an assessment of the financial implications.

### Health Finance

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the capital allocations to (i) Scottish health boards, (ii) national health service trusts, (iii) the Common Services Agency and (iv) the state hospital in each of the most recent five years. [11199]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information is detailed in the table:

*£000*

| | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Health Boards | 214,292 | 112,216 | 27,680 | 9,398 | 13,155 |
| NHS Trusts | 13,416 | 77,632 | 159,075 | 203,297 | 194,380 |
| CSA | 21,673 | 17,403 | 19,420 | 6,800 | 2,930 |
| State Hospital | 5,388 | 3,053 | 4,435 | 6,280 | 4,715 |
| Total | 254,769 | 210,304 | 210,610 | 225,775 | 215,180 |

### Efficiency Savings (Health Boards)

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the efficiency savings targets, expressed both in percentage and cash terms, set for Scottish health boards in each year since they were first introduced. [11147]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information is set out in the table:

| *Year* | *Target Percentage* | *Efficiency savings target £000* |
|---|---|---|
| 1985–86 | 1 | 13,488 |
| 1986–87 | 1.5 | 21,600 |
| 1987–88 | 1 | 15,554 |
| 1988–89 | 1 | 17,259 |
| 1989–90 | 2 | 37,003 |
| 1990–91 | 1 | 20,051 |
| 1991–92 | 1 | 22,620 |
| 1992–93 | 1 | 24,191 |
| 1993–94 | 2 | 48,629 |
| 1994–95 | 2 | 50,584 |
| 1995–96 | 2.75 | 71,386 |
| 1996–97 | 3 | 83,000 |
| Total | | 425,365 |

The savings made from efficiency measures are all retained by health boards to enable them to make further improvements in patient care.

### Housing Finance

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was for each district and islands council area for each of the years between 1989–90 and 1994–95, the total public expenditure within the Scottish Homes approved development programme by *(a)* housing association for rent, *(b)* housing association shared ownership, *(c)* housing association improvement for sale, *(d)* grants for rent and ownership grant for rent and *(e)* grants for rent and ownership grant for home ownership; [11598]

(2) what is the average per unit cost of land acquisition for rural schemes within Scottish Homes approved development programme of housing association grant for rent in the years 1992–93 to 1994–95; and what proportion of total average scheme costs was accounted for by land acquisition; [11610]

(3) what was for each district and island council area for each of the years 1992–93 to 1994–95 *(a)* the number of rural home ownership grants awarded by Scottish Homes and *(b)* the expenditure on rural home ownership grants; [11599]

(4) how many dwelling completions there were for each district and islands council area for each of the years between 1989—90 and 1994–95 inclusive within the Scottish Homes approved development programme

by *(a)* housing association for rent, *(b)* housing association shared ownership, *(c)* housing association improvement for sale, *(d)* grants for rent and ownership grant for rent and *(e)* grants for rent and ownership for home ownership. [11611]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

### Environmentally Sensitive Areas

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farm conservation plans have been approved since designation in the Shetland islands environmentally sensitive area. [11169]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* As at 19 January 1996, 84 farmers and crofters have been offered agreements under the Shetland islands environmentally sensitive area scheme.

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farm conservation plans have been approved, since designation, in the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area. [11170]

**Mr. Forsyth** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* As at 19 January 1996, 123 farmers and crofters have been offered agreements under the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area scheme.

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farm conservation plans have been approved in the Shetland islands environmentally sensitive area, since its designation, involving payments under tier 2 in year 1 of the plan of *(a)* 0 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,001 to £2,000 and *(c)* £2,001 to £3,000. [11171]

**Mr. Forsyth** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The number of agreements offered under the Shetland islands environmentally sensitive area scheme involving payments under tier 2 in year 1 of the plan is as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| (a) 0 to £1,000 | 44 |
| (b) £1,001 to £2,000 | 21 |
| (c) £2,001 to £3,000 | 19 |

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farm conservation plans have been approved in the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area, since its designation, involving payments under tier 2 in year 1 of the plan of *(a)* 0 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,001 to £2,000, *(c)* £2,001 to £3,000 and *(d)* £3,001 to £3,500. [11172]

**Mr. Forsyth** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The number of agreements offered under the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area scheme involving payments under tier 2 in year 1 of the plan is as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *(a)* 0 to £1,000 | 9 |
| *(b)* £1,001 to £2,000 | 12 |
| *(c)* £2,001 to £3,000 | 10 |
| *(d)* £3,001 to £3,500 | 92 |

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total area of land entered into the grassland birds management option in the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area. [11173]

**Mr. Forsyth** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* As at 19 January 1996, the total area of land entered into the grassland birds management option in agreements offered under the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area scheme was 292.48 hectares.

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the allocated budget for *(a)* environmentally sensitive areas and *(b)* other agri-environment schemes in (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94 and (iii) 1994–95. [11174]

**Mr. Forsyth** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The supply estimates provision for *(a)* the environmentally sensitive area scheme and *(b)* other agri-environment schemes is set out in the following table.

*£ million*

| | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Environmentally sensitive areas | 3.905 | 5.285 | 4.500 |
| Other agri-environment schemes | — | 0.050 | 0.095 |

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total area of grass for hay and silage recorded in the June agricultural census within the boundary of the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area. [11175]

**Mr. Forsyth** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* In 1994, the total area of grass for mowing for hay and silage production within the boundary of the Argyll islands environmentally sensitive area was 4,129.9 hectares. This figure includes an estimate for minor holdings.

### Media Contracts

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contracts have been awarded by the Scottish Office to monitor media coverage in Scotland over the past three years; to whom the contracts have been awarded; what were the dates on which they were approved; and what are their durations and their value. [7272]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* No such contracts have been awarded. Tenders have been invited for the provision of a press cuttings service; the deadline for submission is 5 January 1996.

### Optoelectronics

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many workers are employed in the optoelectronics industry in Scotland; and what action he is taking to encourage the transfer of research findings from Scottish universities into high-tech companies. [7266]

**Mr. Kynoch** *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* The Scottish register of employment shows that 41,800 persons were employed in electronics in 1993. The register does not take account of companies with fewer than 11 employees and there is no separate category for optoelectronics. A survey carried out in 1992 by Scottish Enterprise estimated that there were at that time 1,300 people employed in optoelectronics in Scotland.

There are a number of schemes available to assist collaborative research, product development and transfer of technology and skill. These include the SMART and SPUR schemes administered by my Department, and LINK and the teaching company scheme for which the Department of Trade and Industry has lead responsibility. The issue of how to improve the commercial exploitation of academic research is being addressed in an inquiry being undertaken by Scottish Enterprise and the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

## TRANSPORT

### Rail Privatisation

**Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list management and management employee buyout teams which have received funding from the British Railways Board for advisory costs as qualified bidders for train operating franchises, indicating which private companies collaborated in each bid; and how much funding was received; [11712]

(2) what was the total amount of funding made available by the British Railways Board to management and management-employee buy-out teams for *(a)* financial advice in the pre-qualification stage of bidding for train operating franchises and *(b)* advisory costs as qualified bidders for train operating franchises; and how much of this funding was provided to consortia including private companies; [11711]

(3) if he will list the management and management employee buyout teams which have received funding from the British Railways Board for financial advice in the pre-qualification stage of bidding for train operating franchises, indicating which private companies collaborated in each bid; and how much funding was received. [11710]

**Mr. Watts:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *28*.

### Ferries

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the speed with which an Indonesian ferry capsized on 20 January; and what design characteristics this vessel shared with ferries operating from United Kingdom ports. [11753]

**Mr. Norris:** The Government have made no formal assessment of the accident because it did not involve a United Kingdom-flagged ship and did not occur in United Kingdom waters.

### Bicycle Lights (Epilepsy)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in the last five years into the effects on drivers who suffer from epilepsy of LED bicycle lights. [11869]

**Mr. Norris:** None. We are, however, in the process of initiating a research project to look into the effects of flashing LED bicycle lights.

### Networker Trains

**Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received recently regarding the safety of Networker trains on the South Eastern trains network; and if he will make a statement. [11940]

**Mr. Watts:** None.

**Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the safety implications of locking connecting compartment doors on Networker trains on the South Eastern trains network; and if he will make a statement. [11941]

**Mr. Watts:** Certain Networker, class 465, trains were withdrawn from service following an incident at the Slade Green depot in south east London, in which a train separated whilst undergoing maintenance. These trains are being examined and will be returned to service only if their couplings are found to be in a satisfactory condition for use without restrictions, such as the locking of connecting compartment doors.

The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate has requested the result of these examinations and will discuss the remedial measures to be implemented.

### Socially Necessary Rail Services

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the criteria for determining that a rail service is essential for the purposes of designation as a socially necessary service; and if he will make a statement. [11973]

**Mr. Watts:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 22 January, *Official Report*, columns, *28–9*. The Secretary of State's instructions to the franchising director require him to develop specific criteria for evaluating the benefits of loss-making but socially necessary services. These criteria are being developed and will be submitted to the Secretary of State for his approval in due course.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11350]

**Mr. Norris** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The answer is as follows:

| | | *(a)* £ | *(b)* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| (iii) 1991–92 | Actual | 5,389,147 | 3,722,495 |
| (iv) 1993–94 | Actual | 5,747,307 | 4,439,161 |

| | | (a) £ | (b) £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| (v) 1994–95 | Actual | 5,621,188 | 4,158,987 |
| (vi) 1995–96 | Forecast | 5,357,874 | 4,271,187 |
| (vii) 1996–97 | Estimate | 5,323,600 | 4,277,700 |

The information requested for earlier years (i) and (ii) and for non-departmental public bodies (c) is not available.

Internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas.

## Heavy Goods Vehicle Testing

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for the last year for which records are available (i) the number of heavy goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes which were given an annual inspection for road worthiness, (ii) for how many of these it was the first test, (iii) what were the 10 most common test failures by *(a)* numbers and *(b)* percentage of the total, (iv) how many vehicles failed on re-test (y) in total and (z) as a percentage, (v) how many of the failures related to braking *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage and (vi) of brake failures how many were in respect of (1) service brakes, (2) secondary brakes, (3) parking brakes and (4) brake components and how many were determined (A) visually and (B) otherwise; what consideration he has give to reducing the period between tests; and if he will make a statement. [11694]

**Mr. Norris** *[holding answer, 25 January 1996]:* The tables show:

Table 1 The total number of heavy goods vehicles tested in 1994–95

Table 2 (a) The 10 most common failure items in each category for motor vehicles

Table 2 (b) The 10 most common failure items in each category for trailers

Table 3 the number of vehicles failing retests and the percentage failure rates

Table 4 the total number of failures for each braking item and the percentage failure rates.

There are no plans for more frequent testing. The existing system is effective in relying on three complementary forms of control: roadworthiness testing, operator licensing and its maintenance conditions; and enforcement checks carried out both at the roadside and in operators' premises.

*Table 1a: The total numbers of heavy goods vehicles tested in 1994–95, (the last full year for which figures are available)*

| Type | Total tests | First and annual tests | Retests |
|---|---|---|---|
| Motor vehicles | 573,074 | 447,660 | 125,414 |
| Trailers | 267,443 | 225,648 | 41,795 |

Separate figures are not available for First Test volumes but estimated volumes are 48,000 for motor vehicles and 16,000 for trailers.

These figures are for all Heavy Goods Vehicles subject to testing under the Goods Vehicles (Plating and Testing) Regulations 1988.

*Table 2a: The 10 most common failure items in each category for motor vehicles*

| | Motor vehicles | |
|---|---|---|
| Testable item | Number failed | Percentage failure rate |
| Headlamp aim | 49,064 | 10.960 |
| Service brake performance | 48,450 | 10.823 |
| Secondary brake performance | 33,785 | 7.547 |
| Parking brake performance | 21,076 | 4.708 |
| Braking systems components | 19,921 | 4.450 |
| Rear position lamps/fog lamps | 19,357 | 4.324 |
| Direction and hazard warning lamps | 12,087 | 2.700 |
| Steering linkage | 7,955 | 1.777 |
| Exhaust emissions | 7,042 | 1.573 |
| Suspension pins/bushes | 7,006 | 1.565 |

*Table 2b: The 10 most common failure items for each category for trailers*

| | Trailers | |
|---|---|---|
| Testable item | Number failed | Percentage failure rate |
| Service brake performance | 22,470 | 9.958 |
| Parking brake performance | 15,439 | 6.842 |
| Braking system components | 6,699 | 2.969 |
| Rear position lamps/fog lamps | 5,018 | 2.224 |
| Trailer parking brake | 3,112 | 1.379 |
| Mechanical brake components | 2,778 | 1.231 |
| Suspension units (attachment) | 2,306 | 1.022 |
| Condition of tyres | 2,207 | 0.978 |
| Stop lamps | 2,026 | 0.898 |
| Reflectors | 1,925 | 0.853 |

*Table 3: The numbers of vehicles failing retests and the percentage failure rates*

| Type | Number of retests | Number of failures | Percentage failure rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Motor vehicles | 125,414 | 17,308 | 13.80 |
| Trailers | 41,795 | 5,668 | 13.56 |

*Table 4: The total numbers of failures for each braking item and the percentage failure rates*

| | Failures for braking items | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Motor vehicles | | Trailers | |
| Testable item | Failure rate percentage | Number of failures | Failure rate percentage | Number of failures |
| Trailer emergency brake | Not applicable | — | 0.042 | 95 |
| Pressure/vacuum warning | 0.364 | 1,629 | Not applicable | — |
| Build up of pressure/vacuum | 0.146 | 654 | Not applicable | — |
| Hand lever operating mechanical brakes | 0.033 | 148 | Not applicable | — |
| Service brake pedal | 0.052 | 233 | Not applicable | — |

*Table 4: The total numbers of failures for each braking item and the percentage failure rates*

| *Testable item* | *Failures for braking items* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Motor vehicles* | | *Trailers* | |
| | *Failure rate percentage* | *Number of failures* | *Failure rate percentage* | *Number of failures* |
| Service brake operation | 0.053 | 237 | 0.454 | 1,024 |
| Hand operated brake control valves | 0.177 | 792 | 0.038 | 86 |
| Mechanical brake components | 0.937 | 4,195 | 1.233 | 2,782 |
| Brake actuators | 0.624 | 2,793 | 0.768 | 1,733 |
| Braking system and components | 4.452 | 19,930 | 2.971 | 6,704 |
| Trailer parking brake | Not applicable | — | 1.380 | 3,114 |
| Service brake performance | 10.822 | 48,446 | 9.958 | 22,470 |
| Secondary brake performance | 7.549 | 33,794 | Not applicable | 0 |
| Parking brake performance | 4.708 | 21,076 | 6.844 | 15,443 |

These figures relate to first and annual tests. Detailed figures on failures for retests are not available.

It should be noted that the figures relate to the number of vehicles failing for a particular item. In many cases vehicles will fail for more than one item.

The inspection for all items other than brake performance—(the last three items in the table—is essentially a visual inspection. The brake performance is determined with the use of a roller brake tester.

## Training Schemes

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been allocated to the crew relief costs scheme, the Government assistance for training scheme for British officer trainees and the development certificated seafarers scheme for 1996. [12467]

**Mr. Norris:** Allocation for the financial year 1996–97 have yet to be finalised.

## Marine Safety Agency

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many surveyors have left the Marine Safety Agency in the last year; and how many have been recruited. [12194]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from R. Bradley to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 26 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of surveyors who have left the Marine Safety Agency and the number who have been recruited in the last year.

Between 1 January and 31 December 1995, 22 surveyors left the Agency, and 9 new recruits joined. A recent recruitment campaign for marine surveyors selected 20 successful applicants. These will be appointed to current vacancies, and any forthcoming vacancies over the next year.

## Lorry Drivers (Convictions)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department takes in respect of British lorry drivers who are convicted in other member states of the European Union of carrying prohibited substances or articles of which they claim to have no knowledge. [12096]

**Mr. Norris:** Such matters are the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs advises that any British citizen convicted of an offence in a foreign country will have full access to normal consular support. However, the British consulate has no authority to interfere with the due process of law in a sovereign state.

## Sites of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which sites of special scientific interest in England will be affected by trunk road and motorway schemes for which preferred routes have been announced. [11229]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Laurie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 26 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) in England that will be affected by trunk road and motorways schemes for which preferred routes have been announced.

I enclose a list of Trunk Road and Motorway schemes in England, for which preferred routes have been announced, that are likely to involve permanent or temporary landtake from a SSSI, a list of schemes that may have an impact on a SSSI but do not involve landtake and a list of those schemes which remain under review following the 1995 Review which may affect a SSSI.

You will, I hope, appreciate that the lists are therefore dynamic and will be subject to change as, and when, scheme, designs are developed.

I hope this is helpful.

*Schemes which may involve permanent or temporary landtake from SSSIs*

| *Scheme* | *SSSI* |
|---|---|
| ROAD PROGRAMME SCHEMES: | |
| *Main programme:* | |
| M4/M49 Second Severn Crossing[1] | Magor and Undy Severn Estuary |
| M5 Widening J18–19[1] | Severn Estuary |
| M6 J20–21a Widening[1] | Woolston Eyes |
| A13 Thames Avenue—Wennington[1] | Inner Thames Marshes |
| A249 M2—Iwade Bypass[1] | The Swale |
| A34 Newbury Bypass[2] | Snelsmore Common |
| | Kennet River |
| | Lambourne River |
| A1(M) Ferrybridge to Hook Moor | Brockade |
| A2/M2 Cobham—J4 Widening | Shorne and Ashenbank Woods |
| | Cobham Woods |
| A2/A282 Dartford Improvement | Darenth Wood |
| A31 Poole Harbour Crossing | Poole Harbour (Holes Bay) |

*Schemes which may involve permanent or temporary landtake from SSSIs*

| *Scheme* | *SSSI* |
|---|---|
| A31 Poole Link Road | Slop Bog and Uddens Heath<br>Canford Heath |
| A43 Geddington Bypass | River Ise and Meadows |
| A120 Stanstead to Braintree (S. 272) | High Wood, Dunmow |
| A249 Iwade—Queensbrough | The SwaleMedway Estuary and Marshes |
| A259 Bexhill and Hastings Western Bypass | Combe Haven<br>Pevensey Levels<br>Marline Valley Woods |
| A259 Pevensey—Bexhill Improvement | Pevensey Levels |
| Birmingham Northern Relief Road | Chasewater Heath |
| *Longer term:* | |
| A5 Dunstable Eastern Bypass | Blows Down |
| A35 Chideock-Morcombelake Bypass | MorcombelakeWest Dorset Coast |
| A259 Dymchurch—M20 Improvement | Lympne Escampment (The Roughs) |
| A259 Rye Bypass | Walland Marsh<br>Camber Sands and Rye Saltings<br>Rye Harbour |
| A449/A456 Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley Bypass | Hurcott and Podmore Pools |
| NETWORK ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME: | |
| A13 West of Heathway—Mar Dyke | The Wennington and Rainham Marshes |
| A46 Upper Swainswick—Pennsylvania Improvement[3] | Monkswood Valley |

[1] Scheme under construction on 30 November 1995.

[2] Scheme expected to start main works during Spring of 1996.

[3] This scheme was transferred to the Network Enhancement Programme as part of the 1995 Review and the Preferred Route will be reviewed.

*Schemes with possible indirect impacts on SSSIs which do not involve landtake*

| *Scheme* | *SSSI* |
|---|---|
| ROAD PROGRAMME SCHEMES: | |
| *Schemes which are part of Design Build Finance and Operate Contracts:* | |
| M1—A1 Lofthouse–Bramham | Hook Moor |
| A21 Kipping's Cross–Lamberhurst | Brookland Wood |
| A65 Hellifield and Long Preston Bypass | Long Preston Deeps<br>Pan Beck Fen |
| A303 Wylye–Stackton Wood | Stackton Wood and Down |
| A419 Latton Bypass | North Meadow, Cricklade<br>River Churn |
| *Main programme:* | |
| A1(M) Ferrybridge–Hook Moor | Fairburn and Newton Ings |
| A57/A628 Mottram Tintwistle Bypass | Dark Peak |
| A303 Illminster–Marsh | Long Lye |
| A556(M) M6–M56 Imp | Rostherne Mere |
| Birmingham Northern Relief Road | River Blythe |
| *Longer Term:* | |
| A5 Dunstable Bypass | Houghton Regis Marl Lakes |
| A10 Wadesmill High Cross–Colliers End Bypass | Plashes Wood |

*Schemes with possible indirect impacts on SSSIs which do not involve landtake*

| *Scheme* | *SSSI* |
|---|---|
| Western Orbital Route (Birmingham) | Hurcott Pools |
| NETWORK ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME: | |
| A3 Thursley to Milford | Thursley Hankley and Frencham Commons |

*Schemes under review which may involve temporary or permanent landtake from SSSIs or with possible indirect impacts on SSSIs which do not involve landtake*

| *Scheme* | *SSSI* |
|---|---|
| ROAD PROGRAMME SCHEMES: | |
| M6 J11a–16 Widening | Doxey and Tillington (Indirect) |
| A27 Lewes to Polegate Improvement | Southern Grey Pit (Possible Landtake)<br>Milton Gate Marsh (Possible Landtake) |

## West Coast Main Line

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the minimum requirements for the refurbishment of the west coast main line *(a)* for signals, *(b)* for track and *(c)* for rolling stock. [11632]

**Mr. Watts:** Railtrack is developing modernisation proposals for the west coast main line which include the introduction of an in-cab signalling system and improved track and power supply equipment. All enhancements will be carried out in accordance with Railtrack's statutory duties, its rigorous safety standards, and its contractual obligations to the train operating companies. All new or altered works, which includes rolling stock, have to be approved by HM railways inspectorate, on behalf of the Secretary of State, under the Railway and Other Transport Systems (Approval of Works Plant and Equipment) Regulations 1994, before they can be used on the railway.

# DEFENCE

## F16 Aircraft

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* the Deputy Prime Minister concerning the proposed leasing of American F16 aircraft. [12115]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *430*. Discussions between Ministers are confidential.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the remit of Mr. David Hart in respect of providing advice on the proposed leasing of American F16 aircraft. [12116]

**Mr. Portillo:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *360*, and that from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *430*.

### Super-computers

**Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the name and addresses of the independent advisers appointed by him, or by the relevant agency, in the procurement of *(a)* the department of experimentation and research into Aviation Farnborough's most current super-computer, *(b)* the Meteorological Office Bracknell's current super-computer and *(c)* the atomic weapons establishment Aldermaston's recent super-computer. [12157]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The competition for a super-computer for the Atomic Weapons Establishment Aldermaston is being run by the AWE operating contractor. It is being assisted in the competition by an independent consultancy company, details of which are commercially confidential.

The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and the Meteorological Office are executive agencies and matters of this nature fall to their chief executives. I have asked the chief executives of both agencies to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Michael Stern, dated 26 January 1996:*

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the appointment of independent advisors on procuring supercomputers. I am responsible for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) which through its Defence Research Agency (DRA) division has recently procured a supercomputer at Farnborough, Hampshire.

The procurement of a massively parallel supercomputer by DERA acting on behalf of the members of the Farnborough Supercompter Centre (FSC) followed from a feasibility study carried out by Smith System Engineering Limited, Surrey Research Park, Guildford, Surrey GU12 5YP.

The FSC, which was opened in January 1995, is a Dual-Use Technology Centre (DUTC) with members from leading defence manufacturers together with DERA.

I hope this information is helpful.

*Letter from Julian Hunt to Mr. Michael Stern; dated 25 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the procurement of the Meteorological Office's current supercomputers this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office.

The Meteorological Office's current supercomputer has been procured in accordance with normal Ministry of Defence practice. The procurement was agreed with the Department's DGICS organisation, in the course of which advice was taken from appropriate independent sources.

The identity of the provider of the relevant advice must remain commercially confidential.

### Nuclear Tests

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the United States Department of Energy will share with the United Kingdom the data derived from the planned subcritical nuclear tests, Rebound (1) and Holog (1). [11720]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Rebound (1) and Holog (1) are the names which have been given to subcritical hydrodynamic experiments planned by the US for later this year. As regards the arrangements allowing for the exchange of nuclear weapons-related information, I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 23 November, 1995, *Official Report*, column *261*.

### Surplus Equipment Sales

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what conditions tanks, armoured personnel carriers and mobile guns are sold to private individuals and dealers; and how many have been sold in each of the past five years. [12200]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Current practice is to scrap surplus tanks and armoured personnel carriers. A limited number have been sold recently in a restricted access auction. Mobile guns are not now sold to individuals and dealers, and the majority of declarations have been the subject of a Government-to-Government sale. Previously, armoured vehicles have been sold by invitation to tender to approved individuals and traders, including collectors and museums; to UK defence companies; or they have been scrapped.

Where fighting vehicles normally carry armaments of any sort, the status of the final user will determine whether the vehicle is deactivated or not. Only those individuals or companies, including scrap dealers in the UK, who hold an appropriate licence under the Firearms Act 1968 may receive an active vehicle. Otherwise, the vehicles are demilitarised, (and officially certified or confirmed as such) in such a way as to render their ordnance unserviceable or inoperative—by barrel slotting, breach cutting/welding etc. The acquisition of parts which are essential to a weapon being fully operative are themselves the subject of the Firearms Act and current departmental policy is not to offer them for sale within the UK. Vehicles sold on the express condition that they are to be broken up or smelted are subject to confirmation that this has been done.

Buyers of MOD's vehicles for other purposes are required to formally seek my Department's permission before on-selling.

The following quantities of vehicles have been sold in the last five years:

1991: 15

1992: 205

1993: 403

1994: 583

1995: 758.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what precautions his Department takes to ensure that surplus tanks, armoured personnel carriers and mobile guns sold to dealers and the public are not used for criminal or other anti-social acts. [12202]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The sales process requires either deactivation of residual ordnance or production of an appropriate firearms licence. After-sale responsibility lies with the purchaser to observe the law concerning ownership and use of the vehicle.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average original cost of *(a)* tanks, *(b)* armoured personnel carriers and *(c)* mobile guns sold by the services in each of the past five years; and what was the average price for which they were sold. [12201]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Vehicles declared for disposal have been in service for many years and records of original costs have been destroyed. Prices achieved depend on

market forces. It is not MOD's policy to reveal individual prices achieved. The value of receipts for armoured vehicles and guns for each of the five years is:

| | Number | £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 15 | 16,250 |
| 1992 | 205 | 255,685 |
| 1993 | 403 | 390,477 |
| 1994 | 583 | 4,384,079 |
| 1995 | 758 | 984,523 |

### Bosnia

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the British bases as part of the implementation force operating in *(a)* Bosnia and *(b)* Croatia; and how much Britain is charged for these bases to be situated in each of those areas. [12114]

**Mr. Soames:** British forces contributing to the IFOR operation in Bosnia and Croatia occupy 34 major sites and a number of smaller buildings. Some of these sites are transitional and may be relinquished when the dispositions of troops within the British area of operations is finalised. Others have been occupied only recently and in many cases, negotiations with owners, where known, are continuing. The details of the bases and the charges so far agreed, are as follows:

| | Monthly charge |
|---|---|
| *Location—Croatia* | |
| Split—Divulje Barracks | No charge. Croatian Government property. |
| Split—port sites and facilities | Remains under UN lease at present. |
| Split—port warehouses | £17,045 |
| Split—Dalma warehouse complex | £83,681 |
| Split—workshops and warehouse | £44,545 |
| Split—factory | £42,610 |
| *Location—Bosnia* | |
| Tomislavgrad—factory and warehouse | £25,000 for warehouse, charge for factory not yet known. |
| Lipa | Not yet known. |
| Kupres | £34,090 |
| Gornji Vakuf—3 factories | £15,909 for one factory, others not yet known. |
| Sipovo—3 factories, sawmill and hotel | Not yet known. |
| Bugojno—factory | Not yet known. |
| Glamoc—sawmill and transport depot | £2,272 for saw mill, charge for depot not yet known. |
| Sanski Most—2 factories | Not yet known. |
| Mrkonjic Grad—2 factories, sawmill and dam | Not yet known. |
| Banja Luka—factory and offices | Not yet known. |
| Vitez—bulk fuel installation (BFI) and school | £636 for BFI, charge for school not yet known. |
| Jajce—factory | Not yet known. |
| Kljuk—depot | £909 |
| Bosanski Petrovac—depot | Not yet known. |
| Krupa—factory | £2,500 |

### Overseas Units (Media Visits)

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost in each of the past five years of visits by journalists to service units abroad funded by *(a)* the armed services and *(b)* his Ministry. [11622]

**Mr. Soames:** This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In the majority of cases, journalists travelling abroad to visit service units/naval ships are expected to fund their costs.

However, financial assistance is given, principally to journalists from provincial or regional media who could not otherwise afford to travel and where coverage is considered to be in the interest of the armed service.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what journalists, from which *(a)* newspapers and *(b)* other media organisations, were guests of (i) his Department and (ii) the armed services on visits to service units abroad in each of the past three years. [11623]

**Mr. Soames:** This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### RAF Turnhouse

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the timing of his plan to close RAF Turnhouse; how many civilian staff are still employed there; and when he intends to notify redundancies. [11991]

**Mr. Soames:** Our proposal to close RAF Turnhouse by 1 April has been the subject of formal consultation. I hope to make an announcement shortly.

### Super-computer (Nuclear Weapons Simulation)

**Sir John Cope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will seek a second and independent opinion on the advice that no United Kingdom-designed and sourced super-computer could perform the task required for nuclear weapons simulation at atomic weapons research establishment, Aldermaston. [11617]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The technical assessment of the responses to the statement of requirement was made on purely technical grounds by AWE assisted by an independent firm of technical consultants. The SOR had been issued to all known massively parallel processor suppliers and placed in the MOD contracts bulletin. The SOR made it clear that the mini-proposal was not a tender, nor would it guarantee suppliers the right to tender.

Only one bid came from a United Kingdom company. It was based on a design not in manufacture and which did not reach the required specification; it was; therefore, rejected. The tenderer was de-briefed to this effect in May 1995.

### HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid

**Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when it is planned that new landing platform dock ships, replacing HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid; will enter service; [11852]

(2) when he plans to place an order for the ships to replace HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. [11871]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The Ministry of Defence is currently in no acceptable price, no contract—NAPNOC—negotiations with VSEL to replace HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. The size and timing of any order, and therefore the exact date of entry into service, depend on a satisfactory outcome to these discussions. Assuming this can be achieved, we would envisage entry into service around the turn of the century.

### Trident

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he intends to publish the annual report on progress of the Trident programme; and if he will send a copy of the report to all right hon. and hon. Members; [11705]

(2) what plans he has to inform Parliament of the updated progress of the Trident programme. [11706]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The annual report on the progress of the Trident programme will be published shortly and, as usual, copies will be placed in the Library of the House. It would not be sensible use of resources to send individual copies to all right hon. and hon. Members as not all may wish to receive one.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Gaming Laws

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish his consultation document on his proposals for reforming the gaming laws. [12110]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** We are reviewing the present controls on bingo clubs and casinos as part of the Government's deregulation initiative. The review is well advanced and we hope to consult on proposals shortly.

### Identity Card Scheme

**Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made in respect of the feasibility studies for the introduction of a nationwide identity card scheme. [11464]

**Mr. Sackville:** We received over 3,000 replies to the Green Paper on identity cards (CM 2879) and have placed in the Library a copy of the Home Office memorandum of evidence to the Home Affairs Committee inquiry on identity cards which contains a summary of the responses.

The Government have yet to reach a final decision on whether an identity card should be introduced and, if so, what type of card scheme to propose but all of the options set out in the Green Paper remain open.

### Gambling (Fruit Machines)

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the percentage of *(a)* the population and *(b)* 16 to 24-year-olds who are addicted to gambling on fruit machines. [11754]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** There are no official statistics on the use of gaming machines.

Research has tended to focus on machine gaming by adolescents. It is not possible to estimate from existing research the incidence of problem gambling specifically on amusement-with-prizes—fruit—machines in the national population or in young adults.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the level of addition to gambling on fruit machines, with particular reference to young people. [11755]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Following consultation, on 11 December 1995, I laid in draft the Deregulation (Gaming Machines and Betting Office Facilities) Order 1996. This measure, which is currently being scrutinised by the deregulation committees, would, for the first time, give local authorities power to impose an age limit in arcades which install proposed all-cash amusement-with-prizes machines with a maximum payout of £10. Young people under 18 would not be allowed access to these new machines in arcades. Elsewhere, these machines would be allowed only in premises to which children have restricted access—liquor licensed premises, bingo clubs, casinos and betting offices.

It is expected that most arcades will switch to the cash machine which should go some way towards alleviating the problem of addiction amongst those under 18.

Local authorities already have powers to ban fruit machines from premises such as cafes and leisure centres.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *483*, if he will set out the reasons for the unreliability of the information requested on the route of arrival of applications for asylum. [11723]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The information in question is not available because many port asylum applicants destroy or dispose of their travel documents and it is often not possible to establish from which country they have travelled to the United Kingdom. Where the information is known in individual cases, it is not recorded centrally.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Minibus Safety

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the guidance issued by local education authorities on minibus safety with particular reference to the meeting of agreed safety standard. [11099]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Schools and local education authorities which own minibuses must comply with vehicle safety standards, as determined by the Secretary of State for Transport generally in the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. LEAs are responsible for any advice they may give in relation to construction standards and other safety issues, and are not required to submit it for assessment by the Secretary of State.

New regulations will be introduced by the Department of Transport next month to require the compulsory fitment of seatbelts on minibuses and coaches used specifically for transporting school children.

## WALES

### School Governors

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of vacancies which will arise on school governing bodies when the present period of office comes to an end; and of these how many will be parent governor vacancies. [10026]

**Mr. Richards:** According to a survey of school governors commissioned by the Welsh Office in 1994, there are around 24,300 school governorships in Wales. Of these, the term of appointment of approximately 60 per cent. will come to an end this year. No estimate has been made as to how many of these are parent governors.

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many seats there are on school governing bodies *(a)* in each county and *(b)* in Wales; what is the number and percentage of such places known to be vacant at the last available date; and if he will make a statement. [10619]

**Mr. Richards:** According to a survey of school governors commissioned by the Welsh Office in 1994, there are around 24,300 school governorships in Wales. Of these, it was estimated in the report that 22,375, or 92 per cent. were filled. The figures are not broken down by county.

### Further and Higher Education Funding

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the finance made available in 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 to (i) the Further Education Funding Council for Wales and (ii) the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales; and what is the number of students being financed in each of the years and the spending per head in (1) cash and (2) real terms; [10024]

(2) what estimates he has made up to 2000 of the number of students to be financed by *(a)* the FEFCW and *(b)* the HEFCW; and if he will give the cost per head in each sector over these years. [10025]

**Mr. Richards:** The information requested is included in the table.

*£ million*

| | *1993–4 Outturn* | | *1994–95 Outturn* | | *1995–96 Outturn* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Cash* | *1994–95 prices* | *Cash* | *1994–95 prices* | *Cash* | *1994–95 prices* |
| FEFCW | 145.841 | 148.583 | 172.518 | 172.518 | 178.463 | 173.687 |
| HEFCW | 179.200 | 182.569 | 232.497 | 232.497 | 242.496 | 236.006 |
| *Full time equivalent student numbers* | | | | | | |
| FE | 46,000 | | 51,200 | | 53,500 | |
| HE | 57,239 | | 62,700 | | 64,500 | |

*£*

| *Spending per head* | *1994–95* | | *1994–95* | | *1994–95* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Cash* | *prices* | *Cash* | *prices* | *Cash* | *prices* |
| FE | 3,170 | 3,230 | 3,369 | 3,369 | 3,336 | 3,246 |
| HE | 4,912 | 5,004 | 4,978 | 4,978 | 4,734 | 4,607 |

The spending plans for further and higher education announced on 13 December assume the following:

| | *1996–97* | | *1997–98* | | *1998–99* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Students* | *Cost per student £* | *Students* | *Cost per student £* | *Student* | *Cost per student £* |
| FE | 56,000 | 3,097 | 58,500 | 3,001 | 60,900 | 2,794 |
| HE | 65,200 | 4,737 | 65,000 | 4,725 | 65,600 | 4,655 |

The spending per head in higher education includes tuition fees paid directly to higher education institutions by local education authorities.

### Metticillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

**Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of metticillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus there have been in Welsh hospitals in each of the last five years. [10295]

**Mr. Richards:** I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) on 22 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *102*.

### Sea Fishing Industry

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many individuals were employed in the sea fishing industry within *(a)* the boundaries of the North Western and North Wales sea fisheries committee, *(b)* the South Wales sea fisheries committee, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the boundaries of each of unitary authority within *(a)* and *(b)*. [10558]

**Mr. Richards:** An estimated 1,623 fishermen were employed in the sea fishing industry in Wales in 1994, which is the latest available figure. Statistics are not recorded in the format requested.

### Fishing Permits

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many permits for all types of fishing activities were granted each year since 1990; and how many permits are extant within *(a)* the North Western and North Wales sea fisheries committee, *(b)* the South Wales sea fisheries

committee and *(c)* each of the unitary local authorities within the boundaries of *(a)* and *(b)*. [10557]

**Mr. Richards:** We have no information on the number of fishing permits issued by local authority sea fisheries committees.

The number of fishing vessels which were licensed in Wales during the period 1990 to 1996 were:

1990: 70
1991: 173
1992: 172
1993: 158
1994: 589[1]
1995: 583
1996: 553

*Note:*

[1] A licensing regime for vessels of 10 meters and under, was introduced in 1993, and these vessels are included in the figures for 1994 onward.

Licence details are not recorded in the format requested.

### NHS Trusts

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the chairmen and chairwomen and members whom he appoints of each NHS trust, indicating the length of time for which each is appointed and when each appointment is due for renewal. [10908]

**Mr. Richards:** The information requested is detailed in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales", which is updated quarterly. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

### GPs (Child Immunisation)

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from general practitioner practices in Wales on the subject of payment for child immunisation; and if he will make a statement. [10717]

**Mr. Richards:** My right hon. Friend has received eight representations, but none of these was made directly by general practitioner practices. Childhood immunisation target payments were introduced to provide incentives for general practitioners to encourage and increase patient take-up of childhood vaccinations. The success of the immunisation programme has resulted in the incidence of childhood diseases being at their lowest ever levels and the Government have no plans to review the criteria GPs have to meet in order to qualify for target payments.

### Welsh Language

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what guidelines his Department has issued since 1994 to *(a)* Cadw and *(b)* non-departmental public bodies in Wales on the use of the Welsh language in the day-to-day conduct of its business; and if he will make a statement; [10704]

(2) what *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* instructions his Department has issued to (i) Cadw and (ii) non-departmental public bodies in Wales on the use of the Welsh language in their official publications. [10703]

**Mr. Richards:** Guidelines as to the form and content of Welsh language schemes, prepared by the Welsh Language Board, were approved by my right hon. Friend and by Parliament in July 1995. Welsh language schemes are intended to specify measures relating to the use of the Welsh language in connection with the services they provide to the public in Wales. The Welsh Office has issued no guidelines or instructions additional to those statutory guidelines; it will be for each non-departmental public body to agree a language scheme with the board in respect of its services to the public in Wales.

### Agricultural Holdings

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered agricultural holdings there were in Wales in *(a)* 1966, *(b)* 1974, *(c)* 1984 and *(d)* 1994; and if he will make a statement. [10700]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** There is no process of registration for agricultural holdings but the estimated number of such holdings in Wales for the years requested are as follows: *(a)* 1966: 48,000; *(b)* 1974: 32,800; *(c)* 1984: 36,100 and *(d)* 1994: 37,800.

These figures include both major and minor holdings. Over the period 1966 to 1984, there were minor definitional changes which tended to reduce the number of holdings recorded. In addition, in 1968 about 6,400 holdings were deleted from the records because of their negligible agricultural output.

### Small Businesses

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives his Department is pursuing to assist small businesses in Wales. [10730]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The Welsh Office, together with others, is supporting small businesses through a variety of new start-up and business development initiatives, including financial assistance, training and consultancy support, grants for innovation and help with exporting. Information is available through business connect which is designed specifically to help small firms access quickly and effectively the business support network.

### Public Bodies

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the 12 biggest spending Welsh Office public bodies, giving their spending in cash and real terms in each year since 1990–91; [10910]

(2) if he will list the chairmen and chairwomen and members of the 12 biggest spending Welsh Office public bodies, indicating the length of time for which each is appointed and when each appointment is due for renewal. [10909]

**Mr. Hague:** The information requested is included in the following table.

*Total gross expenditure for the 12 biggest NDPBs was as follows:*

£ million

| | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Arts Council of Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | — | — | — | — | 14.9 |
| real terms | — | — | — | — | 14.9 |
| *Cardiff Bay Development Corporation* | | | | | |
| cash | 34.3 | 35.8 | 48.0 | 47.5 | 66.7 |
| real terms | 39.7 | 39.0 | 50.3 | 48.4 | 66.7 |
| *Countryside Council for Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | [1]0.0 | 14.5 | 17.5 | 19.9 | 21.2 |
| real terms | [1]0.1 | 15.8 | 18.3 | 20.3 | 21.2 |
| *Development Board for Rural Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | 19.6 | 21.5 | 23.6 | 24.9 | 27.2 |
| real terms | 22.7 | 23.5 | 24.7 | 25.4 | 27.2 |
| *Further Education Funding Council for Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | — | — | [2]2.0 | 143.1 | 172.5 |
| real terms | — | — | [2]2.1 | 145.8 | 172.5 |
| *Higher Education Funding Council for Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | — | — | [2]0.5 | 179.0 | 232.5 |
| real terms | — | — | [2]0.6 | 182.3 | 232.5 |
| *Housing for Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | 116.0 | 172.6 | 187.4 | 161.2 | 139.5 |
| real terms | 134.5 | 188.3 | 196.4 | 164.2 | 139.5 |
| *Land Authority for Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | 6.0 | 6.1 | 6.3 | 12.3 | 23.0 |
| real terms | 7.0 | 6.6 | 6.6 | 12.5 | 23.0 |
| *National Museums and Galleries of Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | 17.9 | 18.1 | 16.1 | 16.8 | 14.1 |
| real terms | 20.8 | 19.7 | 16.9 | 17.1 | 14.1 |
| *Sports Council for Wales* | | | | | |
| cash | 7.1 | 7.5 | 8.2 | 8.6 | 9.1 |
| real terms | 8.3 | 8.2 | 8.6 | 8.8 | 9.1 |
| *Wales Tourist Board* | | | | | |
| cash | 13.3 | 13.0 | 13.7 | 13.8 | 14.4 |
| real terms | 15.4 | 14.1 | 14.3 | 14.1 | 14.4 |
| *Welsh Development Agency* | | | | | |
| cash | 149.2 | 158.2 | 165.2 | 151.7 | 157.1 |
| real terms | 173.0 | 172.6 | 173.2 | 154.5 | 157.1 |

1. The cash figures have been extracted from the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies".
2. The real terms figures have been derived by the application of the latest GDP deflators at market prices with a base year of 1994–95.
3. In some cases, figures are not available for the earlier years because the relevant NDPBs had not then been set up in Wales.

[1] Support for the establishment of the Countryside Council for Wales, which came into existence on 1 April 1991.

[2] Support for the establishment of the Further Education and Higher Education Funding Councils for Wales, which came into existence on 1 April 1993.

The information requested about the chairmen and women and members of these bodies is given in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales", which is updated quarterly. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

## Planning Decisions

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many appeals against decisions of local planning authorities were disposed of in *(a)* 1966, *(b)* 1974, *(c)* 1984 and *(d)* 1994, respectively. [10726]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The information for 1974, 1984 and 1994 is given in the table. Information for 1966 is not available.

| | 1974 | 1984 | 1994 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Appeals under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (and corresponding earlier legislation): | | | |
| Section 78 | 514 | 631 | 877 |
| Section 174 | 47 | 126 | 136 |
| Appeals under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992 | 44 | 117 | 90 |
| All other appeals | [1]— | [1]— | [2]61 |

[1] Figures are not available.

[2] Includes appeals under Section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (cases "called in" by the Secretary of State).

## Dentists

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many dentistry practices there were in Wales in *(a)* 1966, *(b)* 1974, *(c)* 1984 and *(d)* 1994, respectively; [10724]

(2) how much dentistry practices in Wales undertook NHS treatment in 1992; and if he will make a statement; [10756]

(3) how many dentistry practices there are in Wales; [10760]

(4) how many dentistry practices undertaking NHS treatment there are in Wales. [10761]

**Mr. Richards:** Information on the number of dentistry practices is not available centrally. However, the number of principal dental practitioners treating some NHS patients is given in the following table—a principal dental practitioner would be the head of a practice although two or more may practice together.

Number of principal dental practitioners, treating some NHS patients in Wales.

30 September 1966: 396

30 September 1974: 493

30 September 1984: 705

30 September 1992: 792

30 September 1994: 801

30 September 1995: 817 (latest available).

### Ministerial Visit (Indonesia)

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations were made on human rights issues during the recent visit to Indonesia of the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards). [10939]

**Mr. Richards:** I visited Indonesia and Singapore with a trade mission to help Welsh companies increase their exporting activities. Human rights issues are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

### Training and Enterprise Councils

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the chairmen and chairwomen and members whom he appoints of each training and enterprise council, indicating the lengths of time each person is appointed and when each appointment is due for renewal. [10911]

**Mr. Richards:** My right hon. Friend does not appoint either the chairmen or the members to the boards of training and enterprise councils. TECs are private companies limited by guarantee.

### Ambulance Services

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations over the past 18 months his Department have undertaken on the subject of the amalgamation of ambulance services in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [10731]

**Mr. Richards:** Public consultation on a joint application from West Glamorgan and East Dyfed ambulance services to form the West Wales Ambulance NHS trust ended on 4 December 1994 and the trust was established on 16 January 1995.

### North Wales Police

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received recently on the subject of the budget allocation to the North Wales police; and if he will make a statement. [10727]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend and I have received one representation, from the North Wales police authority, about funding in 1996–97.

### Healthy Eating

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives his Department is currently undertaking to educate people in healthy eating. [10723]

**Mr. Richards:** The Welsh Office does not itself undertake initiatives to educate people in healthy eating, but provides financial and other support to a large range of organisations which carry out such work, including the Health Promotion Authority for Wales, local authorities, health authorities and voluntary organisations.

### Health Authority Members

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the chairmen and chairwomen and members of each health authority or commission and each family health services authority, indicating the length of time for which each person is appointed and when each appointment is due for renewal. [10907]

**Mr. Richards:** The information requested is detailed in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales" which is updated quarterly. Copies are available in the Library of the House. All the appointments will be terminated on 31 March 1996 when the district health authorities and family health services authorities will cease to exist. I will be announcing the membership of the five new health authorities soon.

### Nursery Education

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on recent developments in respect of the provision of nursery education for four-year-olds in Wales. [11057]

**Mr. Richards:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the relevant provisions of the Nursery Eduction and Grant-maintained Schools Bill, the nursery voucher scheme in Wales will come into effect from April 1997. I announced on 9 January our decisions on funding, payments for redeemed vouchers and the arrangements for inspecting participating establishments. Welsh Office officials have written to all local education authorities, primary and nursery schools and interested organisations detailing these decisions and clarifying some common misunderstandings about the scheme. I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library.

### Grant-maintained Schools

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools in Wales opted out of local government control in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [10692]

**Mr. Richards:** Eight schools became grant-maintained in 1993; five in 1994; and none in 1995.

### Drug Abuse

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for the last three available years and for 1996–97 *(a)* for each county and *(b)* for Wales the funding made available by his Department to combat drug abuse; and if he will make a statement. [10686]

**Mr. Richards:** Following the recommendations of the efficiency scrutiny of health promotion in Wales, those

Welsh Office resources for combating drug misuse provided through the central funding initiative were built into district health authorities revenue allocations. For 1993–94, the last year the CFI operated, the amounts allocated to each county in Wales were:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| Clwyd | 323,202 |
| Dyfed | 250,649 |
| Gwent | 274,295 |
| Gwynedd | 244,165 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 379,826 |
| Powys | 160,517 |
| South Glamorgan | 283,047 |
| West Glamorgan | 306,075 |

The Welsh Office provides separate resources for national activity: the amounts for 1993–94 to 1995–96 were £243,944, £360,918 and £259,737 respectively.

In addition, other central funding mechanisms such as the revenue support grant, the strategic development scheme and the grant for education support and training programme provide funds to combat drug misuse. It is not possible to identify separately the relevant amounts within those schemes.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Monday 29 January 1996*

## TRANSPORT

### Aerial Advertising

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations his Department held with representatives of astronomical groups in the process of drawing up the Civil Aviation (Aerial Advertising) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2943). [10367]

**Mr. Norris:** None.

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if an environmental impact assessment in accordance with European Union procedures of the implications of the Civil Aviation (Aerial Advertising) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2943) was carried out. [10363]

**Mr. Norris:** No. Environmental impact assessments are required only for certain development projects. They are not appropriate for policy changes regarding advertising.

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make it his policy to exempt national parks from the Civil Aviation (Aerial Advertising) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2943); [10364]

(2) if he will make it his policy to exempt areas of outstanding natural beauty from the Civil Aviation (Aerial Advertising) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2943). [10366]

**Mr. Norris:** No.

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers are available to local authorities to control aerial advertising in their areas. [10365]

**Mr. Norris:** Under the provisions in class A to schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992, a person may display an advertisement on the side of a tethered balloon, subject to certain restrictions, on any site for a maximum of 10 days in any year. Any display which exceeds this period requires the express consent of the local planning authority under those regulations. However, this form of advertising is prohibited in national parks, the Broads, areas of outstanding natural beauty, conservation areas or areas of special control of advertisements.

Advertisements on vehicles, including aircraft and airships, which are normally used as moving vehicles, are permitted under the regulations.

### Royal Train

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles the royal train travelled in 1994–95 on official business; and how often the royal train was used by those other than members of the royal family. [11570]

**Mr. Watts:** Between 1 April 1994 and 31 March 1995, the royal train travelled 14,246 miles to enable members of the royal family to carry out official engagements. The train was not used by anyone other than members of the royal family during this period.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *34*, which members of the royal family other than Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales used the royal train in 1995. [12085]

**Mr. Watts:** The Duke of Edinburgh, the Princess Royal and the Duchess of Kent.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the royal train is used by members of the royal family for travel unconnected with official duties. [12015]

**Mr. Watts:** The royal train is used by members of the royal family for travel only in connection with their public duties.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *34*, if he will list the starting point and destination of each of the journeys in the royal train undertaken by *(a)* Her Majesty the Queen, *(b)* HRH the Prince of Wales and *(c)* the other members of the royal family. [12011]

**Mr. Watts:** The information requested is as follows:

*Her Majesty the Queen*

| *Start point* | *Destination* |
|---|---|
| Paddington | Cheltenham Spa |
| Slough | Southampton Eastern Docks and return |
| Slough | Coventry |
| Paddington | Exeter St. David's |
| Euston | Crewe |
| Windsor and Eton Riverside | Tattenham Corner |
| Euston | Stockton |
| Euston | Stoke on Trent |

*His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales*

| *Start Point* | *Destination* |
|---|---|
| Paddington | Worcester Shrub Hill |
| Paddington | Tiverton Parkway |
| Euston | Glasgow Queen Street |
| Perth | Euston |
| Euston | Aberdeen |
| Kemble | St. Bees |
| Gatwick Airport | Victoria |
| Kemble | Hull |
| Cambridge | Lairg |
| Aberdeen | Euston |
| Euston | Perth |
| Paddington | Newport |
| Kemble | Penzance |
| Euston | Runcorn |

*Other members of the Royal Family*

| *Start point* | *Destination* |
|---|---|
| Euston | Leeds |
| Euston | St. Helen's Junction |
| Euston | Liverpool Lime Street and return |

*Other members of the Royal Family*

| *Start point* | *Destination* |
|---|---|
| Euston | Jordanhill (Glasgow) |
| Stroud | Nairn |
| Gatwick Airport | Victoria |
| Euston | Annan |
| Paddington | Truro and return to Euston |
| Euston | Manchester and return twice |

### Road Salting

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will examine alternatives to the use of salt, with special reference to urea, in de-icing on roads; and if he will make a statement. [11646]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking what alternatives he has examined to the use of salt, with special reference to urea in de-icing on roads.

The Highways Agency has studied the value of salt as an anti-icing agent in relation to a variety of alternatives. These have included acetate, glycol and alcohol based materials as well as urea.

The studies, carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory have consistently shown that salt is a very effective anti-icing agent in virtually all conditions experienced in Britain. It also offers good value for money, even after taking account of the corrosive impact on structures.

Urea is an alternative agent, although some six or seven times more expensive than salt, which is used in some areas particularly susceptible to corrosion such as the original Severn crossing and the Midland Links Viaducts where its less corrosive properties have been considered particularly important. However, it is less effective as an anti-icing agent at times of particularly low temperatures and has environmental disadvantages in so far as it oxidises when in solution with water, giving off ammonia. This ammonia can pose a considerable threat to aquatic life especially in smaller water courses.

The Highways Agency remains alert to the possibility of using alternative de-icers, but at present salt remains the most effective agent giving good value for money.

### Trunk Road Programme

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received following the publication of "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" on 28 November 1995 from *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* other organisations and individuals. [12386]

**Mr. Watts:** We have received many representations about trunk roads following the publication of "Managing the Trunk Road Programme." The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### British Rail Central Printing Unit

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* inquiries and *(b)* bids were received from companies or individuals interested in purchasing the British Rail central printing unit at York; how many employees work in the unit at present; what was the unit's turnover in 1995; when the unit is due to close; what will happen to its staff; and what consideration led to the decision not to sell the unit as a going concern. [11677]

**Mr. Watts:** The central printing unit employs 10 staff and currently forms part of BR's York facilities management group. Its turnover is not separately identified within the group. The future of the unit—which is a management matter for the BR board—is currently under consideration.

### Interlogic Control Engineering

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date and for what reasons the contracts of employment of the *(a)* managing director, *(b)* production director, *(c)* finance director, *(d)* personnel director and *(e)* commercial director of Interlogic Control Engineering were terminated by the British Railways Board; and what severance terms they were offered. [11678]

**Mr. Watts:** These are management matters for the British railways board. Severance terms are a matter for BR and the individuals concerned in accordance with the terms of their contracts of employment.

### Air Quality Monitoring

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to extend and improve the effectiveness of the monitoring of air quality in towns and cities in the United Kingdom. [11040]

**Mr. Clappison:** I have been asked to reply.

The Department of the Environment currently monitors air pollutants at over 1,500 non-automatic sites and more than 50 automatic sites across the United Kingdom. The Government intend to expand the automatic monitoring network further by completing the main multi-pollutant urban network and integrating national and local systems, to form a national automatic network of at least 80 sites by the end of 1996.

## TREASURY

### Value Added Tax

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will withdraw the guidelines issued to officers of the Customs and Excise Department regarding the charging of value added tax on computer equipment for the specific use of registered disabled people. [11695]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** No. While items of computer equipment are undoubtedly useful to disabled people, they cannot be supplied tax free under VAT law unless designed solely for their use. However VAT is not chargeable on the service of adapting computer equipment so that it is easier for disabled people to use.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he now defines and assesses risk to both the public and private sectors within the private finance initiative. [4925]

**Mr. Jack:** Guidance on the definition and assessment of risk is contained in the recent publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

### Corporation Tax

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the costs have exceeded projections in respect of extending the period over which trading losses could be carried back to set against corporation tax liabilities from one year to three years; and what impact this has had on Government revenues. [8311]

**Mr. Jack:** The "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1991–92" estimated the net cost of extending loss carry back for companies from one year to three years as £250 million in 1992–93.

However, the net cost cannot be measured precisely. Repayments of corporation tax in 1992–93 are estimated to include £350 million from the extension of loss carry back to three years, but the consequent changes to group relief surrendered and losses carried forward, which would reduce the cost, cannot be measured.

### Higher Rate Tax

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the numbers brought into the higher rate tax for each year since 1989–90 when the Government did not increased tax thresholds in line with *(a)* inflation and *(b)* earnings; [8307]

(2) what is the percentage change in the number of higher rate taxpayers since 1989–90; and what have been the changes in respect of the numbers of people paying the higher rate since 1989–90. [8306]

**Mr. Jack:** Estimated taxpayer numbers under independent taxation for years from 1990–91 are given in the table. Under the 1989–90 income tax regime indexed to allow for changes in the retail prices index there would be 1.5 million higher rate taxpayers in 1996–97. Equivalent estimates for all intervening years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Statutory indexation of tax thresholds is expressed in terms of price rather than earnings movements.

*Estimated taxpayer numbers*[1]

*Millions*

| | *Number of lower rate taxpayers* | *Number of basic rate taxpayers* | *Number of higher rate taxpayers* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | — | 24.4 | 1.70 |
| 1991–92 | — | 24.1 | 1.62 |
| 1992–93 | 4.24 | 19.4 | 1.72 |
| 1993–94 | 5.17 | 18.1 | 1.74 |
| 1994–95[2] | 5.00 | 18.3 | 2.10 |
| 1995–96[2] | 5.40 | 18.1 | 2.20 |
| 1996–97 | 6.30 | 17.3 | 2.20 |

[1] Figures for 1989–90 are in terms of joint taxation, figures for later years include individuals under independent taxation and are therefore not directly comparable. It is estimated that there were about 20 million single people and married couples liable to tax at the basic rate only and 1.5 million liable at the higher rate.
[2] Provisional.

### Taxation

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the tax threshold as a per cent. of average earnings for each year since 1966 for *(a)* a single person, *(b)* a single-wage married couple, *(c)* a two-wage married couple and *(d)* a single-wage married couple with two children aged eight and 12 years. [9316]

**Mr. Jack:** Available information giving a historical series of tax thresholds as a percentage of average earnings is in appendix C of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1992" for earlier years and table 2.6 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1995" for recent years.

Latest estimates for years from 1994–95, based on the 1994–95 "New Earnings Survey", are in the table. Additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*Tax threshold as a percentage of average earnings*[1] *for all occupations*

| | *Single person* | *Married man without children* |
|---|---|---|
| 1994–95 | 17.9 | 26.9 |
| 1995–96[2] | 17.7 | 24.2 |
| 1996–97[2] | 18.0 | 24.7 |

[1] Full time males paid at adult rates working a full week.
[2] Provisional.

### Retired People (Earnings)

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of earnings for retired people, above the limit of the state pension, was free of income tax, in each year since 1979. [10642]

**Mr. Jack:** The amount of the personal allowance, age allowances and the standard rate of basic state retirement pension received by a single person, for each year since 1979–80, is given in the table.

*Standard rate of basic rate*

*£ per annum*

| | *Personal allowance Age under 65* | *Age allowance Age 65–74* | *Age allowance Age 75 or more* | *Standard rate of basic state retirement pension Under 80* | *80 or more* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 1,165 | 1,540 | 1,540 | 1,094 | 1,107 |
| 1980–81 | 1,375 | 1,820 | 1,820 | 1,285 | 1,298 |
| 1981–82 | 1,375 | 1,820 | 1,820 | 1,458 | 1,471 |
| 1982–83 | 1,565 | 2,070 | 2,070 | 1,601 | 1,614 |

*Standard rate of basic rate*

*£ per annum*

| | *Personal allowance Age under 65* | *Age allowance Age 65–74* | *Age allowance Age 75 or more* | *Standard rate of basic state retirement pension Under 80* | *80 or more* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1983–84 | 1,785 | 2,360 | 2,360 | 1,765 | 1,778 |
| 1984–85 | 2,005 | 2,490 | 2,490 | 1,804 | 1,817 |
| 1985–86 | 2,205 | 2,690 | 2,690 | 1,909 | 1,922 |
| 1986–87 | 2,335 | 2,850 | 2,850 | 2,006 | 2,019 |
| 1987–88 | 2,425 | [1]2,960 | [1]3,070 | 2,054 | 2,067 |
| 1988–89 | 2,605 | [1]3,180 | [1]3,310 | 2,140 | 2,153 |
| 1989–90 | 2,785 | 3,400 | 3,540 | 2,267 | 2,280 |
| 1990–91 | 3,005 | 3,670 | 3,820 | 2,439 | 2,452 |
| 1991–92 | 3,295 | 4,020 | 4,180 | 2,704 | 2,717 |
| 1992–93 | 3,445 | 4,200 | 4,370 | 2,816 | 2,829 |
| 1993–94 | 3,445 | 4,200 | 4,370 | 2,917 | 2,930 |
| 1994–95 | 3,445 | 4,200 | 4,370 | 2,995 | 3,008 |
| 1995–96 | 3,525 | 4,630 | 4,800 | 3,060 | 3,073 |
| 1996–97 | 3,765 | 4,910 | 5,090 | 3,180 | 3,193 |

[1] Lower age allowance for people aged 65–80, higher age allowance for people aged 80 or over.

### Charities (Tax)

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total tax paid by all United Kingdom domiciled charities for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1990–91 and *(c)* 1994–95; and if he will make a statement on the taxation of charities and the implications for charities of the changed balance of taxation between direct and indirect. [11320]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* For 1994–95, it is estimated that charities paid the following tax:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Income and capital taxes | [1]neg |
| VAT | 350 |
| National non-domestic rates | 100 |

[1] "neg" = negligible (under £3 million).

Estimates of the excise duties paid by charities are not readily available, nor are comparable figures for the earlier years.

The Government value the work of charities and encourage charitable activities through the tax system. Charities are exempt from tax on most of their income and gains.

Since 1979, the Government have done a great deal to extend and improve the tax incentives to give to charity by deed of covenant and under the gift aid and payroll giving schemes. In 1994–95, tax reliefs for charities totalled £1.5 billion, of which £900 million related to direct taxation, £200 million to indirect taxation and £400 million to rate relief.

The Government's overall tax policy is aimed at leaving people with more money to spend as they choose. That choice includes the possibility of giving more to charity.

### Nuclear Industry

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much corporation tax in 1995 prices has been received from Scottish Nuclear and Nuclear Electric since 1990. [12471]

**Mr. Jack:** Details of the tax affairs of identified taxpayers are confidential.

### British Energy

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates have been made of the net present value of corporate tax to be received by the Exchequer from British Energy post-privatisation. [12472]

**Mr. Jack:** Details of the tax affairs of identified taxpayers are confidential.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Deregulation

12. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new initiatives he will advance in the next year to deregulate industry; and if he will make a statement. [9990]

**Mr. Freeman:** This year we hope to make considerable progress on the merger of the administrative procedures for PAYE and national insurance which should benefit small businesses.

16. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what analysis he has made of the effects of deregulation on the protection of the individual at work. [9994]

**Mr. Freeman:** Deregulation is aimed at achieving better regulation without removing necessary protection, whether for employees, consumers, the environment, or the public at large. Ministers responsible for orders under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 must demonstrate that any necessary protection under existing legislation will be maintained.

### Departmental Running Costs

13. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the annual costs of the office of the Deputy

Prime Minister when that title was held by the two previous incumbents; and what is the estimated annual cost of running the office currently. [9991]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The estimated annual cost of my office is £470,000. The two previous incumbents to whom the hon. Gentleman refers held other posts at the same time, and it is not therefore possible to identify comparable costs.

### Ministerial Responsibilities

14. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes have taken place in his role since his appointment; and if he will make a statement. [9992]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My role is unchanged.

### Ministerial Office (Cost-benefit Analysis)

15. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of his office's functions for the first six months of its operation. [9993]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have no plans to do so.

### Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency

17. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when proposals for the privatisation of the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency will be published. [9995]

**Mr. Willetts:** Recruitment and Assessment Services will be sold as a single viable business by trade sale. Expressions of interest in RAS have been invited and an information memorandum will be made available to prospective bidders.

### Departmental Objectives

18. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what objectives he has set for his Department for the forthcoming year. [9997]

**Mr. Willetts:** To promote the competitiveness agenda, the deregulation initiative and the effective administration of the services for which my Department is responsible.

### Quangos

19. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of public expenditure was taken up by quangos in 1979; and what percentage of public expenditure they take up now. [9998]

**Mr. Willetts:** Expenditure by non-departmental public bodies funded by Government was 4 per cent. of general Government expenditure in 1978–79 and 6 per cent. in 1994–95. Almost two-thirds of expenditure on non-departmental public bodies is accounted for by a very small number of executive bodies, such as the Housing Corporation, Legal Aid board and Higher and Further Education councils, which are responsible for the distribution of funds and provide important services.

### Public Safety

20. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made on the effects of deregulation on public safety. [10000]

**Mr. Freeman:** I am satisfied that deregulation does not diminish public safety. We have included safeguards in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, which ensures that any necessary protection under existing legislation will be maintained.

### Cabinet Committees

21. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what changes took place in his responsibilities for chairing Cabinet Committees and presenting Government policies consequent on the appointment of the Deputy Prime Minister. [10001]

**Mr. Freeman:** My right hon. Friend and I took up our current posts at the same time as the reorganisation of Cabinet Committee memberships confirmed in a written answer on Tuesday 18 July 1995.

### Lockerbie

22. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are his responsibilities in relation to the consequences of the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [10003]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** None.

### Government Policy

23. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the principal Government policy with which he has had to work during the current week. [10004]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have continued to work on a full range of those Government policies for which I am responsible.

25. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the co-ordination of Government policy. [10006]

**Mr. Willetts:** Government policies are co-ordinated to pursue economic prosperity and security for all, based on an enterprise economy; creating a nation of opportunity reflecting the Government's values of choice, ownership and reward; upholding decent commonsense values in the pursuit of law and order and justice; providing the people of Britain with first class public services; and reflecting pride in our nation and its place in the world.

### Crown Copyright

24. **Mr. Garrett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy after the privatisation of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, to leave the administration of Crown copyright with the residual HMSO and located in Norwich. [10005]

**Mr. Freeman:** I can confirm that the administration of Crown copyright will remain a function of the residual HMSO. Ten staff currently work in this area, and there are no plans at present to relocate them away from Norwich.

### F16 Aircraft

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the proposed leasing of American F16 aircraft. [12126]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** All discussions between Ministers are confidential.

### Departmental Policy

**Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what priority he accords to representations from *(a)* members of the public and *(b)* hon. Members in formulating his Department's policy. [9984]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I take such representations fully into account.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

### Second Church Estates Commissioner

38. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, when the Church Commissioners last discussed the parliamentary duties of the Second Church Commissioner; and if he will make a statement. [10019]

**Mr. Alison:** The role of the Second Church Estates Commissioner, and of the other Church commissioners, has been commented on the recent report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England—"Working as One Body". This report is currently the subject of discussion and refinement within the Church; the next major debate about its recommendations will take place during the February group of sessions of the General Synod.

### Bishops' Palaces

39. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is the current cost of maintaining bishops' palaces; how many of them there are; what were the figures *(a)* 10 and *(b)* 20 years ago in (i) real and (ii) cash terms; and if he will make a statement. [10020]

**Mr. Alison:** The total expenditure, both capital and revenue, on diocesan bishops' houses in 1994—the last year for which figures are currently available—was £2,347,000. There are 45 houses, including the Archbishop of Canterbury's London base, Lambeth palace. Only 11 can properly be described as palaces. They include not only domestic accommodation but a chapel, meeting rooms and office accommodation. The figures include expenditure on furnishings and gardens and staff accommodation, and are net of any income.

In real and comparable terms the total expenditure in 1984 was £1,822,000 and in the year to March 1975 £1,665,000.

Expenditure each year varies depending on the turnover in episcopal appointments and the incidence of major repairs. The most recent survey of expenditure shows the average expenditure on diocesan bishops' houses was £39,496 per annum over a 10-year period.

The commissioners are currently reviewing the suitability of all See houses, and steps are being taken to keep maintenance costs to a minimum. It has recently been decided to replace the Portsmouth See house by one which will be cheaper to maintain

### Pension Fund

40. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what estimate the Church Commissioners have made of the ability of the pension fund to meet the needs of clergy and staff and to ensure that they receive increases at least in line with inflation in the future. [10021]

**Mr. Alison:** Under current proposals, the Church Commissioners will meet the cost of clergy pensions earned up to 1998 and they have confirmed their continuing commitment to meet that cost, including pension increments. They have assessed the likely costs with actuarial advice and their financial projections allow for pension increments in line with the existing formula, which links them to stipend.

From 1998 onwards, subject to legislation, it is proposed that the cost of pensions will be met by contributions from dioceses and parishes into a new scheme administered by the Church of England pensions board. The board is discussing with dioceses estimated contribution rates, advised by actuaries; these allow for increases at least in line with limited price indexation. The commissioners would give short term support to dioceses as they make the transition to paying pension contributions in full.

The legislation will also enable a funded scheme for staff pensions to be established. Staff are contractually entitled to pension benefits in line with those of civil servants.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister (1) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs; [10979]

(2) how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10978]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies given on Friday 26 January, by my hon. Friend, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, *Official Report*, columns *418–19.*

### Advertising and Publicity

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list breaches, by Department and Minister, of conventions on ministerial advertising and publicity since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [12253]

**The Prime Minister:** In all cases Government Departments seek to observe the conventions.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Prime Minister when the Cabinet Office last circulated its guidelines to Ministers on central Government conventions on publicity and advertising and what measures it takes to ensure the guidelines are adhered to. [11955]

**The Prime Minister:** An updated version of the guidance on Government publicity and advertising was circulated by the Cabinet Office to Departments this month and I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House. This document makes clear that Departments are responsible for ensuring that the conventions on propriety are observed and that value for money is achieved.

### No. 10 Downing Street (Chandelier)

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received urging him to return a chandelier in No. 10 Downing street to the former Argyll Motor Works building in Alexandria. [12300]

**The Prime Minister:** As far as I am aware, none.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Trafalgar Square (Northern Ireland Demonstration)

**Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to revise the decision announced in 1972 to refuse to grant permission for any demonstration on the issue of Northern Ireland in Trafalgar square. [12815]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** My ministerial colleagues and I have reviewed the 1972 ban and decided that in future any application to use Trafalgar square for demonstrations on the issue of Northern Ireland will be treated in the same way as applications in respect of other demonstrations. My Department will continue to apply the rules which restrict all demonstrations on Trafalgar square to weekends, and will continue to consult the local police, Westminster city councils and others, and to consider each application on its merits.

### Register of Conditionality Exempt Works of Art

**Dr. John Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures have been taken by her Department to improve publicity for the register of conditionally exempt works of art. [11221]

**Mr. Jack:** I have been asked to reply.

The register has been computerised, and is updated on a quarterly basis. Each update is announced in an Inland Revenue press release which explains the public's right to view the items included in the register, and how copies of it in computer-readable format may be purchased. The most recent press release was issued on 16 January. Inland revenue is also considering the possibility of placing this information on the Internet.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Maintenance Orders

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many maintenance orders were pursued in each year by *(a)* the Lord Chancellor and *(b)* the Secretary of State for the Home Department under schedule 2, section 6 of the Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders (Hague Convention Countries) Order 1993. [12204]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Section 6 of the Maintenance Orders (Reciprocal Enforcement) Act 1972, as modified by paragraph 6 of schedule 2 of the Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders (Hague Convention Countries) Order 1993, allows the Lord Chancellor to receive an order from a Hague convention country for registration in a magistrates court in England and Wales. For the period 1 May 1994 to 31 December 1994, 29 such cases were received; and during 1995, 53 such cases were received. I regret that figures before 1 May 1994 are not available.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Strangeways Prison

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the final cost of rebuilding Strangeways prison. [10030]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. John Spellar, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the final cost of rebuilding Strangeways prison.

The costs of rebuilding Manchester prison are given in the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General which was ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on 14 July 1994. The project was completed in September 1993 at a cost of £89 million.

This overall cost included £1.8 million which was spent on temporary housing arrangements for prisoners in K-wing which was required because of the high number of prisoners in police cells at that time.

After the completion of the main project, further work was carried out to bring K-wing and its perimeter up to modern standards in terms of security, control and sanitation at a cost of £5.6 million.

The overall cost of rebuilding the prison was therefore around £95 million.

### Prison Contracts

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if a one year break in contract clause is currently being considered for inclusion in *(a)* the contracts for the new prison at Fazakerly on Merseyside and *(b)* the contracts for the running of the five new secure training centres for children aged between 12 and 14 years. [10523]

**Miss Widdecombe:** A number of options relating to termination are under consideration in respect of the contract for the first two secure training centres, but as these are still under negotiation the terms are commercially confidential. Responsibility for replying in respect of the contract for the new prison at Fazakerley has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the inclusion of a one-year break in contract clause in the contract for a new prison at Fazakerley.

The contract for Fazakerley allows the Prison Service the option of terminating the contract, at will, any time from five years after the contractual opening date.

### Strip Searches

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present policy in relation to the strip searching of visitors to prisons; if access to prisons is being denied to visitors who refuse to remove their clothes in front of prison officers; and if strip searches are conducted in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and its relevant codes. [10325]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. George Howarth, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about strip searching of visitors to prisons.

The instructions for searching visitors to prisons, including strip searches are contained in the Manual on Security, copies of which are held in the library of the House. The following is a summary:

Rule 86 (1) allows the governor to authorise a search of any person seeking to enter a prison. This is a search with consent, but it is only reasonable that those who refuse to be searched should be denied access to the prison, since they may be put under pressure to smuggle in escape equipment, weapons or drugs. However, in certain circumstances it may be possible to allow a closed visit.

It is not our policy to conduct strip searches of visitors, with or without consent, unless other legislation gives us the right to conduct the search without consent. Officers of the prison have the power to conduct searches without consent, including strip-searches, using their powers of a constable under section 8 of the Prison Act 1952, as modified by the Police And Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984, in the following circumstances:

1. If there is reason to believe the visitor is in possession of a class A, B or C controlled drug (section 23 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971).
2. If there is reason to believe she or he is in possession of a firearm (section 47 Firearms Act 1968).
3. Following arrest of the visitor in the circumstances set out in section 32 of PACE 1984.

It is our policy that governors will only authorise a strip-search if the police are unwilling or unable to attend. Officers of the prison may, if they have lawful grounds for doing so, arrest and caution the visitor pending arrival of the police.

### Miss Elaine Connolly

**Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct the acting Director General of the Prison Service to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen of 4 December 1995 about the case of Miss Elaine Connolly. [11315]

**Miss Widdecombe:** The temporary Director General replied to the letter from the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen on 24 January.

### Community Officers

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which areas are currently covered by a community officer; and how many of these officers are currently operating in each area of the country. [11853]

**Mr. Maclean:** All police forces in England and Wales have community liaison departments and deploy community police officers.

**Mrs. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what ways he is monitoring the effectiveness of the community officer programme. [11854]

**Mr. Maclean:** Community liaison activities in police forces are monitored by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

### Holloway Prison

**Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pregnant women are currently in custody at Holloway prison. [11682]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question about the number of pregnant women currently in custody at Holloway prison.

The number of women known to be pregnant at Holloway on 24 January 1996 was 18.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total expenditure each year since 1990 on education at HMP Holloway; and if he will make a statement. [11641]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the expenditure on education at Holloway prison.

The total expenditure each year since 1990 on education at Holloway is given in the attached table.

| | *Salaries* £ | *Materials (VT, CIT, Pre-release)* £ | *Education capital* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 285,525 | 53,122 | 7,535 |
| 1991–92 | 403,129 | 87,634 | 32,534 |
| 1992–93 | 343,837 | 67,553 | 18,136 |
| 1993–94 | 321,817 | 68,406 | nil |
| 1994–95 | 383,871 | 47,967 | 9,967 |
| 1995–96 | 348,000 | 58,900 | 2,000 |

### Homicide Convictions

**Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* males and

*(b)* females are currently serving in Her Majesty's prisons following conviction for (i) murder, (ii) manslaughter and (iii) other homicide convictions. [11719]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. William Powell, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many (a) males and (b) females are currently serving in Her Majesty's prisons following convictions for (i) murder, (ii) manslaughter, and (iii) other homicide convictions.

The latest available information is for 31 December 1995 and is given in the attached table.

*Population under sentence in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for murder, manslaughter and other homicide, by sex, on 31 December 1995*[1]

| *Offence* | *Males* | *Females* |
|---|---|---|
| Murder | 2,705 | 110 |
| Manslaughter | 210 | 13 |
| Other homicide and attempted homicide | 997 | 35 |
| Total | 3,912 | 158 |

[1] Provisional figures.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11912]

**Mr. Howard:** The Home Office and all its agencies use the Employment Service's disability symbol both for external recruitment and for internal selection and promotion.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11384]

**Mr. Howard:** Publicity expenditure is committed when there is a need to advise the public or inform them of their rights. Assessment takes account of policy objectives and prioritisation within available resources.

Advertising and press office staff, accommodation and administration costs for my Department are as follows for 1979–80 to 1988–89:

| *Year* | *Advertising* | *Press* |
|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 2,904,671 | 283,140 |
| 1980–81 | 1,649,605 | 392,532 |
| 1981–82 | 1,834,476 | 381,799 |
| 1982–83 | 1,957,304 | 424,290 |
| 1983–84 | 2,760,681 | 516,632 |
| 1984–85 | 3,262,700 | 560,512 |
| 1985–86 | 3,306,391 | 606,996 |
| 1986–87 | 5,000,000 | 548,136 |
| 1987–88 | 4,700,000 | 599,282 |
| 1988–89 | 5,400,000 | 674,945 |

From 1989–90 onwards, recording systems were improved to identify advertising and other publicity material such as publications, videos, exhibitions and posters:

| *Year* | *Advertising* | *Other publicity material* | *Press* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 5,500,000 | 3,088,065 | 715,646 |
| 1990–91 | 5,728,000 | 4,323,476 | 786,519 |
| 1991–92 | 7,275,940 | 3,600,288 | 792,125 |
| 1992–93 | 7,334,635 | 5,638,982 | 835,441 |
| 1993–94 | 9,090,222 | 5,062,327 | 847,632 |
| 1994–95 | 10,912,008 | 3,190,350 | 899,084 |
| 1995–96[1] | 7,398,629 | 1,387,550 | 727,169 |
| 1995–96[2] | 7,398,629 | 3,387,550 | 969,560 |
| 1996–97[2] | 4,150,000 | 3,750,000 | 993,799 |

[1] Year to date
[2] Forecast

Press and publicity expenditure by my Department's Agencies was as follows:

| *Agency/Year* | *Advertising and publicity material* | *Press* |
|---|---|---|
| *Prison Service* | | |
| 1993–94 | 206,900 | 304,800 |
| 1994–95 | 200,500 | 594,900 |
| 1995–96 forecast | 228,400 | 319,900 |
| 1996–97 forecast | 213,300 | 318,200 |
| *Fire Service College* | | |
| 1992–93 | 89,300 | — |
| 1993–94 | 55,700 | — |
| 1994–95 | 34,600 | — |
| 1995–96 forecast | 24,370 | 6,000 |
| 1996–97 forecast | 30,000 | 6,000 |
| *Passport Agency* | | |
| 1991–92 | 70,357 | 62,492 |
| 1992–93 | 67,454 | 56,880 |
| 1993–94 | 70,945 | 68,981 |
| 1994–95 | 127,040 | 256,693 |
| 1995–96 forecast | 94,814 | 160,701 |
| 1996–97 | Budgets not yet decided | |
| *Forensic Science Service* | | |

Under the Forensic Science Service agency's framework, document, press and publicity services are provided by the Home Office. These are marginal and are included in the Departmental spend.

It has not been possible in the time available for agencies to provide precise 1995–96 year to date figures, but they expect no substantial divergence from forecast.

I shall write to the hon. Member concerning publicity and press expenditure by my Department's non-departmental public bodies.

### Frankland Prison

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *54*, what steps have been taken to recover the cell key lost at Frankland prison. [12023]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 29 January 1996*:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the loss of a cell key at Frankland prison.

Following the loss of the cell key, an investigation was mounted and this is still continuing. The replacement of the locks at the prison has rendered the lost key ineffective.

### Women Prisoners (Hospital Treatment)

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women prisoners in each year since 1990 have escaped from escort while attending hospital for antenatal care, childbirth or post-natal care; if he will list the circumstances of their escape; and from which prisons they were attending the hospital. [7539]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Tessa Jowell, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many women prisoners in each year since 1990 have escaped from escort while attending hospital for antenatal care, childbirth or post-natal care, giving the circumstances of their escape and from which prisons they were attending hospital.

In this period there have been seven escapes from hospital for the stated reasons. The information is shown in the attached table.

Since 1990 there is one recorded case of a pregnant woman (32 weeks) attempting to escape from a hospital escort (Risley prison). There is another where a pregnant woman attempted to escape from a hospital escort, the pregnancy was not the reason for the hospital visit. On two occasions there were attempted escapes where the reason for the hospital visit is not known.

| *Date* | *Establishment* | *Details* |
|---|---|---|
| *1990* | | |
| 17 July 1990 | Holloway | Escaped leaving new born child while uncuffed |
| *1991* | | |
| Nil | — | — |
| *1992* | | |
| 19 February 1992 | Holloway | Espaced through wc window while uncuffed |
| 29 August 1992 | Holloway | Escaped when a male prisoner impeded staff while uncuffed |
| *1993* | | |
| 6 May 1993 | Pucklechurch | Escaped when aided by man armed with hurling stick while uncuffed |
| 19 May 1993 | Styal | Escaped from staff supervision, while uncuffed |
| 5 June 1993 | Styal | Escaped from staff supervision, while uncuffed |
| 26 August 1993 | Styal | Escaped when two males impeded escorting staff, while uncuffed |
| *1994* | | |
| Nil | — | — |
| *1995* | | |
| Nil | — | — |
| *1996 (to 7 January)* | | |
| Nil | — | — |

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Aid Budget

26. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the size of the overseas aid budget in 1996–97. [10007]

**Mr. Hanley:** We always receive a number of representations from hon. Members and the general public and this year is no exception.

33. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with non-governmental organisations concerned with the use of overseas aid, regarding the consequences of the reduction of the overseas aid budget. [10014]

**Mr. Hanley:** My right hon. and Noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development and her officials have frequent contact with NGOs on a wide range of policy-related issues, including the size of the aid budget. We have informed the NGO's that the joint funding scheme will be increased in 1996–97 to over £36 million from £34 million this year.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary met chief executives from major NGOs on 23 January.

35. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the total overseas aid budget for the current year is devoted to educational purposes. [10016]

**Mr. Hanley:** Expenditure on education from the bilateral aid programme is identifiable only up to 1994–95. In that year a total of £227 million was spent on educational activities, which was 20 per cent. of the total bilateral aid expenditure.

### Nigeria

32. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent changes he has made to the aid budget to Nigeria. [10013]

**Mr. Hanley:** Bilateral aid spending will be about £6.4 million in 1995–96 compared with an estimated £7.9 million before the EU measures taken in December 1995. EC aid is limited to tackling poverty through non-governmental organisations.

### Private Capital

34. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will commission studies into the role of private capital in fostering economic development. [10015]

**Mr. Hanley:** I am pleased to inform the hon. Member that the Overseas Development Administration is in the process of commissioning a major research programme on the policy options facing developing countries in attracting private capital.

### Former Yugoslavia

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the delays experienced by non-governmental organisations delivering aid in Bosnia as a result of customs and other procedures required by the Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Herceg-Bosnan authorities; what is his assessment of the effect of these delays on deliveries of aid in Bosnia; and if he will ask the Bosnian authorities to minimise such restrictions. [10860]

**Mr. Hanley:** We know from running our own ODA aid programmes in Bosnia of the delays caused to aid organisations by complicated local customs procedures. Aid organisations registered with the Croatian and Bosnian Governments find that advance clearance from the relevant Ministries usually takes about six days. Further customs checks en-route lengthen aid journeys. We recognise the rights of the Croatian and Bosnian Governments to exercise proper customs controls but have asked them to apply them as efficiently as possible or to relax them for aid. In the new conditions following the Dayton peace agreement access is much improved but we will continue to urge the local authorities to apply customs controls on aid as lightly as possible.

### Nigerian Police Training

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Nigerian police officers have received police training in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990; and if he will list *(a)* the names and ranks of the trainees, *(b)* the cost and duration of each officer's training, *(c)* which United Kingdom police forces provided the training and *(d)* which Government department provided the funding for the training. [11576]

**Mr. Hanley:** Twenty-one Nigerian police officers have received training in the United Kingdom since 1990, funded by the Overseas Development Administration. The further details requested have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

*Details of ODA funded training provided in the United Kingdom for Nigerian police officers between 1990–91 and 1994–95*

| *Year* | *Name* | *Rank* | *Cost* £ | *Duration* | *Where training provided* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | Mr. B. Madake | Deputy Superintendent | 2,601 | 6 weeks | Greater Manchester Police Force |
| 1990–91 | Mr. B. D. Odigie | Deputy Superintendent | 2,601 | 6 weeks | Greater Manchester Police Force |
| 1991–92 | Mr. Salami | Chief Superintendent | 2,400 | 6 weeks | Greater Manchester Police Force |
| 1991–92 | Mr. Adeoye | Chief Superintendent | 11,306 | 3 months | Overseas Command Course, Bramshill |
| 1992–93 | Mr. N. L. Hussein | Superintendent | 5,783 | 6 weeks | Hendon Police College |
| 1993–94 | Mr. B. Benjamin | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1993–94 | Mr. T Chenbap | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1993–94 | Ms H. Ugochukwi | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1993–94 | Mr. S. Gambo | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1993–94 | Mr. K. Gwarzo | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1993–94 | Mr. L. Oki | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1993–94 | Mr. U. Ntenborg | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1993–94 | Mr. A. Yahaya | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1993–94 | Mr. P. Ukoyono | Assistant Superintendent | 2,915 | 2 weeks | Central Planning and Training Unit—Harrogate |
| 1994–95 | Mr. P. Ebo | Assistant Commissioner | 4,482 | 4 weeks | West Midlands Fraud Squad—Birmingham |
| 1994–95 | Mr. S. F. Abdullahi | Deputy Superintendent | 4,482 | 4 weeks | West Midlands Fraud Squad—Birmingham |
| 1994–95 | Mr. M Isa-Adejo | Detective | 4,482 | 4 weeks | West Midlands Fraud Squad—Birmingham |
| 1994–95 | Mr. M. Yakubu | Detective | 4,482 | 4 weeks | West Midlands Fraud Squad—Birmingham |
| 1994–95 | Mr. Onyeguiri | Deputy Superintendent | 4,482 | 4 weeks | West Midlands Fraud Squad—Birmingham |
| 1994–95 | Mr. A. Dikko | Deputy Superintendent | 4,482 | 4 weeks | West Midlands Fraud Squad—Birmingham |
| 1994–95 | Mr. O. J. Ekama | Deputy Commissioner | 1,650 | 1 week | Bramshill, Harrogate, Ryton |

### UN Aid Target

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to increase Her Majesty's Government spending on overseas aid to the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product. [11984]

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) on 19 January, *Official Report*, column *787*.

### Nepal

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made

of the future of his Department's funding for the Lumle agricultural research centre in Nepal; and what plans he has for aid to Nepal in research into disease-resistant crops such as peas, cold tolerant rice and broad leaf mustard. [11735]

**Mr. Hanley:** The Government will decide later this year on the extent and nature of further aid support for hill agricultural research in Nepal, including the Lumle agricultural research centre, in the light of progress on the present foundation year project.

Research into disease-resistant crops is an important component of current British aid to agricultural research in Nepal. The Lumle agricultural research centre has already successfully produced a cold-tolerant variety of rice, and research into disease resistant tomatoes, wheat, rice, potatoes and maize is currently being undertaken.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Minimum Wage

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 17 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *628*, if he will list the research mentioned in his reply. [11808]

**Mr. Lang:** Among the studies considered are the following:

(i) UK Studies on the link between pay and jobs at national level:

HM Treasury, (1985) "The Relationship Between Employment and Wages". London: HMSO. [This is the most comprehensive survey of the evidence on the link between pay and jobs at a national level.]

Wells, W. (1983). "The Relative Pay and Employment of Young People", Department of Employment Research Paper No. 42.

(ii) UK Studies on the employment effects of proposals for a national minimum wage:

Bazen, S. (1990) "On the Employment Effects of Introducing a National Minimum Wage in the UK", British Journal of Industrial Relations, 1990.

Bazen, S. (1991) "Minimum Wage, an Analysis of the Issues", Institute of Personnel Management.

Dennison, S.R. and Forrest D. (1984. "Low Pay or No Pay; A Review of the Theory and Practice of Minimum Wage Laws", Institute of Economic Affairs, Hobart Paper No. 101.

Gregg, P. (1992). "National Minimum Wage", in the National Institute Economic Review, February 1992.

Minford, P. (1989). "The Effects in the UK of EEC Wage Proposals in the Social Charter", in the Liverpool Quarterly Economic Bulletin, December 1989.

UBS Phillips and Drew (1991). Economic Briefing, June 1991.

James Capel Economic Research Unit (1991) in "Is Labour a Threat?"

Kleinwort Benson, (1995): "Window on the Economy". UK Economics, Third Quarter 1995.

(iii) Studies of the employment effects of the wages boards and councils:

Canning, D. And Tarling, R. (1985). "A Report on the Department of Employment's Study "Wages Floors in the Clothing Industry, 1950–1981", Department of Applied Economics, Cambridge 1985.

Craig, C. And Wilkinson, F. (1986). "Pay and Employment in Four Retail Trades", Department of Employment Research Paper No. 51.

Kaufman, R. (1989). "The Effects of Statutory Minimum Rates of Pay on Employment in Great Britain". Economic Journal, December 1989.

Lund, P., Morris, T., Temple, J., Watson, J. (1982). "Wages and Employment in Agriculture, 1960–1980", GES Working Paper No. 52.

Machin, S. and Manning, A. (1992). "Minimum Wages, Wages Dispersion and Employment: Evidence from the UK Wages Councils", LSE Working Paper No. 221.

Morgan, P., Paterson, D. and Barrie, R. (1986). "Wage Floors in the Clothing Industry, 1950–1981", Department of Employment Research Paper No. 52.

Neuburger, H. (1984). "From the Dole Queue to the Sweatshop", London Low Pay Unit.

(iv) Studies on the employment effects of the United States minimum wage:

Brown, C., Gilroy, C., Kohen, A. (1982). "The Effect of the Minimum Wage on Employment and Unemployment." Journal of Economic Literature, Vol. xx [This contains a survey of the US evidence.]

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Vedder, R. and Gallaway, L. (1995). "Minimum Wages Cost Jobs".

(v) Studies of the employment effects of the minimum wage in EU member states:

Ducos, and Plassard (1991). "Young People's Employment and the Minimum Wage".

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Starr, G. (1981). "Minimum Wage Fixing", International Labour Office.

Bazen, S. and Martin (1991). "Impact of the Minimum Wage on Earnings and Employment in France", OECD Economic Studies No. 16.

(vii) Other articles and correspondence concerning the debate about the employment effects of the wages councils, and minimum wages. For example, a recent Fabian Society pamphlet by Fred Bayliss; various publications by the Low Pay Unit; and New Economy, Winter 1995, Vol. 2, Issue 4.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11919]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The DTI does not use the symbol for external or internal recruitment, or for promotion. However, it is kept under review as the Department develops its programme of action on staff with disabilities.

I have asked the chief executives of the DTI's agencies to write to the hon. Member direct.

*Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 29 January 1996:*

I am replying to your written question on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency.

Question: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for his Department and each of the Agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's Positive about Disabled People symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion.

The Radiocommunications Agency does not use the Employment Services Positive about Disabled People symbol for either external recruitment or internal recruitment and promotion.

However the Agency only assumed responsibility for equality of opportunity matters from the Department of Trade and Industry in October 1994. The Agency produces an annual Action Programme. One of the actions in the 1996 Action Programme is to consider the use of the Employment Services Disability Symbol. I expect that the Agency will make a decision later in the year on whether or not to use the symbol for both external recruitment and internal recruitment and promotion.

*Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 29 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question and about use of the Employment Service's *Positive about Disabled People* symbol. This Agency does not currently make use of this symbol.

*Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 25 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question on behalf of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, an executive agency of DTI.

The Laboratory does not use the Employment Service's Positive about Disabled People symbol for either a) external recruitment or b) internal recruitment and promotion.

However, recruitment advertisements contain a statement that LGC is an equal opportunities employer whether directed at external or internal applicants.

*Letter from David Durham to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 29 January 1996:*

I have been asked to respond as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency, to your question to the President of the Board of Trade regarding the use of the Employment Service's Positive about Disabled People symbol. I can confirm that we have been pleased to advertise our commitment in this way.

The symbol is used for both external and internal recruitment purposes and, as you can see below, is publicised on all recruitment correspondence issued by our Personnel Section.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 29 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about using the Employment Service's Positive about Disabled People symbol.

The Insolvency Service does not currently use the symbol for either external recruitment or internal recruitment and promotion. However following discussions with the Employment Service, it is in the process of applying for permission to use it on all its recruitment, promotion and training literature.

*Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 29 January 1996:*

I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about use of the Employment Service's Positive about Disabled People symbol. In recent external recruitment exercises we have used either the symbol, or text making it clear that we welcome applications from those with disabilities. In internal recruitment or promotion we rely on a statement of our Equal Opportunities Policy we have issued to all staff which makes it clear that discrimination on grounds of disability is unacceptable. We have also established a Disabled Forum which can raise with management any point of concern.

### Companies Acts

**Mr. Bell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many DTI inspectors are working upon investigations in accordance with powers conferred by the Companies Acts. [12208]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** There are currently 15 inspectors undertaking inspections into the affairs and/or membership of nine companies under the investigative powers conferred by the Companies Acts.

### Departmental Staff (Energy Matters)

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff in his Department work on press and publicity and public relations; and how many of them deal with energy-related matters. [12483]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Sixty-three staff are employed in the Department's information division either directly on, or in support of, publicity, press and other media relations work. Of these, seven spend 50 per cent. or more of their time on energy-related matters.

### Nuclear Industry (Privatisation)

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his latest estimate of the date for nuclear power generation privatisation; and if he will suspend his Department's plans pending publication by the Trade and Industry Committee of its report into nuclear privatisation. [12226]

**Mr. Lang:** Privatisation of the nuclear power generation industry is on track for the summer of this year and will not be suspended pending the issue by the Trade and Industry Committee of its report.

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column 227, what was the total expenditure on management, financial and other consultants employed by his Department to advise on the sale of Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear in each year since 1988–89. [12225]

**Mr. Lang:** There was no expenditure on the sale of Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear in the years 1988–89 to 1994–95. Pursuant to my answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, columns *226–27*, actual expenditure for the year to 31 March 1996 will be reported to Parliament in the normal way through the appropriation account.

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total amount of money raised by the non-fossil fuel obligation; and how much of those proceeds have been distributed to Nuclear Electric. [11252]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The fossil fuel levy was introduced on 1 April 1990. The information requested is:

| *Year* | *Fossil fuel levy receipts* | *Payments from levy to Nuclear Electric* £ *million* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 1,175 | 1,135 |
| 1991–92 | 1,324 | 1,281 |
| 1992–93 | 1,348 | 1,291 |
| 1993–94 | 1,234 | 1,139 |
| 1994–95 | 1,205 | 1,081 |

*Sources:*
Office of Electricity Regulation (amounts raised) and Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency Ltd. (Payments).

The balance of levy receipts is used to finance payments to British Nuclear Fuels plc and to renewables generators, and to cover certain other costs such as administration costs.

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount of money is estimated to be raised from the privatisation of Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear in terms of *(a)* unspent non-fossil fuel obligation moneys and *(b)* cash surpluses at the time of the sale. [11309]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The proceeds of the sale of British Energy will depend on a variety of factors, including market conditions at the time of sale. It is not possible to put a fixed estimate on proceeds in advance of sale.

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount of money has been spent on redundancy payments for staff in *(a)* Nuclear Electric and *(b)* Scottish Nuclear in each of the last five years; and how much is estimated to be spent in 1996–97. [11310]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* Information on staff redundancy costs is given in the annual report and accounts of Nuclear Electric plc. Information for 1995–96 and beyond will be published in the accounts of the relevant companies for those years. Questions on Scottish Nuclear Ltd. are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to retain the non-fossil fuel obligation after privatisation of British Energy; what is its estimated level; and if he will make a statement. [11254]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* Under the non-fossil fuel obligation, NFFO, the regional electricity companies, RECs, are required to make arrangements to secure the availability of specified amounts of non-fossil—nuclear and renewables—sourced electricity generating capacity. The fossil fuel levy recovers the above-market costs to the RECs of securing this capacity. The nuclear NFFO will continue until 1998, but the element of the fossil fuel levy that is attributable to Nuclear Electric will end at the time of privatisation, subject to the recovery of outstanding moneys. The levy will continue to cover renewables and British Nuclear Fuels plc. We cannot give a figure for the reduced rate at this time, as it will depend on a number of factors that are still uncertain.

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much of the non-fossil fuel obligation distributed to Nuclear Electric *(a)* remains as cash surplus, *(b)* has been used for decommissioning, *(c)* has been used for waste reprocessing, *(d)* has been invested in capital assets and *(e)* has been spent elsewhere. [11253]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* Details of nuclear premium received by Nuclear Electric under the NFFO arrangements and of their expenditure are contained in Nuclear Electric's annual report and accounts. The nuclear premium forms part of their overall income.

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answers of 10 January, *Official Report*, columns *226–27*, to whom the expenditure provision for restructuring and privatisation of the nuclear power generation industry will be given in 1995–96; and what is the value of the contacts with the companies advising his Department on the sale. [11311]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* Pursuant to my answers of 10 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *226–27*, expenditure in 1995–96 on restructuring and privatisation of the nuclear power generation industry will be in respect of the companies advising the Government during that financial year. Actual expenditure will be reported to Parliament in the normal way through the appropriation account. The value of individual contracts with companies is commercially confidential.

## Competition Policy, Birmingham

**Mr. Corbett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the impact of competition policy on Birmingham. [9996]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The Government believe that competition is good for competitiveness by making business compete more effectively and thus benefiting both customers and producers—in Birmingham as in the rest of the UK.

## EU Funding

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how much in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European Thermie programmes and its predecessor programmes over the last available five years; [11662]

(2) how much in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European Thermie programme under the current financial perspectives. [11663]

**Mr. Page:** Payment from European expenditure programmes are not allocated to members states in the legislation supporting the programmes. The Thermie programme supports projects selected following an open call for proposals. It is not possible to predict the outcome of future calls, but in the last five years UK led projects have received:

| *Year* | *kecu* | *£ thousands*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 19,507 | 15,996 |
| 1992 | 21,111 | 17,311 |
| 1993 | 26,053 | 18,903 |
| 1994 | 37,250 | 30,545 |
| 1995 | 21,541 | 17,663 |

[1] 1 ecu = £0.82.

A breakdown of these figures on a regional basis is not available.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European Altener programme under the present structural funds agreement; [11667]

(2) how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European Altener programme and its predecessor programmes over the last available five-year period. [11666]

**Mr. Page:** The Altener programme for the promotion of renewable energy sources in the Community is not part of the structural funds. Payment from European expenditure programmes are not allocated to member states in the legislation supporting the programmes. The Altener programme started in 1993 and UK-led projects have received:

| *Year* | *kecu* | *£ thousand*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 272 | 223 |
| 1994 | 1,609 | 1,071 |
| 1995 | 2,101 | 1,723 |

[1] 1 ecu = £0.82.

A breakdown of these figures on a regional basis is not available.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received from European Commission research and development programmes over the last available five years. [11668]

**Mr. Taylor:** Information on receipts for the European Union research and development programmes which have to be collected from the recipients is available only for 1993–94:

*1993–94*

| *Region* | *£million* | *MECU* |
|---|---|---|
| South East | 97.76 | 125.57 |
| South West | 36.06 | 46.32 |
| East Anglia | 12.76 | 16.39 |
| East Midlands | 10.79 | 13.86 |
| West Midlands | 6.01 | 7.71 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 6.00 | 7.70 |
| North | 4.63 | 5.95 |
| North-West | 17.57 | 22.57 |
| Wales | 7.77 | 9.98 |
| Scotland | 17.26 | 22.17 |
| Northern Ireland | 5.40 | 6.93 |
| UK Total | 222.01 | 285.17 |

These totals do not include funds received by the non-profit sector or the new universities.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much in *(a)* Ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European Commission research and development programmes under the current financial perspectives. [11669]

**Mr. Taylor:** Payments from European Community expenditure programmes are not allocated to member states in the legislation supporting the programmes.

Framework programme IV, which runs from 1994–98, is the EU's main research and development programme. It supports collaborative research aimed at promoting industrial competitiveness and the quality of life. It has a budget of 13.1 billion ecu—approximately £10.9 billion. It is administered by the European Commission, which receives applications and manages the project selection process. The budget is not pre-allocated in any way among member states. Projects are selected on the basis of scientific excellence. UK researchers have participated strongly in successive framework programmes.

## Post Office

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future of the Post Office. [10002]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The Government's plans for the future of the Post Office were set out in a statement on 11 May 1995 by my right hon. Friend the then President of the Board of Trade.

## Small Firms

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the outcome of the recent review of the small firms loan guarantee scheme; and what changes he proposes to make to the rules. [12816]

**Mr. Page:** I expect to be able to make an announcement shortly.

## Departmental Payments

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department has held with other Government Departments following the publishing of the figures showing percentages of bills paid late in 1994–95. [12224]

**Mr. Page:** My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is responsible for issuing guidance on monitoring methods and payment policies to Government Departments.

As Minister for Small Business, I have also stressed the importance of prompt payment at meetings with all the small firms Ministers across the Government and shall continue to do so.

In addition, this Department has substantially improved its payment performance over the past year. I recognise the need to build on this improvement and this Department will re-examine payment procedures and checking systems will be made even more comprehensive.

### Business Links

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many inquiries business links handled in the last year for which figures are available. [11962]

**Mr. Page:** During the period October 1994 to September 1995, business links provided advice and information to the following numbers of companies:

October–December 1994: 26,624

January–March 1995: 33,035

April–June 1995: 41,222

July–September 1995: 51,931

Each company is counted only once each quarter. To the extent that some companies may seek information and advice more than once in each quarter the total number of inquiries dealt with will be higher than above.

### British Gas

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will hold discussions with the Office of Gas Supply about the measures which should be taken to ensure that the cost of take and pay contracts entered into by British Gas is not passed on to gas consumers. [11498]

**Mr. Eggar:** The Government have decided not to include a provision in the standard conditions of the gas shippers licences to recover the costs of "take or pay" contracts. Regulation of prices in the tariff market is, and always has been, the responsibility of the independent Director General of Gas Supply.

### Value Added Tax

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many businesses *(a)* registered and *(b)* deregistered for VAT in (i) the north-west and (ii) Pendle in 1994 and 1995. [12598]

**Mr. Page:** The latest available figures are for 1994 and are as follows:

*VAT registrations and deregistrations in 1994*

| | *Registrations* | *Deregistrations* |
|---|---|---|
| North-West | 17,375 | 17,751 |
| Pendle | 261 | 246 |

The above estimates include adjustments for the effects of the changes in the VAT threshold in November 1993, and hence differ from those published elsewhere by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report are in the possession of Ministers or officials in his Department other than those to whom draft sections of the report were sent by Sir Richard Scott. [11876]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* In forwarding sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to Ministers and officials, the inquiry expressly stated that individuals could at their discretion make a copy for a legal or other adviser and another for the Department concerned. Whether they did so is a matter for the individuals concerned.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have used copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report to prepare the Government's response to Sir Richard Scott's report. [11877]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* No decision about the response to Sir Richard Scott's report will be taken until the report has been received.

In considering issues relating to the Scott inquiry, all Departments naturally take account of material properly available to them.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11387]

**Mr. John M. Taylor** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The value of contracts let centrally to external consultants including management consultants for 1993–94 was £24.17 million, for 1994–95 it was £6.66 million, and for 1995–96 to date it is £3.96 million. Other information on central expenditure can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on savings is not collected centrally and estimates can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information in respect of non-departmental public bodies is not kept centrally and could not be compiled without disproportionate cost.

The above information excludes external consultancies let independently by the Department's executive agencies. I have asked agency chief executives to reply separately.

*Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 24 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the use of management consultants by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC), an executive agency of the DTI.

From time-to-time we have used consultants to help review or improve internal management functions (including the provision of information technology). They are engaged against "value-for-money" criteria, and only when they can bring particular skills or knowledge not available from within LGC; particular examples are in training, the selection and implementation of accounting systems, and operational review.

Over the last six years LGC has spent the following amounts on management consultants:

| *Year* | *£ thousand (including VAT)* |
|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 25 |
| 1992–93 | 103 |
| 1993–94 | 11 |
| 1994–95 | 277 |
| 1995–96 (to date) | 46 |
| 1995–96 (estimate to year end) | 120 |

I am afraid that information on earlier years can only be provided at disproportionate cost. Forecasts for 1996/97 are not available.

*Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 29 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply, in relation to the Patent Office, to your Question about the use of external consultants.

The Patent Office made no use of external consultants in 1992/93, 1993/94 and 1994/95. In 1995/96 expenditure to the 31st December 1995 is £113,204 with the full year estimated at £130,000. In 1996/97 provision has been made for £100,000 as continuation of existing work aimed at identifying scope for savings in activities such as marketing and use of computer services. Figures relating to 1979/80, 1989/90 and 1991/92 are not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The savings accruing to the Office from this work will depend on the extent to which better value for money can be obtained while preserving the current quality of service.

*Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 29 January 1996:*

I have been asked by the President of the Board of Trade to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question concerning expenditure on external consultants.

I regret that information is not available for 1979–80, but the figures for the years since 1989 are as follows:

| | *£ thousand* |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | Nil |
| 1990–91 | 2 |
| 1991–92 | 10 |
| 1992–93 | 22 |
| 1993–94 | 58 |
| 1994–95 | 39 |
| 1995–96 (to date) | 30 |
| 1995–96 (full year estimate) | 35 |
| 1996–97 (estimate) | 30 |

The consultants employed have provided exclusively technical advice, mostly related to accounting changes and the development of the Agency's quality system. It is therefore impossible to estimate what savings, if any, may have accrued as a result.

*Letter from David Durham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 29 January 1996:*

Mr John Taylor MP has asked me to reply in respect of Companies House Executive Agency to your question to the President of the Board of Trade on the expenditure of external consultants; and the estimated savings derived from the use of consultants by Companies House Executive Agency, for certain years since 1979.

The information you sought is as follows:

*Expenditure on Consultants*

| *Year* | *£ thousand* |
|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 172 |
| 1994–95 | 122 |
| 1995–96 (to date) | 167 |
| 1995–96 (full year forecast) | 279 |

The expected expenditure for 1996–97 is not available at this stage, as Companies House is still developing its budget plans for next year.

Information on earlier years can only be provided at disproportionate costs.

There are no direct savings attributed to the above consultancy costs, since the consultants were employed by Companies House to provide technical advice on matters such as structural building repairs and IT system design and implementation.

I trust you will find this information helpful.

*Letter from Michael Goddard to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Competition and Consumer Affairs, has asked me to reply to your Question about expenditure on external consultants.

2. The Agency did not assume responsibility for letting its own contracts until 1994. Expenditure on external consultants, including management consultants, in FY 94–95 amounted to £237,207, and to date in FY 95–96 to £247,377. Expenditure in earlier years is covered in Mr. Taylor's reply to your question. Planned expenditure in FY 96–97 is unlikely to exceed the level of previous years.

3. All the expenditure in FY 94–95 and FY 95–96 involved the provision of strategic advice. Savings resulting from decisions taken in response to such advice will not be quantifiable for some time. When engaging external consultants "value for money" is the Agency's prime consideration.

*Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 29 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on external consultants and the estimated savings resulting from their employment by The Insolvency Service.

Details of the costs associated with external consultants engaged by The Service are:

| *Organisation* | *Purpose* | *Cost including VAT* 1993–94 £ | 1994–95 £ | 1995–96 to date £ | 1995–96 estimated total £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coopers and Lybrand | Accountancy support | — | 60,000 | — | — |
| KPMG | Market test | 45,000 | — | — | — |

| Organisation | Purpose | 1993–94 £ | 1994–95 £ | Cost including VAT 1995–96 to date £ | 1995–96 estimated total £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ernst and Young | Market test and accountancy support | 107,800 | 13,100 | — | — |
| Price Waterhouse | User survey | — | 124,800 | — | — |
| Stoy Hayward | Contracting out and management consultancy | 76,670 | 94,150 | — | — |
| Shreeveport Ltd. | Contracting out | — | 129,000 | 421,100 | 506,400 |
| Bevan Ashford | Contracting out | — | — | 26,465 | 36,500 |
| Bond Pearce | Contracting out | — | 10,100 | — | 10,000 |
| | Total | 229,470 | 431,150 | 447,565 | 552,900 |

Prior to 1994 contracts for consultants were let by the Department of Trade and Industry, and information in relation to 1992 and 1993 was provided in a Parliamentary Question No. 146 for Ms Diane Abbott MP dated 25 January 1994, Columns 211-217. Information on consultancies prior to 1992–93 can only now be provided at disproportionate cost.

The Service has also used outside private sector organisations for advice on, development of and delivery in relation to specialist areas such as training, design and information technology systems. Details of the organisations concerned, the payments made to them and any estimate of savings accrued could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The £60,000 payment to Coopers and Lybrand for accountancy support for the Agency was in and about the setting up of systems to enable it to produce commercial style accounts.

Ernst and Young were engaged in 1993–94 to prepare a specification for the market test of The Service's Central Accounting Unit and to assist with the evaluation of the bids at a cost of £107,800. KPMG were engaged to assist the in-house bid team in the preparation of their bid at a cost of £45,000. The annual saving in the overall cost of the activities market tested is approximately £85,000 in each of the five years of the resulting Service Level Agreement.

Ernst and Young were also engaged in 1995 on accounting reconciliation work for the Central Accounting Unit at a cost of £13,100. This did not produce direct savings but provided independent professional assurance that financial data had been properly transferred to the CAU's new computer system (BANCS).

Consultants have been engaged by The Service throughout the period of the current contracting out exercise which has yet to reach its conclusion. Any estimate of savings accrued as a result could only be determined once the decision has been taken on contracting out.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Globe Europe Network

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the benefits that have accrued from the United Kingdom financial support through the know-how fund for the Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment-Globe Europe Network; and what financial commitments have been made for further funding of the Globe Europe Network. [12002]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The know-how fund has not previously provided any direct support to the Globe Europe network. However, it has pledged a sum of up to 35,868 ecu—approximately £20,000—20 per cent. of the total cost of a project to be started in 1996.

The details are still under negotiation. However, the project aims to promote among parliamentarians in central and eastern Europe understanding of parliamentary procedures and techniques with particular emphasis on environmental policy-making. The project will consist of some preliminary research into environmental concerns in the Central and Eastern Europe region; two international seminars at which parliamentarians will be invited to discuss related issues with experts in the environmental field; the implementation of joint initiatives based upon findings and examples of successful co-operation between parliaments and NGOs; and a campaign aimed to publicise the initiatives and their results.

The benefit likely to accrue from know-how fund support for this programme is the formation of constructive policy work in the environmental field as parliamentarians are encouraged to forge practical policies.

### Ceremonial Dress

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *690-91*, if he will give details of the ceremonial dress expected to be worn by Her Majesty's representatives in *(a)* Japan, *(b)* the Cayman Islands and *(c)* Swaziland. [11571]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The ceremonial dress expected to be worn by Her Majesty's representatives in Japan is full dress uniform comprising coatee and trousers, cocked hat with feathers, sword and accessories, boots, black braces and white gloves.

The ceremonial dress expected to be worn by Her Majesty's Representative in the Cayman Islands and Swaziland is tropical uniform which comprises white drill and trousers, collar, sword and accessories, braces, white gloves, boots and embroidered cap.

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *691*, if he will give details of the uniform expected to be worn by Her Majesty's representatives to the Holy See; when that post was last held by a man; and what was the then cost. [11572]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The last male Her Majesty's representative to the Holy See was accredited between 1991–1995. The cost of his diplomatic uniform was

£3,193 and consisted of coatee and trousers, cocked hat topped with feathers, sword and accessories, boots, braces and white gloves.

### Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column 692, what was the total cost of the Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps; how many staff are employed; and what are the principal duties of the Marshal. [11624]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The marshal occupies official accommodation for which he makes a contribution from his salary. The direct costs of his office borne by Buckingham palace and the FCO in 1994–95 were £70,995.35.

The marshal's staff consists of a secretary and the services of an office cleaner.

His principle duties are to make arrangements for heads of diplomatic missions on state and official occasions.

### War Crimes, Bosnia

**Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* Serbs, *(b)* Croats, and *(c)* Moslems have been indicted for war crimes by the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal. [11847]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** To date, 45 Serbs, seven Croats, and no Moslems have been indicted by the international war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

### Military Personnel (Training)

**Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what has been the cost to public funds of United Kingdom military personnel providing training assistance between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1995 in *(a)* Gambia, *(b)* Indonesia, *(c)* Nigeria and *(d)* Saudi Arabia. [12125]

(2) how many military personnel from *(a)* Indonesia, *(b)* Saudi Arabia, *(c)* Sierra Leone, *(d)* Gambia, *(e)* Sudan and *(f)* Nigeria were given training in the United Kingdom between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1995; and what has been the cost to public funds in each case. [12124]

**Mr. David Davis:** The details of training given under the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme are confidential between Governments.

### Kenya

**Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Kenya concerning their intention to introduce the Press Council and Mass Media Commission Bills, especially insofar as they affect foreign correspondents. [12118]

**Mr. Hanley:** We have maintained a dialogue at senior level with the Kenyan authorities on the draft legislation in question, in which we have emphasised the importance we attach to freedom of the press in Kenya.

### Zanzibar

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the presidential elections held in Zanzibar in October 1995. [10618]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* Together with other participants in the international monitoring exercise we have called on the Zanzibari and Tanzanian authorities to take appropriate action following concerns about discrepancies in the compilation of votes for the presidency of Zanzibar.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11381]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not collect statistics on absenteeism rates. Though we believe non-sick-related absences to be minimal. Therefore, the information requested by the hon. Member can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Chocolate Directive

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the European Commission to publish its new draft directive on chocolate; and if he will make it his policy to oppose proposals from the Commission to *(a)* reduce the proportion of vegetable fat currently permitted in United Kingdom chocolate and *(b)* require chocolate manufactured in the United Kingdom to be described on its packaging as anything other than chocolate. [9949]

**Mrs. Browning:** I understand that the European Commission hopes to issue soon a formal proposal to replace the 1973 Cocoa and Chocolate Products Directive.

British manufacturers make a wide variety of high quality chocolate products, many of which include a small addition of vegetable fats other than cocoa butter, so as to meet the full range of consumer tastes and expectations both in this country and elsewhere. This has had the effect of expanding the chocolate market, securing jobs at home and increasing demand for cocoa and other products on which the economies of many developing countries are heavily dependent.

The Government will therefore vigorously oppose any proposal which seeks to reduce the diversity of chocolate formulations which may be marketed freely within the European Community or which seeks to prohibit the use

of the name chocolate on products containing the traditional mixture of cocoa butter and other vegetable fats.

### Monofilament Nets

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what length of *(a)* monofilament netting and *(b)* other fishing gear is estimated to have been lost or discarded in United Kingdom waters in each year since 1990; and what measure he has taken to (i) monitor and (ii) regulate the loss and discard of monofilament netting. [11573]

**Mr. Baldry:** No information is held centrally on the loss or discard of fishing gear. Under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 it is an offence to discard into the sea any fishing gear, including netting, for which the penalty may be a substantial fine or even imprisonment. The Ministry will not hesitate to prosecute in such cases where sufficient evidence is considered to be available.

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sea mammals have been trapped in monofilament nets in *(a)* United Kingdom waters and *(b)* Scottish waters, since 1980. [11574]

**Mr. Baldry:** The Ministry does not hold the information requested. However, since 1980 there have been no recorded cases of sea mammals becoming trapped in monofilament nets in Scottish inshore waters, where the carriage of such nets is prohibited. The Ministry has commissioned the sea mammal research unit to undertake a two-year study to evaluate the extent of cetacean by-catch in the bottom-set gill net fishery in the North sea. Some of the nets involved are likely to be monofilament.

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing vessels currently use monofilament nets in United Kingdom waters; and in what areas they operate. [11575]

**Mr. Baldry:** The Ministry does not hold information on the number of fishing vessels currently using monofilament nets in United Kingdom waters. Such nets may be used in United Kingdom waters apart from Scottish inshore waters where their carriage has been prohibited since 1986.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11353]

**Mr. Boswell:** Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, selected aggregated data on sickness absence in respect of calendar years has been available since 1985, in the form of reports from Her Majesty's Treasury and more recently the Civil Service Occupational Health and Safety Agency (OHSA). Figures for the Department based on these data, (and which necessarily include some of the agencies in the period 1990 to 1994), are as follows:

| *Year* | *Average number of days sick absence per staff year* |
|---|---|
| 1989[1] | 6.3 |
| 1990[2] | 7.5 |
| 1991 | 8.7 |
| 1992 | 8.0 |
| 1993 | 8.4 |
| 1994 | 7.4 |

[1] Figures are based on a 10 per cent. sample.
[2] Figures are based on a 20 per cent. sample.

### Spanish Fishing Vessels

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow, dated 9 January, which countries or organisations were party to the negotiations following which 22 Spanish fishing vessels gained access to the Norwegian exclusive economic zone in 1994; and if he will make a statement. [11031]

**Mr. Baldry:** The negotiations for a free trade area between the EC and EFTA culminated in the European economic area agreement which came into effect in 1994. Inter alia this negotiation involved an increase in fishing opportunities in Norwegian waters in recognition of a substantial reduction in tariff barriers for fish products. This gave limited access to Spain, Portugal and Ireland as well as a substantial increase in United Kingdom quotas.

### Fish Farming

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many rainbow trout fattening ponds there are in Northern Ireland; if they require a culture licence; what chemicals they use; and if they may discharge chemicals without consent into a watercourse. [10665]

**Mr. Ancram:** I have been asked to reply.

There are 104 ponds at which small-scale production of not more than 500 rainbow trout per year is authorised. All sites where trout are artificially fed require a fish culture licence under section 11 of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966. Chemical treatment is not a feature of fish husbandry at these sites. Chemicals may not be discharged into a watercourse without consent.

### EU Funding

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European financial instrument for fishery guidance over the last available five years. [11656]

**Mr. Baldry:** The European financial instrument for fisheries guidance was introduced on 1 January 1994. Allocations are not made on a regional basis as awards are made according to how they meet selection criteria.

No central records of awards by standard regions is therefore kept. However, payments made in financial year 1994–95 and for the first half of 1995–96 were as follows:

| | 1994–95 | | 1995–96 (up to September) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mecu | £ million | Mecu | £ million |
| Scotland (Objective 1) (Highlands and Islands) | 0.97 | 0.79 | 0.86 | 0.72 |
| Northern Ireland (Objective 1) | 0.95 | 0.78 | 0.04 | 0.035 |
| Non-Objective 1 areas (England, Wales and the remainder of Scotland) | 4.3 | 3.54 | 0.47 | 0.395 |
| Total | 6.22 | 5.11 | 1.37 | 1.15 |

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European financial instrument for fishery guidance under the present structural funds agreement. [11657]

**Mr. Baldry:** The European financial instrument for fisheries guidance was introduced on 1 January 1994. Allocations are not made on a regional basis as awards are made according to how projects meet selection criteria. Allocations of Community funds under the United Kingdom's sectoral plan for 1994–99 are in the table.

| | Mecu | £ million |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland (Objective 1) (Highlands and Islands) | 19.8 | 16.5 |
| Northern Ireland (Objective 1) | 15.12 | 12.6 |
| Non-Objective 1 areas (England, Wales and the remainder of Scotland) | 88.7 | 73.92 |
| Total | 123.62 | 103.02 |

A further 8.35 mecu—some £7 million has been allocated to the United Kingdom from FIFG under the PESCA Community initiative. Allocations of Community funds under the UK PESCA programme for the period 1995–1999 are:

| | Mecu | £ million |
|---|---|---|
| *Objective 1 areas* | | |
| Scotland (Highland and Islands) | 2.53 | 2.11 |
| Northern Ireland | 0.26 | 0.21 |
| *Non-Objective 1 areas* | | |
| England | 3.69 | 3.08 |
| Wales | 0.07 | 0.06 |
| Scotland | 1.80 | 1.50 |
| Total | 8.35 | 6.96 |

Further PESCA funding is due to be awarded to the United Kingdom from the Commission's Community Initiative reserve. Details are awaited from the Commission.

## HEALTH

### Rubella Vaccination

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the rubella vaccination programme with particular reference to the vaccination of schoolgirls between the age of 10 and 14 years. [10742]

**Mr. Horman:** When the measles, mumps and rubella—MMR—vaccine was introduced into the routine pre-school childhood immunisation schedule in 1988, it was accepted that a continuingly high uptake of the vaccine would mean that it would be possible, in due course, to stop routinely immunising schoolgirls against rubella. It was also acknowledged when planning the measles/rubella immunisation campaign conducted in schools in November 1994, that a successful campaign would make it possible to bring forward the end of the schoolgirl rubella programme. Vaccine uptake in the measles/rubella campaign was very high at around 92 per cent. and uptake of MMR vaccine in infants is also consistently high at 92 per cent. In the light of the success of both the ongoing MMR programme and the measles/rubella campaign, the independent joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation concluded that immunisation levels against rubella among children were sufficiently high and advised that the routine immunisation of girls between 10 and 14 was no longer appropriate.

Ministers accepted the committee's recommendation and health authorities and all doctors were told in October 1995 that the routine immunisation of schoolgirls against rubella should be ended.

The policy of providing protection against rubella remains unchanged. In announcing the decision to end the routine immunisation programme, the Departments stressed that health authorities should continue with their other existing rubella screening and immunisation programmes. Health authorities should both continue to ensure that MMR vaccine is offered to any children of school leaving age who have not been immunised and also maintain their procedures to ensure that, where and when appropriate, women of childbearing age are both screened for rubella antibodies and offered immunisation. This will ensure that both girls and boys receive rubella vaccine if missed before.

Copies of the appropriate executive letter and Chief Medical Officer's update are available in the Library.

### Northern and Yorkshire Outpost

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the location and address of the site for the new headquarters of the Northern and Yorkshire outpost of the NHS executive. [11112]

**Mr. Malone:** A new headquarters building for the national health service executive Northern and Yorkshire regional office is being constructed at the Mountjoy science park in Durham. The postal address for the new building has not been finalised.

### Personal Information

**Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many instances of unauthorised access to identifiable

personal health information have been recorded in each of the last three years; and how many of these were by access through IT equipment or NHS networks. [11474]

**Mr. Horam:** There is no central collection of statistics on recorded instances of unauthorised access to identifiable personal health information, whether via computer systems or paper records.

**Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the NHS HealthNet network to meet the demands of healthcare professionals for the effective protection of identifiable patient health data; [11470]

(2) what progress his Department has made towards developing for NHS staff a code of guidance for protecting identifiable personal health information transmitted on NHS networks; and if he will make a statement; [11468]

(3) if he will place in the Library details of the security policy and technical specifications proposed for the new NHS HealthNet network. [11469]

**Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in developing policy on the secure management of identifiable personal health data to be transmitted on HealthNet. [11188]

**Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for health (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that the confidentiality and integrity of patient data transmitted on the proposed HealthNet network will be maintained; [11680]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that bodies within the NHS implement security policies which protect the confidentiality of patients' personal health information transmitted on computer networks. [11681]

**Mr. Horam:** Over the past two years the Department of Health sought advice from security experts and from representatives of the clinical professions, following which the national health service chief executive wrote to all health authorities and trusts in December 1995 enclosing the networking security policy, codes of connection and the security guide, EL (95) 108, copies of which are available in the Library.

The papers explain the measures taken to protect information when it is passing over the networking system. They also state that these measures must be matched by secure handling of patient information locally. The Department of Health will issue further guidance in the near future, covering both the protection and use of patient information, and the secure management of computer systems.

## Yorkshire RHA

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on repairs, maintenance and improvement of the former Yorkshire regional health authority headquarters at Park parade, Harrogate, since January 1986; who owns the building; when it will be vacated; and what receipts from the sale of the lease or freehold on this building will be passed to the NHS. [11114]

**Mr. Malone:** Spending on repairs, maintenance and improvement of the former Yorkshire regional health authority headquarters at Park parade, Harrogate for the financial years from 1986–87 onwards is shown in the table.

| *Financial year* | *Expenditure £* |
|---|---|
| 1986–87 | 54,000 |
| 1987–88 | 30,000 |
| 1988–89 | 1,400,000 |
| 1989–90 | 1,400,000 |
| 1990–91 | 46,000 |
| 1991–92 | 371,000 |
| 1992–93 | 88,000 |
| 1993–94 | 56,000 |

The building is currently owned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, but on its vacation by the national health service executive regional office, ownership will pass to Dysart Developments Ltd, the developer of the new headquarters for the regional office at Durham. Receipts from the sale of the building will be £2.825 million, which will be added to allocations to health authorities in the region to invest in services for patients.

## HIV-associated Dementia

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action he is taking to improve awareness among general practitioners of HIV-associated dementia; [11743]

(2) if he will list all specialist services for HIV-associated dementia; [11741]

(3) what research he has commissioned into HIV-associated dementia; [11745]

(4) how many cases of HIV-associated dementia have been identified in each year since 1990; [11744]

(5) what action he is taking to improve the co-ordination of care for people with HIV-associated dementia. [11742]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department of Health commissioned a study in 1991, covering the period 1991–1994, into the epidemiology of HIV-associated dementia in the Thames regional health authorities. This has concluded that previous studies had over-estimated the size of the problem and suggests a lower prevalence of HIV-associated dementia in people with AIDS of under 10 per cent. The report will be published shortly and copies will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Information is not available nationally on the number of cases of HIV-associated dementia or on specialist services for people with HIV dementia.

The Department has issued a comprehensive training pack for general practitioners which covers the whole spectrum of HIV disease, including HIV dementia. Guidance to health authorities on HIV/AIDS has stressed the need for shared care arrangements between specialist AIDS facilities and general practitioners. The Department has also issued guidance to both health and local

authorities on the need to carry out population needs assessments in their localities to establish local priorities for service commissioning.

### Disability

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11918]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department of Health and its agencies submitted an application for the award of the disability symbol to the Employment Service on 19 January 1996. We intend to use the disability symbol on all external and internal advertisements, including promotions.

### Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what circulars or other information or directives have been sent to social service departments of local authorities regarding the implementation of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995. [11825]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Department has prepared a circular giving detailed policy and practice guidance to local and health authorities on implementing the Act, which comes into force on 1 April 1996. We recently consulted interested parties on the draft guidance, and we shall shortly be issuing the final document to local and health authorities.

### Tobacco Sales (Minors)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to restrict the advertising, sponsorship and promotion of tobacco and to strengthen the legislation on illegal sales to minors. [12101]

**Mr. Horam:** The Government are already committed to ensuring that there are effective controls on tobacco advertising, sponsorship and promotion. This is achieved by voluntary agreements between the Government and the tobacco industry. The voluntary agreements were strengthened in a number of key areas at the end of 1994. The law relating to illegal sales to minors has also been strengthened significantly by virtue of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 and regulations made under it.

### Community Hospital, Orsett

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to his oral answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column 528, if he will make a statement on the *(a)* size, *(b)* scale and *(c)* services that are planned to be made available at the community hospital at Orsett to which he referred; [10781]

(2) pursuant to his oral answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *528*, when the new minor injuries unit he announced for Orsett hospital will be opened; [10782]

(3) pursuant to his oral answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column 528, which operations it is planned will continue to be conducted at the day surgery at Orsett hospital. [10738]

**Mr. Horam:** These are matters for the South Essex health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. David Micklem, the chairman, for details.

### Hospitals, Greater Manchester

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates between 1 December 1995 and 14 January 1996, and at what hospitals in the Greater Manchester area, accident and emergency facilities were closed to new admissions. [11176]

**Mr. Horam:** Greater Manchester ambulance service has a policy of not accepting any requests to divert and takes emergency patients to the nearest accident and emergency department as a matter of course.

### Sun Healthcare

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports he has received in respect of the activities in the United Kingdom of the United States company Sun Healthcare; and if he will make a statement. [12449]

**Mr. Bowis:** None.

### Fraud

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of fraud and corruption for each year since 1979. [12451]

**Mr. Horam:** The costs of fraud and corruption in the national health service are not identified separately from other losses in returns to the Department. However, the Audit Commission publication "Ensuring Probity in the NHS" reported in December 1994 that proven fraud was small. It estimated that losses through the misuse of taxpayers' money over a three year period when NHS expenditure totalled £80 billion were £6 million—about one penny for every £100 spent in the NHS.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to monitor fraud in community care provision. [12452]

**Mr. Bowis:** Local authority social service departments should build suitable fraud prevention measures into their financial management procedures. Any evidence of fraud should be referred direct to the police who are the appropriate investigating authority for such matters.

### Private Sector Providers

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which agency monitors health authority contracts with private sector providers; [12453]

(2) if he will list the number, type and value of contracts issued by health authorities to the private sector for nursing home beds. [12455]

**Mr. Bowis:** It is the responsibility of health authorities to place contracts with providers for health care services, including continuing in-patient care, and to monitor those contracts.

### Special Transitional Grant

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those local authorities which failed to spend

85 per cent. of the special transitional grant for 1994–95 in the independent sector. [12450]

**Mr. Bowis:** Audited returns detailing community care spending in the independent sector by local authorities in 1994–95 were due to be submitted to the Department by 31 December 1995. Some returns are still outstanding and are being followed up through the Audit Commission.

### Local Authority Contracts

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which agency monitors local authority contracts with private sector providers. [12454]

**Mr. Bowis:** Local authorities are responsible for monitoring contracts with providers.

### Residential and Nursing Care

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number, type and value of contracts issued by local authorities to the private sector for nursing and care home beds. [12456]

**Mr. Bowis:** Information on contracts between local authorities and independent sector providers of residential and nursing care beds is not collected centrally.

### Pharmacies

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many small independent pharmacies there are in the United Kingdom; how many there were in 1992; and what estimate he has made of how many supermarkets have opened pharmacies since 1992. [12120]

**Mr. Malone:** It is not possible to give the information in the form requested. In the financial year 1992–93 there were 6,579 independent pharmacies in England. The comparable figure for 1994–95 was 6,330. Independent pharmacies are defined as including chains of four or less and exclude pharmacies in health centres, for which a breakdown is not available. No information is available centrally on supermarkets which have opened pharmacies. Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

## DEFENCE

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6382]

**Mr. Soames:** Details of overseas visits by Ministers in my Department were set out in the answer of 19 July given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Knowsley North (Mr. Howarth), *Official Report*, columns *1369–75*. The costs of visits overseas by Ministers falling to my Department since then, including the cost of officials where they can be identified, are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Secretary of State for Defence: | £64,830 |
| Minister of State for the Armed Forces: | £95,228 |
| Minister of State for Defence Procurement: | £26,359 |
| Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence: | £2,735 |

The cost of domestic visits by Ministers in each financial year since 1991–92 could be identified only at disproportionate cost. Costs falling to my Department since 1 April last year have been identified, however, and are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Secretary of State for Defence: | £17,670 |
| Minister of State for the Armed Forces: | £14,702 |
| Minister of State for Defence Procurement: | £8,362 |
| Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence: | £7,469 |

*Note:* Figures include overseas and domestic visits undertaken up to 20 December 1995.

The cost to my Department of ministerial security is not separately identifiable. Ministerial protection is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Information on the cost of ministerial cars and chauffeurs was set out in the letter of 28 November 1995 from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and (i) other. [6381]

**Mr. Soames:** Details of the cost of running my right hon. Friend's departmental office are not held in a form which would allow them to be identified separately for each financial year since 1991–92. The costs which have been identified for the last and present financial years are as follows:

| | *1994–95* £ | *1995–96*[1] £ |
|---|---|---|
| Telephone | 1,757 | 1,083 |
| Staff | 649,474 | 383,961 |
| Newspapers (including periodicals) | 1,017 | 508 |
| Stationery | 4,957 | 7,653 |
| Entertainment (including alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks) | 1,911 | 461 |

[1] To 31 October 1995.

The cost of refurbishing my right hon. Friend's own office in each of the financial years in question is as follows:

1990–91: Nil

1991–92: £380

1992–93: £881

1993–94: Nil

1994–95: Nil

1995–96: Nil[1]

[1] to 31 October 1995.

## Royal Yacht

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *582*, if he will list for the 35 days of royal duties carried out by the royal yacht *(a)* the destinations, *(b)* the period spent at sea and *(c)* the members of the royal family conveyed. [11563]

**Mr. Soames:** I regret that whilst preparing the answer to this parliamentary Question, my officials found that my earlier answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *582*, contained an error. In 1995 members of the royal family were embarked aboard Her Majesty's Yacht Britannia for 36 days, not 35 as previously stated.

In 1995, Britannia carried out royal duties on the following occasions:

*Member(s) of the Royal Family Embarked*

| *Date* | *Location* | |
|---|---|---|
| 19-21 March | Capetown | Her Majesty the Queen<br>HRH The Duke of Edinburgh |
| 24-25 March | Capetown | Her Majesty the Queen<br>HRH The Duke of Edinburgh |
| 31 May-2 June | Falmouth/Avonmouth | Her Majesty the Queen<br>HRH The Duke of Edinburgh |
| 12-13 June | Portsmouth | HRH The Princess Royal |
| 15 June | Portsmouth | HRH The Duke of York |
| 19-21 June | Kiel | HRH The Duke and Duchess of Kent |
| 26-27 June | Dundee | HRH The Prince of Wales |
| 28 July-2 August | Cowes | HRH The Duke of Edinburgh |
| 4-14 August | Western Isles | Her Majesty the Queen<br>HRH The Duke of Edinburgh |
| 18-20 August | London | Her Majesty the Queen<br>HRH The Duke of Edinburgh |

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *582*, how much was received by his Department in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995 for the use of the royal yacht for trade promotion; and from where the payments were received. [11568]

**Mr. Soames:** Charges for the use of Britannia are not levied on the sponsors of commercial events when she is used to promote British exports and attract inward investment to the United Kingdom. However, all additional costs incurred, over and above normal running costs, are paid for by the Government Departments and organisations concerned.

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *582*, what duties were carried out by the royal yacht in 1995 during the period she was at sea but not on royal duties or trade promotion. [11569]

**Mr. Soames:** In 1995, HMY Britannia was engaged in the following activities during the period she was in transit to or from royal duties or trade promotion:

| *Date* | *Location* | *Event* |
|---|---|---|
| 14 March | Walvis Bay | Her Majesty's High Commission, Namibia (lunchtime reception) |
| 1-10 April | Simon's Town | Self maintenance period |
| 10 April | Simon's Town | Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (lunch) |
| 21 April | Tema | Overseas Development Agency (seminar and lunch) |
| 4 October | Pireaus | Her Majesty's Ambassador (evening reception) |
| 26 October | Lisbon | Her Majesty's Ambassador and the right hon. Douglas Hurd (dinner and evening reception) |

## HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid

**Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* HMS Fearless and *(b)* HMS Intrepid (i) last put to sea and (ii) will next engage in military manoeuvres.

**Mr. Soames:** HMS Fearless was last at sea on 9 June 1995. She is currently in dock at Portsmouth undergoing routine maintenance and is scheduled to return to operational duties at the end of March. She is next planned to participate in military exercises at the end of April.

HMS Intrepid was last at sea on 8 November 1990. She is currently in a state of extended readiness at Portsmouth, available for operations at longer notice if required.

## Small Arms Maintenance Contract

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on the award of the small arms maintenance contract. [11872]

**Mr. Soames:** Small arms repair support for the Army and some units of the other armed services is provided by the Army base repair organisation ABRO has no plans to award a maintenance contract. However, some of the work does form part of a market test competition which commenced in October 1995. It is anticipated that the results of this competition will be known by early 1997.

## European Security

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define the European Union's contribution to wider European security referred to at paragraph 5 of the memorandum appended to the 10th report from the Defence Committee 1994–95, HC824; and if he will make a statement. [11718]

**Mr. Soames:** The EU makes an important contribution to wider European security by promoting economic stability and democratic practices, and through initiatives in the framework of the Common foreign and security policy, such as the joint action in support of the stability pact implemented in the course of last year.

### Married Quarters (Sales)

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings have been sold under the married quarters discounted sales in each year since its introduction. [11873]

**Mr. Soames:** The married quarter discounted sales scheme began in December 1983 with the first sales being completed in financial year 1984–85. The number of sales completed in each financial year is in the table.

| *Financial Year* | *Number Sold* |
|---|---|
| 1984–85 | not available |
| 1985–86 | 308 |
| 1986–87 | 438 |
| 1987–88 | 452 |
| 1988–89 | 562 |
| 1989–90 | 862 |
| 1990–91 | 726 |
| 1991–92 | 494 |
| 1992–93 | 346 |
| 1993–94 | 116 |
| 1994–95 | 361 |
| 1995–96' | 289 |

'Up to 30 November 1995

### Bosnia

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his policy that the British contingent in IFOR should continue the UNPROFOR practice of assisting non-governmental organisations aid convoys in Bosnia. [12197]

**Mr. Soames:** IFOR's primary mission in Bosnia is to implement the military aspects of the peace agreement. Although it does not provide direct support to aid convoys, its efforts are helping to create an environment in which the civilian agencies operating under the peace agreement can accomplish their missions.

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if IFOR is continuing the level of joint patrols as previously conducted by UNPROFOR with BiH—Bosnian Government Armed Forces—and HVO—Bosnian Croat Armed Forces—forces along former confrontation lines. [12198]

**Mr. Soames:** IFOR has been well received in theatre and, although it does not conduct joint patrols, it is continuing to work closely with all of the former warring factions as part of the peace implementation process. This includes joint operations to monitor mine clearance and to clear and maintain routes.

### Low Flying

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to reduce the incidence of low flying by RAF jets over the Dwyfor and Arfon areas. [11976]

**Mr. Soames:** It is our policy to spread military low flying as widely as practicable across the United Kingdom so as to reduce the disturbance over any one area. Restricting the amount of low flying conducted over the areas suggested by the hon. Member would run counter to this policy and concentrate activity over surrounding communities.

### Royal Irish Regiment Base (Fire)

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the report of the inquest held on the deaths in the fire at the Royal Irish Regiment base in Magherafelt; and if he will make a statement. [12151]

**Mr. Soames:** The coroner sent his report to the chief fire officer at headquarters Northern Ireland on 22 January 1996. Many of the matters he raises match those identified in the provisional findings of the Army board of inquiry and are already being addressed. We are anxious that any lessons from this tragic incident are fully carried through. The coroner's observations and recommendations will be closely studied and the appropriate action taken.

### Operational Sea Training

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of the savings to the Defence budget from transferring operational sea training from Portland to Plymouth. [12010]

**Mr. Soames:** The cost of transferring operational sea training from Portland to Plymouth totalled about £9 million in capital costs. This was part of the overall programme of closing Portland naval base which is expected to realise savings of some £11 million per annum in running costs.

### HMS Fearless

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the current condition of HMS Fearless. [12196]

**Mr. Soames:** HMS Fearless is currently in dock at Portsmouth undergoing routine maintenance. This has shown the ship to be in a material state normal for her age. She is scheduled to return to operational duties at the end of March, on completion of the current work.

### Equerries

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *581*, what are the principal duties of the equerries; how they are chosen for the post; what is the normal term of duty. [11567]

**Mr. Soames:** Equerries are chosen from candidates nominated by the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. The equerry to Her Majesty the Queen serves for three years; the others serve for two years.

The equerries provide support to their royal highnesses in arranging and planning visits and engagements both at home and abroad. In addition, they attend on their royal highnesses at official engagements, host guests at private and public functions and deal with routine correspondence.

### Thomson Training and Simulation Ltd.

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department currently hold with Thomson Training and Simulation Ltd.; if contracts placed with this company are cost plus; and what checks his Department carries out to ensure that value for money is achieved. [12123]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The central data maintained by my Department's Procurement Executive and the Defence Research and Evaluation Agency shows there are approximately 70 contracts currently open with the company. Of these, only 10 per cent. have been placed on what is commonly known as "cost plus" terms, and only one of these has been placed during the last five years). These figures include a number of contracts originally placed with different companies, for example Link-Miles Ltd., which have subsequently been subsumed into Thomson Training and Simulation Ltd. as the result of acquisition and organisation.

Where contracts are placed resulting from competition, then market forces ensure value for money. In other cases, including "cost plus", then contractors have to provide cost certificates and satisfy Ministry contracts officers and/or the pricing and quality services directorate as to their validity before final payments may be made.

### HMS Gannet

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, on what occasions Sea King helicopters from HMS "Gannet" have been grounded because of technical or other faults in each of the past three years and in this year to the current date; what caused the grounding and delay of the helicopter in the search for Sinclair Cadzow on 19 February; what action is being taken to rectify the problems; and if he will make a statement. [12119]

**Mr. Soames:** Provision of data specifying the occasions when Sea King helicopters from HMS Gannet have been grounded for technical or other faults in each of the past three years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The search and rescue aircraft and HMS Gannet scrambled on 19 January at the request of the rescue co-ordinating centre suffered a gearbox fault in transit to the search area which necessitated an emergency landing near Cairnryan. An RAF search and rescue aircraft from Boulmer was then tasked to assist in the search.

### Third Parachute Regiment

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the future of the Third Parachute Regiment. [12121]

**Mr. Soames:** We are currently considering the optimum deployment of manpower within our airborne forces. There are no plans to disband the Third Battalion, the Parachute Regiment.

### Type 23 Frigates

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects to announce his decision on the award of the contract for the next batch of type 23 frigates; [12318]

(2) how many type 23 frigates he proposes to order; and to fulfil what function. [12427]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Tenders are being assessed for a batch of up to three type 23 frigates which are highly capable, modern general purpose frigates, optimised for anti-submarine warfare. An announcement will be made as soon as the decision has been taken.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Arms Surrender

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary if State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress towards the surrender of arms and explosives held by the Provisional IRA. [10622]

**Sir John Wheeler:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply which my right hon. and learned Friend gave on 25 January to by hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), *Official Report*, column 466.

### Motorway

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the M2 motorway development in respect of *(a)* the land recently sold to Ronany Ltd. for private commercial development, *(b)* the funds expended on the land purchase, *(c)* the construction of engineering work required including, bridges, *(d)* the level of traffic in its traffic catchment area, *(e)* the extension of Londonderry, *(f)* its status as a Euro-route and claims for expansion within the European Union road transportation strategy and *(g)* the provision for the repurchase from Ronany Ltd. of the land now being disposed of to that company when the time comes for the construction of the additional traffic lanes. [10718]

**Mr. Moss:** The information requested is as follows:

(a) and (b) While the Department has not sold any land near the M2 motorway to Ronany Ltd. , arrangements are being made to lease a portion of the motorway hard shoulder and verge to the company to facilitate the provision of a service area;

(c) Responsibility for undertaking the necessary engineering works will rest with Ronany Ltd.—no bridges are proposed;

(d) Traffic flows on the section of motorway in question are as follows:

(i) northbound carriageway—approximately 14,000 vehicles per day, and

(ii) southbound carriageway—approximately 15,600 vehicles per day;

(e) There are no plans to extend the M2 motorway to Londonderry;

(f) The Belfast–Londonderry route (M2/M22/A6) forms part of the European Union's trans-european network—TEN—adopted in 1993; and

(g) While there are no proposals to widen this section of the M2 motorway, provision to cover an eventuality will be made in the arrangements finally agreed with the company.

### Benefits (Claimants)

**Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the numbers of claimants and the amounts paid in respect of *(a)* each social security benefit and *(b)* housing benefit in Northern Ireland. [11202]

**Mr. Moss:** The information is as follows:

*Estimated average number of claimants in receipt of the main benefits[1] at any one time and expenditure in Northern Ireland, 1994–95*

| *Benefit* | *Average number (000s) 1994–95* | *Expenditure (£'000)* |
|---|---|---|
| Retirement Pension | 219.6 | 631,200 |
| Widows' Benefit | 11.6 | 36,400 |
| Unemployment Benefit | 14.7 | 33,000 |
| Sickness Benefit | 5.4 | 15,500 |
| Invalidity Benefit | 72.9 | 308,100 |
| Maternity Allowance | 0.5 | 1,200 |
| Guardian's Allowance and Child's Special Allowance | 0.2 | 100 |
| Non-Contributory Retirement Pension | 2.6 | 2,619 |
| Attendance Allowance | 56.9 | 108,823 |
| Invalid Care Allowance | 19.6 | 38,960 |
| Severe Disablement Allowance | 14.6 | 30,993 |
| Industrial Injuries Benefits | 11 | 21,658 |
| Disability Living Allowance | 83.7 | 201,732 |
| Disability Working Allowance | 0.2 | 424 |
| Income Support | 227.2 | 649,573 |
| Child Benefit (number of children) | 467 | 221,110 |
| One Parent Benefit (number of families) | 32 | 10,023 |
| Family Credit | 22 | 61,901 |
| *Housing Benefit* | | |
| Rent Rebate | 108.6 | 165,800 |
| Rent Allowance | 28.6 | 55,199 |
| Rates Rebate | 181.7 | 23,148 |
| *Social Fund* | | |
| Budgeting Loans | 73.2 | 18,413 |
| Crisis Loans | 27 | 2,319 |
| Community Care Grants | 38.8 | 9,638 |
| Maternity Payments | 8.4 | 839 |
| Funeral Payments | 3.9 | 3,524 |
| Cold Weather Payments | 0 | 0 |
| Statutory Sick Pay and Statutory Maternity Pay | n/a | 18,700 |
| Independent Living (Extension) Fund | 1.6 | 5,344 |
| Independent Living (1993) Fund | [2] | 102 |
| Transitional Payments | [2] | 7 |

[1] Beneficiaries may be receiving more than one benefit at any one time.

[2] Indicates fewer than 50 claimants in receipt.

### Population Statistics

**Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his current estimate of the population of Northern Ireland *(a)* up to age 15 and *(b)* aged 16 years and over. [11200]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The information, taken from the 1994 mid-year estimates of population, is as follows:

| *Age in years* | *Population* |
|---|---|
| 0-15 | 419,163 |
| 16 and over | 1,222,548 |

### Rail Privatisation

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish the study on the proposed privatisation of rail services in Northern Ireland. [11240]

**Mr. Moss:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 11 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *146*. I have no plans to publish the report.

**Ms Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to make a decision on the timetable for the franchising of rail services in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [11239]

**Mr. Moss:** Steps are being taken to introduce a private element into the management operation and capital programme of Northern Ireland Railways through a series of measures including market testing, contracting out, the sale of non-core businesses and the private finance initiative. I will keep the question of franchising under review.

### Action for Community Employment (ACE)

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what reductions he proposes to make in respect of ACE funding; and what considerations underlie their magnitude. [11107]

**Mr. Ancram:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 23 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your questions about the Action for Community Employment (ACE) programme.

The situation regarding the level of reduction in next year's ACE budget and the considerations underlining their magnitude remain as I outlined in my letter to you of 16 January. As I indicated, the reduction in the ACE budget was set against a background of the encouraging performance of the Northern Ireland economy which includes the creation of almost 11,000 additional jobs in the year ending September 1995 and a reduction of 5,500 in the number of people unemployed for more than 1 year.

### Sites of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which sites of special scientific interest in Northern Ireland will be affected by trunk road and motorway schemes for which preferred routes have been announced. [11231]

**Mr. Moss:** No sites of special scientific interest will be affected.

### National Insurance

**Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many current national insurance numbers are allocated to people normally resident in Northern Ireland. [11201]

**Mr. Moss:** Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Jim Dowd, dated 24 January 1996:*

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question relating to National Insurance numbers.

I should explain that all National Insurance records for the United Kingdom are held centrally in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. The number of National Insurance numbers allocated to Northern Ireland or any other regions of the United Kingdom is not available.

I am sorry that I cannot provide the information you require.

### Wild Animals

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what inspection his Department has made of private residences within Omagh district council area where big cats, snakes and wild animals are in captivity; and if he will make a statement. [10076]

**Mr. Moss:** Under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland has inspected two private residences in the Omagh district council area where wild animals are kept. The inspections have confirmed that the primary needs of the animals are being well catered for and the Department is continuing to monitor the situation.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will seek to extend the provisions of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 to Northern Ireland. [10074]

**Mr. Moss:** This issue is currently under review and I shall write to the hon. Member in due course.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what advice he has received from the Royal Ulster Constabulary about the captivity and security of big cats, snakes and other wild animals maintained in private residences within Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [10075]

**Mr. Moss:** The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has recently received correspondence from the Royal Ulster Constabulary calling for the introduction of legislation equivalent to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. The question of the need for new legislation is under review.

## SCOTLAND

### Sites of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which sites of special scientific interest in Scotland will be affected by trunk road and motorway schemes for which preferred routes have been announced. [11230]

**Mr. Kynoch:** In his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1061-62*, on the programme for developing Scotland's trunk road network, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that, subject to the usual criteria including satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures and the necessary preparatory work, it is intended to construct 17 new road schemes over the next three years. Preferred lines have been chosen for 16 of these schemes.

Two sites of special scientific interest will be affected by these schemes. These are *(a)* Glen Beasdale, affected by the A830 Mallaig road improvement from Polnish bridge to Loch Nan Uamh *(b)* Calrossie, where the A9 Logie Easter to Garrick bridge scheme is proposed to be built along a boundary line of the SSSI.

Disturbance to SSSIs is avoided if possible. When sites are affected, every effort is made to minimise the impact of constructions.

### Speech and Language Therapy

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on the purchasing by health boards of speech and language therapy services required for children who do not have a record of needs; [11638]

(2) what was the level of expenditure by each health board in Scotland for speech and language therapy services for *(a)* children with a record of needs and *(b)* children without a record of needs for (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1994. [11639]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information requested is not held centrally. Health boards are responsible for assessing the health care needs of their local populations and for purchasing services including speech therapy services, accordingly.

### Rural Child Care

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to improve rural child care in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [11581]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Provision and development of child care services are primarily matters for local service providers. The Government are mindful of the special problems for delivering these services in rural areas and have undertaken work to demonstrate how these problems can be addressed. The recently completed under-fives rural initiative demonstrated ways that the quality of child care services in rural areas can be enhanced by the use of special rural tutors.

The Government have also provided funding support of £45,000 over three years to the rural child care development programme run jointly by Children in Scotland and Rural Forum. This project is now in its third year with several long-term projects nearing completion including an employers guide, training information packs, a training needs analysis and an initial evaluation of out-of-school clubs. In North Uist, information is being provided to support a nursery project and in Ullapool a guidebook on children's services is being produced.

We have also funded research by Professor Mark Shucksmith of the Arkleton centre for rural development research. He is currently undertaking a scoping study on innovative approaches in rural service provision, which will include child care initiatives. The need for further research or demonstration projects will be considered on the basis of his findings.

**Mrs. Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to expand the under-fives rural initiative; and what level of finance the scheme will receive in the next three financial years. [11582]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** This initiative was a development project aimed at demonstrating methods for improving the quality of day care by introducing educational elements. It comprised 12 schemes run by voluntary organisations using peripatetic tutors in a number of day care settings in different parts of rural Scotland.

Grants totalling £500,000 were made available under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 to support the project which ended in April 1995. There are at present no plans to extend it. We will, however, assess the lessons which can usefully be drawn for our new pre-school educational voucher initiative.

### Water Charges

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to provide financial assistance to rural local authorities for the collection of rates from water consumers after April [11584]

**Mr. Kynoch:** My right hon. Friend will make an order under section 79 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 to require local authorities to demand and recover domestic unmeasured water and sewerage charges on behalf of the new water and sewerage authorities. That order will contain provision for the level of administrative costs to be refunded to local authorities. Consultation has taken place with local authorities about the terms of the order.

### NHS (Private Sector Consultants)

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that private sector consultants retained by health boards and NHS trusts in Scotland in relation to private finance initiative contracts have no conflict of interest arising from a business, financial or personal relationship with private companies bidding for such contracts. [11612]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** There are no instances of a private sector consultant advising both the NHS and private sector on the same project. NHS trusts should follow relevant procurement rules and corporate governance guidance in avoiding situations where such a conflict of interest would arise.

### Child Care

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what guidance he is proposing to issue to local authorities on the day care review duty in the current legislation relating to the registration of day care and other provision for young children; [12022]

(2) what plans he has to amend existing guidance relating to registration standards and requirements relating to the registration of day care and other provision for young children; [12111]

(3) when he last issued guidelines to local authorities in Scotland regarding registration procedures governing premises for day care for young children; [12018]

(4) what plans he has to clarify the general purpose and application of guidance in the existing legislation relating to the registration of day care and other provision for young children. [12021]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* Statutory provisions dealing with the registration and inspection of those who provide child minding and day care for children under eight are set out in part X of the Children Act 1989. That part of the Act which came into force in October 1991 extends to Scotland.

To assist local authorities in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities under that part of the Act, the Scottish Office issued guidance to local authorities in June 1991.

A minor amendment to the 1989 Act was made in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. This and further detailed amendments are planned on supervised activities and holiday play schemes will make it necessary to modify current guidance.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what priority local authorities are obliged to accord to *(a)* their estimate of local need and *(b)* the official regulations when deciding whether to close existing local day care places for young children; what estimate he has made of compliance with the guidance; and what assessment he has made of the stringency of that guidance. [12113]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* Registration of day care for young children under eight is governed by part X of the Children Act 1989. Section 71 empowers local authorities to refuse registration if they are satisfied about certain things specified in that section. Section 74 gives local authorities a power to cancel registration in certain specified circumstances. Under section 77, authorities are required to give not less than 14 days notice of their intention to refuse an application or to cancel registration. The person receiving such a notice may object to the step being taken and may appeal against it to the court. Section 75 also gives local authorities a power to apply, in cases of emergency, to the court to cancel a person's registration forthwith. The Scottish Office guidance issued in June 1991 draws attention to the statutory powers available to local authorities in this respect.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the sanctions available to social work departments to refer matters to the procurator fiscal when they believe that registration requirements are being breached. [12103]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* Failure to comply with the requirements of registration by a local authority of facilities may be an offence under the relevant statute, for example, where day care of young children is concerned, under section 78 of the Children Act 1989. If a local authority believes that an offence has been committed it may report the matter to the police or to the procurator fiscal.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the provisions of the Department of Health local authority circular on the Children Act 1989 and day care for young children registration No. LAC(93)1 have been translated into similar guidance for local authorities in Scotland. [12017]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* Circular LAC(93)1 was issued by Department of Health for local authorities in England. It does not apply in Scotland. The extant Scottish guidance entitled "Regulation and Review of Childminding, Day Care and Education Services for Children under 8—Guidance for Local Authorities" was issued here in June 1991.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of expansion of day care facilities for young people. [12019]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* The policy of the Scottish Office is to promote expansion of day care provision through public, private and voluntary agencies and individuals. The number of day care places for children under five in Scotland has increased by over 40 per cent.—from 92,000 in 1984 to 131,000 in 1994. The Scottish Office has assisted that expansion through its support under the urban programme and through grants under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Local enterprise companies are also now funding child care projects for children under five and also for older children. Expansion of services is further assisted by the tax concessions which are available to employers providing work place child care facilities.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of day care facilities for young children which have been closed by local authorities in Scotland over the last three years because they have failed to meet the physical and staffing requirements set by local authorities. [12020]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* The data requested are not collected centrally. Local authority reviews under the Children Act 1989, which covered the period October 1991 to October 1994, indicated that very few registrations had been cancelled because of failure to meet the physical or staffing requirements set by local authorities.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if guidance currently available from his Department prescribes legally required standards for registration. [12112]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* Guidance issued by the Scottish Office to local authorities as registration authorities under various statutes advises local authorities on how the legislation should be implemented. The guidance may also suggest standards which should be adopted as a matter of good practice. If such standards or other standards are made a requirement of registration, failure to comply may be an offence.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what ways specific requirements set unilaterally by local social work departments governing the registration of individual premises for day care facilities are enforceable. [12104]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* Under part X of the Children Act 1989, which deals with registration of day care for young children, local authorities must impose such reasonable requirements as they consider appropriate when registering an applicant for registration. The requirements, set out in section 73 are concerned with the number of children who may be looked after, maintenance and safety of the premises and equipment, records and notification of changes. Authorities may also impose further requirements, provided these do not conflict with the requirements in that section. Section 78 makes it an offence where a registered person without reasonable excuse contravenes or otherwise fails to comply with any requirement imposed under section 73.

### Housing Stock

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was, for each district and islands council area, the mid-1995 estimates of *(a)* the total housing stock, *(b)* the number of vacant dwellings and *(c)* the number of other non-effective housing stock. [10855]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The information requested is not yet available. Local authorities are being consulted about the estimates which should be finalised shortly.

### Prison Visiting Committees

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the members of the visiting committee to *(a)* Her Majesty's prison, Barlinnie, *(b)* Her Majesty's prison, Greenock and *(c)* Her Majesty's prison, Cornton Vale. [10856]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information is set out in the table:

| *Establishment* | *Name* |
|---|---|
| Barlinnie | Baillie A. Adam |
| | Ms Y. Anderson |
| | Mr. J. Andrews |
| | E. Divine |
| | F. McAveety |
| | A. McCartney |
| | C. McDonach |
| | R. McGarrity |
| | Mrs. I. Graham |
| | Ms V. Grandon (N/E) |
| | S. Purcell (N/E) |
| | Ms E. Smith (N/E) |
| | I. Wilson (N/E) |
| | R. Campbell |
| | G. McElroy JP BA |
| | Dr. C. Mason |
| | R. McGerty |
| | J. Shaw |
| | R. Quinn |
| | J. Anderson JP (N/E) |
| | A. Devlin (N/E) |
| | Mrs. S. Duke (N/E) |
| | J. Gilleece (N/E) |
| Cornton Vale | Ms A. Dickson |
| | Mrs. M. Brisley |
| | Mrs. C. Cumming (N/E) |
| | Ms A. Greasley (N/E) |
| | A. Henderson (N/E) |
| | J. Robertson (N/E) |
| | Mrs. V. Simpson (N/E) |
| | P. Kelly |
| | Mrs. H.A. Livingston JP |
| | Ms M. Pollack |
| | Ms E. Taylor |
| | Ms T. McNally (N/E) |

| Establishment | Name |
|---|---|
| | Mrs. M. Smith (N/E) |
| | Mrs. H. Wright (N/E) |
| Greenock | Ms C. Allan |
| | A. Nimmo |
| | J. O'Rourke |
| Greenock (Cont.) | P. Arkely (N/E) |
| | R. Jackson (N/E) |
| | J. Thomson (N/E) |
| | E. Gray |
| | A. McGhee |

(N/E) denotes non-elected member.

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to modify the criteria by which persons are appointed to prison visiting committees; and if he will make a statement. [10857]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend has no such plans. He does not appoint members to visiting committees for adult prisons: they are appointed in terms of section 8(1) of the Prisons (Scotland) Act 1989 by local authorities prescribed by rules made under the Act.

### Maintenance Orders

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many maintenance orders were pursued in each year in Scotland by him under schedule 2, section 6 of the Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders (Hague Convention Countries) Order 1993. [12205]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The number of cases received each year since 5 April 1993, when the order came into force, is as shown in the table.

| Year | Number |
|---|---|
| 1993 | 2 |
| 1994 | 5 |
| 1995 | 5 |
| 1996 (to date) | 1 |
| Total | 13 |

### Glasgow Business Table Speech

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he first saw the press release of the speech he gave in Glasgow on Wednesday 17 January; and if he approved it before it was released to the press. [11950]

**Mr. Forsyth:** The press release was not approved by me but consisted of extracts from the speech which had been approved by me.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the names of those not employed in his Department who contributed to the drafting of his speech to the Glasgow Business Table. [11951]

**Mr. Forsyth:** Although I have advice and support from officials, my special adviser and, where necessary, others, my speeches are my responsibility and mine alone.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland at what hour and minute the original press release of the speech he gave to the meeting of the Glasgow Business Table on 17 January was released; when it was withdrawn; and when the second draft of the press release was released. [11952]

**Mr. Forsyth:** I understand that the original press release started issuing at 10.30 am and the withdrawal and release of the second press release finished transmission at 12.49 pm.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors underlay his decision to withdraw the original press release of his speech to a meeting of the Glasgow business Table on 17 January. [11953]

**Mr. Forsyth:** The decision to withdraw the original press release was made by staff of the Scottish Office information directorate as soon as they realised that they had made an error.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the compliance of his second press release on his speech to the Glasgow Business Table with the central Government conventions on publicity and advertising. [11948]

**Mr. Forsyth:** None. This is a matter in which I rely on official advice.

### Ministerial Discussions

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he last met ministerial colleagues to discuss Cabinet Office guidelines on publicity and advertising; [11954]

(2) who was present at the meeting on 17 January after which the director of the directorate of information released a statement apologising to the Secretary of State. [11947]

**Mr. Forsyth:** Successive Administrations have declined to answer questions on discussions between Ministers or between Ministers and their official advisers.

### Heart Surgery

**Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will take action to reduce the waiting times for patients who require heart surgery. [12428]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Since November 1994 a national guarantee has been in place which ensures that all adult patients who are referred for cardiac surgery receive it within 12 months. It is for the patient's clinician to determine clinical priority and of course patients requiring emergency or urgent treatment are seen much sooner than the 12-month limit. It is a matter for health boards to purchase the appropriate level of services to ensure that guarantees are met.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Classroom Assistants

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *1019*, what is her

estimate of the number of classroom assistants who work in a voluntary capacity, and if these were included in the figures given. [10525]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Classroom assistants who work in a voluntary capacity were not included in the figures given. Information about unpaid education support staff is not collected centrally.

### Waste Management and Recycling

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to encourage sustainable waste management and recycling throughout her Department. [11179]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Department operates to a green environmental and energy strategy which as Green Minister I approved in October 1995. This includes guidelines and rules on the management of waste by careful procurement, by minimisation and by separation for recycling. The Employment Service follows a similar strategy, tailored to suit its national network of offices. Objectives and, where feasible, targets are set and progress is monitored.

### Undergraduate Degrees

**Mr. George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans her Department has to lower the time spent on studying for an undergraduate degree to 18 months. [11895]

**Mr. Forth:** The length of individual degree courses is a matter for individual universities. The length of undergraduate courses generally will be considered in the context of the higher education review alongside other issues concerned with the effective use of public funds.

### Pupil Numbers (Costs)

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the estimated cost of the projected increase in pupil numbers from April 1996 to March 1997. [11707]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The latest available estimate shows a 1 per cent. increase in pupil numbers next year. How they are accommodated, and at what cost, will depend on decisions made by local education authorities and schools. The cost should be well within the 4.5 per cent. increase in provision for education made by the Government.

### Student Grants

**Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Eduction and Employment if the calculation of a student's income for entitlement to a grant takes into account a mortgage held by the student. [11824]

**Mr. Forth:** Under the mandatory awards regulations, in assessing a student's income a local education authority has discretion to take account of payments made in pursuance of any obligation, such as a mortgage, incurred before the start of his course.

### Disability Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for her Department and each of the agencies for which she is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11910]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The position in the Department and its agencies is as follows:

| | *(a)* | *(b)* |
|---|---|---|
| DfEE | No | No |
| Employment Service | Yes | Yes |
| Teachers' Pensions Agency | No | No |

DfEE plans to introduce the symbol from April 1996. Consideration is being given to how the Teachers' Pensions Agency might be included in arrangements for use of the symbol by DfEE.

### Education Spending

**Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each local education authority in England (i) total education spending excluding further education in *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94, (ii) total expenditure on service strategy and regulation in *(c)* 1992–93 and *(d)* 1993–94, (iii) *(c)* as a percentage of *(a)*, (iv) *(d)* as a percentage of *(b)* and (vi) the difference between (iii) and (iv) in ascending order of this difference. [11875]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table shows for each local education authority total education expenditure excluding further education colleges for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94; total expenditure for service strategy and regulation for *(c)* 1992–93 and *(d)* 1993–94; the percentage of service strategy and regulation expenditure within total education expenditure for each year *(d)* 1992–93 and *(e)* 1993–94; and finally the difference between these variances in ascending order.

| | *A* *Total education expenditure excluding further education colleges 1992–93* £ | *B* *Total education expenditure 1993–94* £ | *C* *Service strategy and regulation total expenditure 1992–93* £ | *D* *Service strategy and regulation total expenditure 1993–94* £ | *E* *Column C as a percentage of column A* | *F* *Column D as a percentage of Column B* | *G* *Column F minus Column E* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LEA | 000 | 000 | 000 | 000 | | | |
| Coventry | 158,933 | 155,060 | 13,468 | 3,417 | 8.47 | 2.20 | -6.27 |
| South Tyneside | 68,337 | 67,558 | 3,991 | 91 | 5.84 | 0.13 | -5.71 |
| Isle of Wight | 48,888 | 50,013 | 2,568 | 716 | 5.25 | 1.43 | -3.82 |

| | A<br>*Total education expenditure excluding further education colleges 1992–93*<br>£ | B<br>*Total education expenditure 1993–94*<br>£ | C<br>*Service strategy and regulation total expenditure 1992–93*<br>£ | D<br>*Service strategy and regulation total expenditure 1993–94*<br>£ | E<br>*Column C as a percentage of column A* | F<br>*Column D as a percentage of Column B* | G<br>*Column F minus Column E* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Croydon | 146,894 | 145,168 | 5,587 | 1,814 | 3.80 | 1.25 | -2.55 |
| Northamptonshire | 223,754 | 220,838 | 12,232 | 6,645 | 5.47 | 3.01 | -2.46 |
| Cheshire | 415,440 | 423,757 | 9,721 | 1,660 | 2.34 | 0.39 | -1.95 |
| Corporation of London | 1,985 | 2,792 | 285 | 347 | 14.36 | 12.43 | -1.93 |
| Devon | 377,621 | 386,425 | 5,210 | 302 | 1.38 | 0.08 | -1.30 |
| Berkshire | 274,430 | 286,230 | 4,583 | 1,373 | 1.67 | 0.48 | -1.19 |
| Sunderland | 123,308 | 126,776 | 1,745 | 445 | 1.42 | 0.35 | -1.06 |
| Buckinghamshire | 281,150 | 272,288 | 6,479 | 3,526 | 2.30 | 1.29 | -1.01 |
| Barnsley | 85,950 | 89,309 | 1,558 | 947 | 1.81 | 1.06 | -0.75 |
| Lincolnshire | 205,521 | 202,982 | 2,278 | 1,323 | 1.11 | 0.65 | -0.46 |
| Southwark | 131,430 | 130,033 | 1,782 | 1,276 | 1.36 | 0.98 | -0.37 |
| Wiltshire | 218,110 | 218,048 | 2,139 | 1,541 | 0.98 | 0.71 | -0.27 |
| Cumbria | 188,827 | 188,098 | 2,275 | 1,754 | 1.20 | 0.93 | -0.27 |
| Wakefield | 133,981 | 130,009 | 847 | 495 | 0.63 | 0.38 | -0.25 |
| Greenwich | 137,152 | 130,387 | 1,763 | 1,405 | 1.29 | 1.08 | -0.21 |
| East Sussex | 250,377 | 256,923 | 3,388 | 2,999 | 1.35 | 1.17 | -0.19 |
| Haringey | 122,255 | 123,408 | 684 | 513 | 0.56 | 0.42 | -0.14 |
| Suffolk | 252,381 | 255,816 | 1,906 | 1,601 | 0.76 | 0.63 | -0.13 |
| Wolverhampton | 118,265 | 121,781 | 1,144 | 1,040 | 0.97 | 0.85 | -0.11 |
| Wirral | 148,146 | 149,604 | 1,873 | 1,722 | 1.26 | 1.15 | -0.11 |
| Warwickshire | 195,644 | 201,245 | 2,096 | 1,961 | 1.07 | 0.97 | -0.10 |
| Avon | 389,520 | 395,791 | 1,694 | 1,389 | 0.43 | 0.35 | -0.08 |
| Kirklees | 171,820 | 174,975 | 906 | 796 | 0.53 | 0.45 | -0.07 |
| Somerset | 184,342 | 193,130 | 724 | 620 | 0.39 | 0.32 | -0.07 |
| West Sussex | 262,590 | 270,019 | 898 | 767 | 0.34 | 0.28 | -0.06 |
| Norfolk | 276,024 | 283,294 | 956 | 827 | 0.35 | 0.29 | -0.05 |
| Dorset | 219,606 | 219,426 | 1,158 | 1,055 | 0.53 | 0.48 | -0.05 |
| Gloucestershire | 186,903 | 175,559 | 1,973 | 1,774 | 1.06 | 1.01 | -0.05 |
| Lambeth | 157,451 | 146,935 | 1,251 | 1,104 | 0.79 | 0.75 | -0.04 |
| Sefton | 124,977 | 128,750 | 479 | 463 | 0.38 | 0.36 | -0.02 |
| Leeds | 300,232 | 303,660 | 653 | 599 | 0.22 | 0.20 | -0.02 |
| Humberside | 390,801 | 403,069 | 354 | 302 | 0.09 | 0.07 | -0.02 |
| Leicestershire | 394,135 | 400,635 | 1,047 | 1,036 | 0.27 | 0.26 | -0.01 |
| Doncaster | 132,006 | 137,447 | 214 | 219 | 0.16 | 0.16 | 0.00 |
| Bradford | 234,523 | 236,543 | 175 | 175 | 0.07 | 0.07 | 0.00 |
| Isles of Scilly | 1,371 | 1,325 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Stockport | 122,188 | 116,044 | 317 | 315 | 0.26 | 0.27 | 0.01 |
| Nottinghamshire | 422,944 | 445,597 | 1,956 | 2,135 | 0.46 | 0.48 | 0.02 |
| Gateshead | 86,549 | 88,358 | 293 | 319 | 0.34 | 0.36 | 0.02 |
| Liverpool | 225,399 | 229,160 | 574 | 636 | 0.25 | 0.28 | 0.02 |
| Bolton | 120,938 | 116,752 | 350 | 365 | 0.29 | 0.31 | 0.02 |
| Lancashire | 606,766 | 618,913 | 1,185 | 1,354 | 0.20 | 0.22 | 0.02 |
| Hampshire | 605 272 | 581,475 | 2,500 | 2,650 | 0.41 | 0.46 | 0.04 |
| Durham | 257,395 | 256,604 | 941 | 1,068 | 0.37 | 0.42 | 0.05 |
| Cleveland | 270,847 | 256,574 | 224 | 347 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.05 |
| Bedfordshire | 248,007 | 238,055 | 1,114 | 1,217 | 0.45 | 0.51 | 0.06 |
| North Tyneside | 88,626 | 83,108 | 328 | 362 | 0.37 | 0.44 | 0.07 |
| Trafford | 90,203 | 86,556 | 548 | 583 | 0.61 | 0.67 | 0.07 |
| Manchester | 237,226 | 228,234 | 1,304 | 1,414 | 0.55 | 0.62 | 0.07 |
| Tower Hamlets | 131,520 | 137,526 | 1,650 | 1,837 | 1.25 | 1.34 | 0.08 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 260,243 | 257,975 | 925 | 1,147 | 0.36 | 0.44 | 0.09 |
| Lewisham | 135,611 | 129,582 | 721 | 814 | 0.53 | 0.63 | 0.10 |
| Redbridge | 106,936 | 110,514 | 750 | 884 | 0.70 | 0.80 | 0.10 |
| Northumberland | 136,023 | 137,770 | 624 | 804 | 0.46 | 0.58 | 0.12 |
| Barking | 71,015 | 71,871 | 380 | 477 | 0.54 | 0.66 | 0.13 |
| Sutton | 67,780 | 61,647 | 656 | 677 | 0.97 | 1.10 | 0.13 |
| Newham | 125,098 | 123,745 | 492 | 651 | 0.39 | 0.53 | 0.13 |
| Sandwell | 142,552 | 137,676 | 348 | 539 | 0.24 | 0.39 | 0.15 |
| Kent | 538,540 | 525,500 | 526 | 1,298 | 0.10 | 0.25 | 0.15 |
| Rotherham | 115,121 | 118,246 | 191 | 376 | 0.17 | 0.32 | 0.15 |
| Wandsworth | 130,071 | 111,613 | 1,480 | 1,443 | 1.14 | 1.29 | 0.16 |
| North Yorkshire | 291,697 | 290,381 | 712 | 1,161 | 0.24 | 0.40 | 0.16 |
| Salford | 101,175 | 95,098 | 696 | 804 | 0.69 | 0.85 | 0.16 |
| Havering | 97,638 | 87,409 | 628 | 700 | 0.64 | 0.80 | 0.16 |
| Brent | 146,691 | 126,662 | 833 | 926 | 0.57 | 0.73 | 0.16 |
| Camden | 107,437 | 107,239 | 337 | 517 | 0.31 | 0.48 | 0.17 |
| St. Helens | 84,737 | 85,062 | 402 | 549 | 0.47 | 0.65 | 0.17 |
| Tameside | 93,900 | 91,012 | 337 | 484 | 0.36 | 0.53 | 0.17 |
| Birmingham | 482,369 | 481,936 | 0 | 857 | 0.00 | 0.18 | 0.18 |
| Cambridgeshire | 275,872 | 251,033 | 1,360 | 1,686 | 0.49 | 0.67 | 0.18 |
| Sheffield | 198,839 | 198,083 | 359 | 756 | 0.18 | 0.38 | 0.20 |
| Derbyshire | 389,718 | 372,067 | 572 | 1,329 | 0.15 | 0.36 | 0.21 |
| Cornwall | 188,989 | 193,145 | 935 | 1,393 | 0.49 | 0.72 | 0.23 |
| Rochdale | 92,173 | 91,563 | 328 | 540 | 0.36 | 0.59 | 0.23 |
| Wigan | 134,139 | 131,580 | 108 | 438 | 0.08 | 0.33 | 0.25 |

| | A Total education expenditure excluding further education colleges 1992–93 £ | B Total education expenditure 1993–94 £ | C Service strategy and regulation total expenditure 1992–93 £ | D Service strategy and regulation total expenditure 1993–94 £ | E Column C as a percentage of column A | F Column D as a percentage of Column B | G Column F minus Column E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bromley | 92,178 | 90,193 | 723 | 941 | 0.78 | 1.04 | 0.26 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 64,075 | 55,558 | 565 | 634 | 0.88 | 1.14 | 0.26 |
| Shrophire | 177,595 | 169,883 | 0 | 449 | 0.00 | 0.26 | 0.26 |
| Solihull | 99,086 | 90,603 | 925 | 1,090 | 0.93 | 1.20 | 0.27 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 65,678 | 67,346 | 785 | 991 | 1.20 | 1.47 | 0.28 |
| Merton | 82,841 | 79,806 | 1,969 | 2,120 | 2.38 | 2.66 | 0.28 |
| Calderdale | 81,507 | 79,152 | 417 | 656 | 0.51 | 0.83 | 0.32 |
| Bexley | 93,663 | 87,566 | 1,310 | 1,598 | 1.40 | 1.82 | 0.43 |
| Hounslow | 109,740 | 105,192 | 355 | 797 | 0.32 | 0.76 | 0.43 |
| Bury | 80,691 | 79,172 | 795 | 1,130 | 0.99 | 1.43 | 0.44 |
| Hillingdon | 87,301 | 77,691 | 225 | 563 | 0.26 | 0.72 | 0.47 |
| Hackney | 137,918 | 130,965 | 748 | 1,339 | 0.54 | 1.02 | 0.48 |
| City of Westminster | 96,033 | 95,812 | 2,324 | 2,816 | 2.42 | 2.94 | 0.52 |
| Oxfordshire | 219,931 | 229,999 | 0 | 1,213 | 0.00 | 0.53 | 0.53 |
| Staffordshire | 437,107 | 405,148 | 0 | 2,489 | 0.00 | 0.61 | 0.61 |
| Harrow | 94,134 | 99,083 | 673 | 1,322 | 0.71 | 1.33 | 0.62 |
| Barnet | 147,567 | 135,228 | 878 | 1,890 | 0.59 | 1.40 | 0.80 |
| Ealing | 130,983 | 129,805 | 0 | 1,191 | 0.00 | 0.92 | 0.92 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 88,434 | 87,131 | 931 | 1,775 | 1.05 | 2.04 | 0.98 |
| Islington | 135,928 | 117,886 | 0 | 1,197 | 0.00 | 1.02 | 1.02 |
| Essex | 571,035 | 498,636 | 2,660 | 8,021 | 0.47 | 1.61 | 1.14 |
| Hertfordshire | 419,703 | 412,363 | 3,444 | 8,103 | 0.82 | 1.97 | 1.14 |
| Surrey | 375,278 | 361,684 | 972 | 5,486 | 0.26 | 1.52 | 1.26 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 129,432 | 123,114 | 413 | 2,059 | 0.32 | 1.67 | 1.35 |
| Knowsley | 81,187 | 82,913 | 1,783 | 3,038 | 2.20 | 3.66 | 1.47 |
| Enfield | 135,753 | 122,282 | 1,109 | 2,921 | 0.82 | 2.39 | 1.57 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 67,941 | 64,095 | 697 | 1,671 | 1.03 | 2.61 | 1.58 |
| Waltham Forest | 116,115 | 118,987 | 218 | 3,052 | 0.19 | 2.56 | 2.38 |
| Walsall | 131,255 | 123,192 | 0 | 3,278 | 0.00 | 2.66 | 2.66 |
| Oldham | 123,586 | 114,020 | 55 | 3,298 | 0.04 | 2.89 | 2.85 |
| Dudley | 117,858 | 112,402 | 500 | 3,752 | 0.42 | 3.34 | 2.91 |
| Total | 20,554,327 | 20,223,378 | 155,542 | 156,771 | 0.76 | 0.78 | 0.02 |

## Teachers' Pay Award

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total cost *(a)* nationally and *(b)* to each local education authority of the teachers' pay award in 1995–96. [11746]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The total estimated cost in England and Wales of the teachers' pay increase in 1995–96 is around £290 Million. The following table illustrates the cost of the award by updating the 1993–94 expenditure recorded by local education authorities in England and Wales for teaching staff salaries in nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by the teachers' pay awards of 2.9 per cent. in 1994–95 and 2.7 per cent. in 1995–96. The 1993–94 expenditure figures are the latest available for local education authority schools in England and Wales. The figures in the table take no account of changes in teacher numbers or other factors that affect the teachers' paybill.

*LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries*

£ thousand

| Pre-primary and primary, secondary and special schools | 1993–94 (actual) | 1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.) | 1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Corporation of London | 378 | 11 | 11 |
| Camden | 37,774 | 1,095 | 1,049 |
| Greenwich | 53,751 | 1,559 | 1,493 |
| Hackney | 41,871 | 1,214 | 1,163 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 25,087 | 728 | 697 |
| Islington | 37,294 | 1,082 | 1,036 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 15,922 | 462 | 442 |
| Lambeth | 39,698 | 1,151 | 1,103 |
| Lewisham | 43,235 | 1,254 | 1,201 |
| Southwark | 38,056 | 1,104 | 1,057 |
| Tower Hamlets | 58,012 | 1,682 | 1,612 |
| Wandsworth | 31,532 | 914 | 876 |
| City of Westminster | 30,151 | 874 | 838 |
| Barking | 34,487 | 1,000 | 958 |
| Barnet | 55,491 | 1,609 | 1,542 |
| Bexley | 40,962 | 1,188 | 1,138 |
| Brent | 39,613 | 1,149 | 1,101 |
| Bromley | 35,283 | 1,023 | 980 |
| Croydon | 51,278 | 1,487 | 1,425 |
| Ealing | 46,119 | 1,337 | 1,281 |
| Enfield | 51,873 | 1,504 | 1,441 |
| Haringey | 48,595 | 1,409 | 1,350 |
| Harrow | 38,702 | 1,122 | 1,075 |
| Havering | 41,677 | 1,209 | 1,158 |
| Hillingdon | 26,648 | 773 | 740 |
| Hounslow | 46,927 | 1,361 | 1,304 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 21,879 | 634 | 608 |
| Merton | 33,279 | 965 | 925 |
| Newham | 54,533 | 1,581 | 1,515 |

*LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries*

*£ thousand*

| *Pre-primary and primary, secondary and special schools* | *1993–94 (actual)* | *1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.)* | *1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Redbridge | 49,548 | 1,437 | 1,377 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 25,724 | 746 | 715 |
| Sutton | 22,531 | 653 | 626 |
| Waltham Forest | 46,867 | 1,359 | 1,302 |
| Birmingham | 211,785 | 6,142 | 5,884 |
| Coventry | 69,840 | 2,025 | 1,940 |
| Dudley | 55,540 | 1,611 | 1,543 |
| Sandwell | 66,061 | 1,916 | 1,835 |
| Solihull | 41,921 | 1,216 | 1,165 |
| Walsall | 55,669 | 1,614 | 1,547 |
| Wolverhampton | 53,635 | 1,555 | 1,490 |
| Knowsley | 34,935 | 1,013 | 971 |
| Liverpool | 104,939 | 3,043 | 2,916 |
| St. Helens | 39,149 | 1,135 | 1,088 |
| Sefton | 57,370 | 1,664 | 1,594 |
| Wirral | 69,278 | 2,009 | 1,925 |
| Bolton | 54,728 | 1,587 | 1,521 |
| Bury | 33,505 | 972 | 931 |
| Manchester | 91,541 | 2,655 | 2,543 |
| Oldham | 56,483 | 1,638 | 1,569 |
| Rochdale | 39,389 | 1,142 | 1,094 |
| Salford | 47,641 | 1,382 | 1,324 |
| Stockport | 53,551 | 1,553 | 1,488 |
| Tameside | 39,501 | 1,146 | 1,097 |
| Trafford | 36,262 | 1,052 | 1,007 |
| Wigan | 66,655 | 1,933 | 1,852 |
| Barnsley | 41,363 | 1,200 | 1,149 |
| Doncaster | 62,198 | 1,804 | 1,728 |
| Rotherham | 58,540 | 1,698 | 1,626 |
| Sheffield | 92,046 | 2,669 | 2,557 |
| Bradford | 109,072 | 3,163 | 3,030 |
| Calderdale | 37,935 | 1,100 | 1,054 |
| Kirklees | 81,076 | 2,351 | 2,253 |
| Leeds | 146,072 | 4,236 | 4,058 |
| Wakefield | 63,131 | 1,831 | 1,754 |
| Gateshead | 40,458 | 1,173 | 1,124 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 53,518 | 1,552 | 1,487 |
| North Tyneside | 40,501 | 1,175 | 1,125 |
| South Tyneside | 31,493 | 913 | 875 |
| Sunderland | 65,654 | 1,904 | 1,824 |
| Isles of Scilly | 608 | 18 | 17 |
| Avon | 177,289 | 5,141 | 4,926 |
| Bedfordshire | 105,301 | 3,054 | 2,926 |
| Berkshire | 135,540 | 3,931 | 3,766 |
| Buckinghamshire | 112,209 | 3,254 | 3,118 |
| Cambridgeshire | 103,041 | 2,988 | 2,863 |
| Cheshire | 185,457 | 5,378 | 5,153 |
| Cleveland | 124,442 | 3,609 | 3,457 |
| Cornwall | 86,653 | 2,513 | 2,407 |
| Cumbria | 88,947 | 2,579 | 2,471 |
| Derbyshire | 168,175 | 4,877 | 4,672 |
| Devon | 175,999 | 5,104 | 4,890 |
| Dorset | 98,186 | 2,847 | 2,728 |
| Durham | 120,743 | 3,502 | 3,355 |
| East Sussex | 116,123 | 3,368 | 3,226 |
| Essex | 211,358 | 6,129 | 5,872 |
| Gloucestershire | 74,050 | 2,147 | 2,057 |
| Hampshire | 256,960 | 7,452 | 7,139 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 128,339 | 3,722 | 3,566 |
| Hertfordshire | 186,227 | 5,401 | 5,174 |
| Humberside | 177,122 | 5,137 | 4,921 |
| Isle of Wight | 24,264 | 704 | 674 |
| Kent | 227,895 | 6,609 | 6,332 |
| Lancashire | 294,517 | 8,541 | 8,183 |
| Leicestershire | 185,004 | 5,365 | 5,140 |
| Lincolnshire | 88,099 | 2,555 | 2,448 |
| Norfolk | 124,807 | 3,619 | 3,468 |
| North Yorkshire | 138,958 | 4,030 | 3,861 |
| Northamptonshire | 109,086 | 3,163 | 3,031 |
| Northumberland | 62,398 | 1,810 | 1,734 |
| Nottinghamshire | 204,137 | 5,920 | 5,672 |
| Oxfordshire | 105,430 | 3,057 | 2,929 |
| Shropshire | 79,422 | 2,303 | 2,207 |
| Somerset | 84,749 | 2,458 | 2,355 |
| Staffordshire | 193,818 | 5,621 | 5,385 |
| Suffolk | 130,118 | 3,773 | 3,615 |
| Surrey | 143,690 | 4,167 | 3,992 |
| Warwickshire | 90,965 | 2,638 | 2,527 |
| West Sussex | 128,568 | 3,728 | 3,572 |
| Wiltshire | 96,340 | 2,794 | 2,677 |
| Clwyd | 79,496 | 2,305 | 2,209 |
| Dyfed | 83,748 | 2,429 | 2,327 |
| Gwent | 89,452 | 2,594 | 2,485 |
| Gwynedd | 52,783 | 1,531 | 1,466 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 126,517 | 3,669 | 3,515 |
| South Glamorgan | 84,294 | 2,445 | 2,342 |
| West Glamorgan | 79,266 | 2,299 | 2,202 |
| Powys | 27,607 | 801 | 767 |

## Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the total expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate she has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11344]

**Mr. Robin Squire** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Before the merger in July 1995, the Department operated separately as the Department for Education and the Employment Department. We will continue to follow separately-funded programmes of publicity until the end of the financial year 1995–96.

Information on the publicity spend of agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally by the former Departments. It was not the policy of the former Departments to make use of paid public relations services. Press enquiries were handled by their own specialist staff and costs are not separately identifiable.

The costs of the total expenditure on publicity and on advertising for the former Departments are as follows:

*£ thousand*

| | *Total publicity expenditure* | *Advertising* |
|---|---|---|
| *ED* | | |
| 1979–80 | 70 | not available |
| 1989–90 | 30,300 | 16,630 |
| 1991–92 | 18,300 | 12,600 |
| 1993–94 | 10,970 | 7,300 |
| 1994–95 | 11,200 | 8,000 |
| 1995–96 (to date) | 6,400 | 4,500 |
| 1995–96 (estimated for whole year) | 7,595 | 6,283 |
| *DFE* | | |
| 1979–80 | 104 | 92 |
| 1989–90 | 1,400 | 250 |
| 1991–92 | 8,881 | 3,03 |
| 1993–94 | 9,994 | 1,442 |

£ thousand

| | Total publicity expenditure | Advertising |
|---|---|---|
| 1994–95 | 8,088 | 147 |
| 1995–96 (to date) | 1,342 | 49 |
| 1995–96 (estimated for whole year) | 5,430 | 300 |

The projected spending on publicity in the 1996–97 public expenditure survey allocation for the Department is £13,040,000. Details on how this will be divided between various forms of publicity have not yet been agreed.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her Department's agencies and *(c)* her Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11346]

**Mr. Robin Squire** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The information is as follows:

a. *Telephone costs to the Department*

(i) 1979–80: Figures are not available

(ii) 1989–90: Figures are not available

(iii) 1991–92: £6,157,168

(iv) 1993–94: £6,269,422

(v) 1994–95: £5,867,605

(vi) 1995–96: £4,800,000 (estimate)

(vii) 1996–97: £4,800,000 (estimate)

For 1995–96 and earlier the figures amalgamate the relevant expenditure of the former Department for Education and the former Department of Employment. The figures for 1993–94 and later years include the telephone costs for the Teacher's Pensions Agency which cannot be separately identified.

b. *Telephone costs to the Employment Service*

(i) 1979–80: Figures are not available

(ii) 1989–90: Figures are not available

(iii) 1991–92: Figures are not available

(iv) 1993–94: £14,900,554

(v) 1994–95: £13,699,000

(vi) 1995–96: £12,833,333 (estimate)

(vii) 1996–97: £12,833,333 (estimate)

c. Information about telephone costs to the Department's non-departmental public bodies is not available centrally. On availability of internal directories the answers are:

(a) Yes

(b) Yes

(c) Information not available to the DfEE.

## Education, South London

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many (1) church-aided and (2) non-denominational secondary schools which are located within 15 miles of Southwark are *(a)* grant-maintained and *(b)* maintained by local authorities. [11937]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The information requested is shown in the following table:

*Maintained secondary schools within 15 miles of the centre of Southwark Local Education Authority (LEA) area November 1995*

| | Denominational[1] | Non-denominational |
|---|---|---|
| LEA maintained schools | 68 | 210 |
| Grant-maintained schools | 50 | 63 |

[1] Includes Church of England, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Methodist and other religious denominations.

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will institute a public inquiry into the quality of secondary education provision in the London boroughs of Islington, Southwark and Lambeth. [11938]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** No.

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will hold discussions with the Lambeth and Southwark education committee chairmen on whether their education policies are meeting the needs of local parents. [11939]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** I have had no request for such a meeting nor is there any current intention of Ministers to seek one.

## Employment Service (Safety of Staff)

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what has been the number of attacks on Employment Service office staff in each of the last five years; what assessment she has made as to the causes of such attacks; and if she will make a statement; [11933]

(2) what account she takes of representations by staff when considering the provision of safety measures in jobcentres; [11934]

(3) what plans she has to allow additional safety measures to be provided at jobcentres at the request of staff; and what funding she will make available for this purpose. [11935]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. John McAllion, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your questions concerning attacks on Employment Service (ES) staff.

All attacks against my people are taken very seriously and we investigate them thoroughly. Fortunately, few of these attacks result in physical injury. The incidence of attacks need to be placed in the context of the some two million contacts we have with the public every week. Seen in that light the likelihood of someone in the Employment Service being attacked is, I am pleased to say, low. That does not diminish our determination to ensure that it is as low as possible and we continue to work to that end. Every incident is studied to assess causes and see if any changes are needed to the existing countermeasures. These studies show that there are very different factors for each incident, but typical countermeasures will

include upgrading the security arrangements, better training in customer handling, introducing more effective and efficient working procedures and improving the layout of the office to provide better traffic flow and more accessible escape routes for my people.

The figures of actual assaults on my people in each of the last five years are:–

1991: 152

1992: 203

1993: 258

1994: 268

1995: 234

A systematic risk assessment, by competent Risk Assessors, to identify and recommend measures to reduce incidents to the minimum practical level has been made of all our Jobcentres in preparation for the introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Trade Union Health and Safety representatives were fully consulted as part of the risk assessment process. Their views were fully taken into account by risk assessors.

Safety and security measures will receive priority funding and I anticipate no difficulties in implementing the agreed recommendations of Risk Assessors.

I hope this is helpful.

## Jobseekers (Project Work Scheme)

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her oral statement of 16 January, *Official Report*, column 610, if she will place in the Library a copy of all correspondence and other data evaluated by her Department relating to the decision to pilot the project work scheme in the Hull and Medway travel-to-work areas. [12156]

**Mr. Forth** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* The information requested is either data about the labour market, which is publicly available, or pre-existing documents. It would not be appropriate specifically to provide this information in the form requested. However, it may be helpful if I explain the way in which the choice of pilot areas was made. Hull and Medway and Maidstone were two of a number of travel-to-work areas of the right size to mount a manageable pilot at a reasonable cost, while still producing a sample large enough for proper evaluation. They were also relatively self-contained, which minimised the potential for distortion, and they represented two different sorts of labour market. The respective rates of unemployment and very long-term unemployment in the two travel-to-work areas is shown in the following table, compared with the national averages.

| *Pilot area* | *Unemployment rate Per cent.* | *VLTU[1] as percentage of total unemployed* | *VLTU[1] as percentage of total workforce* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Medway and Maidstone | 8.2 | 13.7 | 1.1 |
| Hull | 9.9 | 18.8 | 1.9 |
| National average | 8.0 | 21.6 | 1.7 |

[1] Very long-term unemployed, i.e., over 2 years.
[2] Seasonally adjusted, and provisional.

## Equal Opportunities Commission

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effects on the workings of the Sex Discrimination Acts and Equal Pay Act 1970 of the reduction in funding for the Equal Opportunities Commission. [12398]

**Mrs. Gillan:** I expect that the Equal Opportunities Commission will continue to use its resources efficiently and effectively to carry out its statutory duties.

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to restore funding to the Equal Opportunities Commission. [12396]

**Mrs. Gillan:** We consider annually the funding requirements of the Equal Opportunities Commission, alongside other calls on public expenditure.

## EU Funding

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European Leonardo programme and its predecessor schemes over the last available five-year period; [11649]

(2) how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European Leonardo programme under the current financial perspectives. [11648]

**Mr. Forth:** The main predecessors of the Leonardo programme were the Comett, Force and Petra programmes. The following tables relate to funding received in the United Kingdom as a whole under these programmes; regional allocations are not available. No financial details of funds received within the Leonardo programme in 1995, its first year of operation, have yet been published by the European Commission.

*Table 1: Figures in 000 ECU*

| *Year* | *Comett* | *Force* | *Petra* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1990[1] | — | — | — |
| 1991 | 3,048 | | [2]1,055 |
| 1992 | 6,411 | 7,380 | 2,796 |
| 1993 | 3,871 | | 3,866 |
| 1994 | 3,677 | Not available | 3,274 |

[1] Figures not available for 1990.
[2] Excludes placement/exchange activity.

*Table 2: Figures in £000*

*Exchange rate 1 ECU=£0.8472*

| *Year* | *Comett* | *Force* | *Petra* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1990[1] | — | — | — |
| 1991 | 2,582 | | [2]894 |
| 1992 | 5,432 | 6,252 | 2,369 |
| 1993 | 3,280 | | 3,275 |
| 1994 | 3,115 | Not available | 2,774 |

[1] Figures not available for 1990.
[2] Excludes placement/exchange activity.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the

United Kingdom received from the European Socrates programme and its predecessor schemes over the last available five years. [11652]

(2) how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European Socrates programme under the current financial perspectives. [11653]

**Mr. Forth:** The main predecessors of the Socrates programme were the Erasmus and Lingua programmes. The following table relates to funding allocated to the United Kingdom as a whole under these programmes; regional allocations are not available. No financial details of grants awarded under the Socrates programme in 1995, its first year of operation, have yet been published by the European Commission.

| Year | ERASMUS[1] | | LINGUA | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ECU000 | £000[2] | ECU000 | £000[2] |
| 1990 | 5,372 | 4,551 | n/a | n/a |
| 1991 | 6,822 | 5,780 | [3]2,156 | [3]1,827 |
| 1992 | 9,249 | 7,836 | [4]4,210 | [4]3,567 |
| 1993 | 9,582 | 8,118 | [4]4,769 | [4]4,040 |
| 1994 | 10,328 | 8,750 | [4]5,283 | [4]4,476 |

[1] Includes LINGUA Action II.
[2] At 1 ECU = £0.8472.
[3] LINGUA Actions I, III, IV and VB only.
[4] LINGUA Actions I, III, IV and V only.
n/a not available.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much in *(a)* Ecus and *(b)* pound sterling by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European social fund over the last available five years. [11660]

**Mr. Forth:** Information by standard region is not available except at disproportionate cost. The following table shows the amounts of European social fund as allocated to the United Kingdom in the years 1991–95.

*European Social Fund Allocations 1991–95*

*1994 prices using an exchange rate of £1 = 1.2 ecu*

*Community initiatives are included between 1991–93 and excluded for 1994 and 1995*

| | 1991 | | 1992 | | 1993 | | 1994 | | 1995 | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mecu | £ million | Mecu | £ million | Mecu | £ million | Mecu | £ million | Mecu | £ million | Mecu | £ million |
| *Objective 1* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Northern Ireland | 75 | 53 | 80 | 59 | 78 | 61 | 49 | 40 | 50 | 42 | 332 | 255 |
| Merseyside[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 46 | 39 | 50 | 42 | 96 | 81 |
| Highlands and Islands[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 8 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 17 | 14 |
| Total | 75 | 53 | 80 | 59 | 78 | 61 | 103 | 86 | 109 | 91 | 445 | 350 |
| *Objective 2* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| North-East England | 25 | 17 | 29 | 21 | 27 | 21 | 24 | 20 | 26 | 21 | 131 | 100 |
| East England[2] | 24 | 17 | 28 | 20 | 26 | 21 | — | — | — | — | 78 | 58 |
| East Midlands[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 6 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 13 | 11 |
| West Midlands | 19 | 13 | 22 | 16 | 20 | 16 | 30 | 25 | 31 | 26 | 122 | 96 |
| North West England | 51 | 36 | 60 | 44 | 56 | 44 | 31 | 26 | 33 | 27 | 231 | 177 |
| West Cumbria | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 13 | 10 |
| West Scotland | 18 | 13 | 21 | 16 | 20 | 16 | 20 | 17 | 21 | 17 | 100 | 79 |
| East Scotland | 6 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 36 | 29 |
| South Wales | 14 | 10 | 17 | 12 | 16 | 12 | 15 | 12 | 16 | 13 | 78 | 59 |
| North East Wales[2] | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | 6 | 5 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 25 | 21 | 26 | 22 | 51 | 43 |
| East London and Lea Valley[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 12 | 10 |
| Thanet[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Plymouth | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Total | 162 | 113 | 189 | 138 | 177 | 139 | 170 | 144 | 179 | 149 | 877 | 683 |
| Objectives 3 and 4 Total[3] | 314 | 262 | 371 | 309 | 548 | 457 | 421 | 351 | 554 | 462 | 2,208 | 1,841 |
| *Objective 5b* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| South West England | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 17 | 14 |
| Rural Wales | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 17 | 14 |
| Highland and Islands[2] | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | 8 | 7 |
| Dumfries and Galloway[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| The Marches[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Northern Uplands[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 6 |
| Lincolnshire[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| East Anglia | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Borders of Scotland[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Central Scotland/Tayside[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Grampian[1] | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 12 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 17 | 15 | 21 | 19 | 62 | 55 |
| Grand total | 563 | 437 | 646 | 512 | 809 | 663 | 711 | 596 | 863 | 721 | 3,592 | 2,929 |

[1] These programmes commenced in 1994.
[2] These programme areas were redefined from 1994.
[3] Objectives 3 and 4 are national programmes not divided regionally. 1991–93 figures cover both objectives which were amalgamated into Objective 3 from 1994 onwards.

## EU Funding

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pound sterling by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European social fund under the present structural funds agreement. [11661]

**Mr. Forth:** Information by standard region is not available except at disproportionate cost. Allocations are set out in the following table. The table shows the amounts of European social fund allocated to the United Kingdom in the years 1994–1999. There are as yet no indicative allocations for objective 2 of the European structural fund in 1997–1999. It will be for the European Commission to decide later this year the share of each eligible member state and for the Government to determine the share between the eligible areas of Great Britain.

*European Social Fund Allocations 1994–99*

*1994 prices using an exchange rate of £1=1.2 ecu*

| | *1994* | | *1995* | | *1996* | | *1997* | | *1998* | | *1999* | | *Total* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Mecu* | *£million* | *Mecu* | *£million* | *Mecu* | *£million* | *Mecu* | *£million* | *Mecu* | *£million* | *Mecu* | *£million* | *Mecu* | *£million* |
| *Objective 1* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Northern Ireland | 49 | 40 | 50 | 42 | 55 | 46 | 58 | 48 | 68 | 57 | 75 | 62 | 355 | 295 |
| Merseyside | 46 | 39 | 50 | 42 | 54 | 45 | 58 | 48 | 63 | 52 | 68 | 56 | 339 | 282 |
| Highlands and Islands | 8 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 8 | 55 | 46 |
| Total | 103 | 86 | 109 | 91 | 118 | 99 | 125 | 104 | 141 | 117 | 153 | 126 | 749 | 623 |
| *Objective 2*[1] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| North East England | 24 | 20 | 26 | 21 | 27 | 22 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 77 | 63 |
| East Midlands | 6 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 6 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 20 | 17 |
| West Midlands | 30 | 25 | 31 | 26 | 33 | 27 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 94 | 78 |
| North West England | 31 | 26 | 33 | 27 | 35 | 29 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 99 | 82 |
| West Cumbria | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 6 | 6 |
| West Scotland | 20 | 17 | 21 | 17 | 22 | 18 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 63 | 52 |
| East Scotland | 8 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 24 | 22 |
| South Wales | 15 | 12 | 16 | 13 | 16 | 14 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 47 | 39 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 25 | 21 | 26 | 22 | 27 | 23 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 78 | 66 |
| East London and Lea Valley | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 18 | 15 |
| Thanet | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 3 |
| Plymouth | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 170 | 144 | 179 | 149 | 186 | 156 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 535 | 449 |
| *Objectives 3 and 4 Total*[2] | 421 | 351 | 554 | 462 | 526 | 438 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 3,377 | 2,815 |
| *Objective 5b* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| South West England | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 33 | 27 |
| Rural Wales | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 33 | 27 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 6 |
| The Marches | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 6 |
| Northern Uplands | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 20 | 16 |
| Lincolnshire | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 6 |
| East Anglia | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 6 |
| Borders of Scotland | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 6 |
| Central Scotland/Tayside | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 6 |
| Grampian | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 17 | 15 | 21 | 19 | 22 | 19 | 25 | 21 | 24 | 19 | 24 | 19 | 133 | 112 |
| Grand Total | 711 | 596 | 863 | 721 | 852 | 712 | 150 | 125 | 165 | 136 | 177 | 145 | 4,794 | 3,999 |

[1] No indicative allocations available for Objective 2 beyond 1996.
[2] The total allocation shown for Objectives 3 and 4 is for six years but a plan for 1997–99 has yet to be agreed.

## Employment Service (Coventry)

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) when the bonus payments paid to Employment Service staff in Coventry began; when the staff of the Coventry Employment Service were notified of the payment of bonuses; and what the conditions of such payments were; [11837]

(2) when those Coventry Employment Service staff currently in dispute were notified of the payment of bonuses to Employment Service staff; and if they were notified of the conditions that would have to be accepted if they were to receive such payments; [11838]

(3) what discussions took place between her Department and Employment Service with regards to the payment of bonuses to Coventry Employment Service staff; [11839]

(4) what bonus payments to Coventry Employment Service staff have been issued in relation to the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance; [11841]

(5) what are the reasons, outside those in connection with the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance, for the payment of bonus to Coventry Employment Service staff; and if she will make a statement; [11842]

(6) what is the cost to date, and what the eventual cost will be, of the payment of bonuses to Employment

Service staff in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole; [11843]

(7) what relation the payment of bonus to Employment Service staff in Coventry bears to the current dispute within the Employment Service in Coventry; [11844]

(8) if bonus payments have been issued to the Employment Service staff in Coventry involved in the Coventry Employment Service dispute. [11845]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about bonus payments to Employment Service staff in Coventry.

First I must make clear that no bonus payments have been made to staff in my Coventry offices. In three of the four ES offices in Coventry, strike action has been called by the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA), and it seems that the Association is alleging that bonuses are being paid to staff remaining at work. That is not the case.

It is open to the Employment Service to make bonus payments under the provisions of its Special Bonus Scheme which began operating in 1989. The Scheme criteria under which a bonus may be paid include recognition of "maintenance of operational effectiveness in exceptionally difficult circumstances".

Under the Scheme, bonus payments may be authorised by my Regional Directors where they believe the circumstances to warrant such a payment. There is no requirement for discussions to take place between the Employment Service and the Department for Education and Employment in relation to payments made under the ES Special Bonus Scheme.

My Regional Director for the West Midlands, Rosemary Thew, is currently considering whether to make a bonus payment to staff remaining in work at Coventry. Such a payment would reflect the particularly difficult circumstances at the offices in the City; staff remaining at work are ensuring that the offices continue to function, thus allowing benefit payments and services to be offered to unemployed people and employers in Coventry.

Any payment made would have no connection with the forthcoming introduction of the Jobseeker's Allowance. As I have indicated they would be designed to recognise the maintenance of services in the exceptionally difficult circumstances occasioned by strike action by those ES employees in Coventry who are members of the CPSA.

You asked what the cost of paying people bonuses through the Special Bonus Scheme had been to date, and what the eventual cost will be. Some of my Regional Directors in regions other than the West Midlands have made bonus payments totalling £141,000 to people who are delivering our services from some offices affected by the dispute. It is not possible to inform you of the future total cost of such payments as many of my Regional Directors have not yet decided whether they should be made or, if so, for how much.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she has requested the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to report into the dispute involving the Employment Service. [11840]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 29 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the involvement of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) in the trade dispute between the Employment Service and the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA).

In early December 1995 ACAS acted upon a request from the CPSA to offer its conciliation services to the parties involved in the dispute. I was pleased to agree to talks under the auspices of ACAS being planned for 19 December. However, at a late stage they were called off because the CPSA decided not to adhere to the agreement we had reached that it would order its striking members back to work before the talks started.

I hope that this is helpful.

## Grant-maintained Schools

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many grant-maintained schools have applied for a change of character; what was the nature of the change; and what was the Secretary of State's decision. [12183]

**Mrs. Gillan:** There have been 211 applications for a significant change of character by grant-maintained schools. The following table shows the nature of the changes applied for and the Secretary of State's decision.

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *To add or extend sixth form* | |
| Applications | 89 |
| Approved | 38 |
| Rejected | 33 |
| Under consideration | 18 |
| *To add or extend nursery provision* | |
| Applications | 49 |
| Approved | 16 |
| Rejected | 11 |
| Under consideration | 22 |
| *Other change of age range* | |
| Applications | 44 |
| Approved | 40 |
| Rejected | 2 |
| Under consideration | 2 |
| *To add whole or partial selection* | |
| Applications | 26 |
| Approved | 16 |
| Rejected | 5 |
| Under consideration | 5 |
| *To add or remove boarding* | |
| Applications | 2 |
| Approved | 2 |
| Rejected | 0 |
| Under consideration | 0 |
| *Single-sex to co-educational* | |
| Applications | 1 |
| Approved | 0 |
| Rejected | 1 |
| Under consideration | 0 |

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many grant-maintained schools interview as part of their admissions procedure. [12184]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Some 20 grant-maintained schools have approved admission arrangements which enable them to use interviews other than for the purpose of assessing religious suitability.

### Training and Enterprise Councils

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to ensure that the membership of training and enterprise council boards includes representatives from firms with *(a)* under 50 employees, *(b)* under 20 employees, and *(c)* under 10 employees. [11959]

**Mr. Paice:** I am satisfied that the current arrangements ensure that small firms are represented on training and enterprise council boards and that TECs consult widely with small businesses in the preparation of their plans.

### Business Start-up Scheme

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *357*, how many start-ups in each of his tables benefited from *(a)* start-up grants, *(b)* survival grants and *(c)* both. [11945]

**Mr. Paice:** All starts received a start-up grant. The number of 52-week survival grants paid in 1993–94 and 1994–95 is given in the following table. All survivors, therefore, received both start-up and survival grants.

*Business start-up scheme: 52 week survivors in England*

| *Year* | *52-week survivors* |
|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 25,282 |
| 1994–95 | 24,344 |

### European Social Fund

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many training places were created *(a)* in total and *(b)* by standard region, with assistance from the European social fund in the United Kingdom in each year from 1990 to 1994. [11700]

**Mr. Forth:** I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds the United Kingdom has been allocated from the European social fund under objectives 3 and 4 between 1994 and 1999. [11701]

**Mr. Forth:** The United Kingdom was allocated 3,377 mecu under objectives 3 and 4 of the European social fund between 1994 and 1999. At an exchange rate of 1.2ecu = £1 this would be £2,815 million.

### Training Schemes

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment her Department has made of the numbers and percentages of *(a)* firms with under (i) 100 employees, (ii) 50 employees, (iii) 20 employees and (iv) 10 employees and *(b)* start-ups that have participated in Government-funded training schemes in each of the last five years. [11956]

**Mr. Paice:** The Department does not hold the information in the specific form requested. I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

### School Budgets

**Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish the delegated schools budget for 1995–96 for each local education authority combining the budgets for grant-maintained and for local education authority maintained primary and secondary schools. [12341]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table shows, for each local education authority, the amount delegated to primary, middle and secondary schools through the aggregated schools budget in 1995–96. The figures are derived from the local management of schools budget statements produced by local education authorities under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

The funding of grant-maintained schools is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools, and I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to arrange for a reply to be sent to the hon. member in respect of the GM sector.

*Funding delegated (1995–96) to primary, middle and secondary schools through ASB*

| *LEA* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Avon | 234.4 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 50.8 |
| Barnet | 61.4 |
| Barnsley | 51.4 |
| Bedfordshire | 127.8 |
| Berkshire | 163.9 |
| Bexley | 50.5 |
| Birmingham | 275.1 |
| Bolton | 66.7 |
| Bradford | 127.8 |
| Brent | 38.8 |
| Bromley | 39.5 |
| Buckinghamshire | 138.1 |
| Bury | 45.1 |
| Calderdale | 37.7 |
| Cambridgeshire | 130.4 |
| Camden | 43.1 |
| Cheshire | 248.9 |
| Corporation of London | 0.7 |
| Cleveland | 157.3 |
| Cornwall | 113.9 |
| Coventry | 87.4 |
| Croydon | 62.1 |
| Cumbria | 98.0 |
| Derbyshire | 185.4 |
| Devon | 224.4 |
| Doncaster | 85.1 |
| Dorset | 117.7 |
| Dudley | 67.7 |
| Durham | 146.6 |
| Ealing | 57.4 |
| East Sussex | 153.4 |
| Enfield | 64.9 |
| Essex | 222.2 |
| Gateshead | 50.5 |
| Gloucestershire | 71.2 |
| Greenwich | 74.0 |
| Hackney | 51.6 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 31.2 |

*Funding delegated (1995–96) to primary, middle and secondary schools through ASB*

| *LEA* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Hampshire | 338.7 |
| Haringey | 59.3 |
| Harrow | 53.3 |
| Havering | 56.7 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 149.3 |
| Hertfordshire | 226.2 |
| Hillingdon | 33.8 |
| Hounslow | 59.7 |
| Humberside | 237.8 |
| Isle of Wight | 30.6 |
| Isles of Scilly | 0.8 |
| Islington | 53.1 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 22.1 |
| Kent | 277.4 |
| Kingston | 26.5 |
| Kirklees | 96.6 |
| Knowsley | 45.3 |
| Lambeth | 43.7 |
| Lancashire | 320.6 |
| Leeds | 190.2 |
| Leicestershire | 226.6 |
| Lewisham | 65.7 |
| Lincolnshire | 105.3 |
| Liverpool | 129.4 |
| Manchester | 114.6 |
| Merton | 39.8 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 66.2 |
| Newham | 72.6 |
| Norfolk | 155.6 |
| North Tyneside | 49.6 |
| North Yorkshire | 177.1 |
| Northamptonshire | 138.1 |
| Northumberland | 81.7 |
| Nottinghamshire | 250.3 |
| Oldham | 68.8 |
| Oxfordshire | 130.9 |
| Redbridge | 63.2 |
| Richmond | 36.0 |
| Rochdale | 48.7 |
| Rotherham | 70.5 |
| Salford | 58.9 |
| Sandwell | 79.3 |
| Sefton | 78.5 |
| Sheffield | 103.9 |
| Shropshire | 89.9 |
| Solihull | 59.1 |
| Somerset | 108.9 |
| South Tyneside | 39.6 |
| Southwark | 55.7 |
| St. Helens | 48.7 |
| Staffordshire | 243.5 |
| Stockport | 69.7 |
| Suffolk | 162.1 |
| Sunderland | 81.9 |
| Surrey | 173.2 |
| Sutton | 30.5 |
| Tameside | 50.9 |
| Tower Hamlets | 72.6 |
| Trafford | 44.2 |
| Wakefield | 79.1 |
| Walsall | 62.8 |
| Waltham Forest | 57.2 |
| Wandsworth | 37.3 |
| Warwickshire | 105.4 |
| West Sussex | 167.2 |
| Westminster | 38.8 |
| Wigan | 83.8 |
| Wiltshire | 104.4 |
| Wirral | 83.7 |
| Wolverhampton | 64.7 |

## ENVIRONMENT

### Housing (Elderly People)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the housing stock in England and Wales was earmarked for the elderly in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9477]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The available data on local authority and housing association dwellings in England for elderly people are set out. The figures relate to the stock at 31 March/1 April. Comprehensive data for the private sector are not available.

*Per cent.*

| | *Local authorities* | | *Housing associations* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Proportion of stock which is:* | | *Proportion of stock which is for the elderly* | *Proportion of bedspaces in hostels which are for the elderly* |
| | *sheltered housing* | *other housing intended for the elderly* | | |
| 1992 | 7.9 | 9.1 | 26.6 | 23.9 |
| 1993 | 8.0 | 9.1 | 24.7 | 18.4 |
| 1994 | 8.0 | 9.4 | 23.9 | 19.0 |
| 1995 | 8.0 | 9.3 | n/a | n/a |

*Sources:*
Local authority—Housing Investment Programme (HIP1) returns
Housing associations—HAR10/1 returns.

For information about Wales, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

### Commission for Local Administration in England

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received the report of the review of the local government ombudsman; and when he expects to publish it. [11098]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Following completion of the first stage of his financial, management and policy review of the Commission for Local Administration in England, Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield presented his report to my right hon. Friend and to the chairman of the commission on 30 November 1995. The report is now being carefully considered by Ministers and by the commission and it will be published for wider consideration in due course.

### Rail Services

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what total payment has been made under the standard spending assessment to provide for the additional costs of supporting rail services that have arisen from the privatisation of British Rail. [11318]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** A figure of £89 million has been set aside from within the provisional all other services standard spending assessments for 1996–97 to reflect the costs of supporting rail services that have arisen from restructuring due to the privatisation of British Rail. This takes account of payments made directly to passenger transport executives under British Rail and Railtrack deeds of assumption.

## Single Regeneration Budget

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will increase the funds for the single regeneration budget to ensure a higher success rate in bids. [11609]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** As existing commitments under the programmes combined within the single regeneration budget are fulfilled, so increased resources are being made available for the bidding rounds for the SRB challenge fund. Under current plans, the challenge fund element of the SRB will increase from £125 million in 1995–96 to £600 million in 1988–99. Many unsuccessful bidders from round 1 in 1994 came back with greatly improved and successful bids for round 2, demonstrating the strength of local partnerships. Unsuccessful bidders last year will have the chance to bid again in round 3 this year.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy in respect of changes in public expenditure plans for the regeneration budget before May 1997. [11608]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Regeneration work, such as housing, training and economic development initiatives, are supported through main programme expenditure by various Government Departments. This is supplemented by targeted programmes which have been brought together in the single regeneration budget.

Under current plans, the single regeneration budget will provide over £1.3 billion for regeneration work in each of the three years 1995–96 to 1997–98—a total of some £4 billion. During this period there will be some £870 million available for funding new regeneration schemes successful in bidding rounds for the competitive SRB challenge fund. In 1998–99, under current plans, the challenge fund element of the SRB will increase to £600 million, by which time new schemes from four bidding rounds will be under way.

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, columns *25–26*, if he will list for each of the challenge fund schemes which included plans to assist business start-ups how many start-ups they estimated would be helped; and what was the average sum estimated to be made available for each start-up by each scheme. [11944]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Information on the forecast number of business start-ups over the lifetime of each challenge fund scheme is given.

Information about the average sum estimated to be made available for each start-up for each scheme is not available. As explained in my replies to the hon. Member on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *25*, and 17 January, *Official Report* column *603*, the single regeneration budget challenge fund provides support to local partnerships for schemes which incorporate a wide range of economic, environmental and social measures, including the business start-ups set out in the table. Schemes approved to date stand to receive some £1.7 billion in challenge fund support overall. Within the resources made available to each approved scheme, it is for partnerships to determine the support provided for business start-ups. This accords with our intention of encouraging partnerships to tackle regeneration in ways that are appropriate to their local needs and priorities. It is not therefore possible to estimate the sums provided for start-ups from the records held centrally or at Government offices.

*Challenge fund scheme under rounds 1 and 2 and the forecast number of business start-ups over the lifetime of each scheme are as follows:*

| *Scheme* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| A New Start for Netherfield | 20 |
| Action for Haslingden | 58 |
| All Change at Crewe | 28 |
| Altogether Wight | 436 |
| Amble Challenge Bid | 10 |
| Amble Regeneration | 4 |
| Appleby Heritage Centre | 48 |
| Ashfield Partnership | 820 |
| Backing Winners Business Support | 2,250 |
| Birmingham SRB | 4,861 |
| Birmingham: 1996–2003 | 135 |
| Blackbird Leys Redevelopment Initiative | 2 |
| Blackbird Leys/Temple Cowley Regeneration Partnership | 375 |
| Blackburn SRB | 606 |
| Blackpool Challenge Partnership | 525 |
| Blueprint for the Community (Bognor Regis) | 70 |
| Boston 2000 | 278 |
| Breaking the Cycle—From Dependence to Independence | 30 |
| Brighton Regeneration Partnership | 47 |
| Bristol 2020 | 67 |
| Brixham Business Development Project | 40 |
| Burton: A Better Future | 500 |
| Business 2000 | 673 |
| Canning Town | 500 |
| Central Stepney Regeneration Programme | 14 |
| Chart 99 | 30 |
| Cheetham and Broughton Initiative | 260 |
| CILNTEC Contributing to A World Class City | 930 |
| Cityvision's First Challenge Fund Bid for Hull | 62 |
| Coalfield Renaissance | 368 |
| Cobridge Community Renewal | 87 |
| Community Works | 307 |
| Communities First in Rural Somerset | 21 |
| Congleton Town and Industry Initiative | 51 |
| Connected Community for the 21st Century | 5 |
| Consett Southern Area | 200 |
| Corby Urban Village Restoration Scheme | 16 |
| Cornwall Developing in Partnership | 322 |
| County Durham SRB Partnership | 1,200 |
| Coventry and Warwickshire Partnerships Ltd. | 1,915 |
| Creating A Sustainable Black Country Urban Forest | 3 |
| Creekside Renewal: Building Bridges | 74 |
| Crime Reduction, Employment and Training Queen Parks Kilburn | 50 |
| Crosby/Scunthorpe Town Centre | 380 |
| Cross River Partnership 1995 | 97 |
| Dartford and Thames Gateway Foyer Project | 4 |
| Derby-DaubHill Deane: A Partnership for Prosperity | 277 |
| Derby's Rail Corridor—Opportunity for Global Change | 128 |
| Destination Bassetlaw | 785 |
| Developing Park Royal's Offer | 106 |
| Developing Stronger Communities (Barnsley) | 18 |
| Dewsbury: Fabric for the future | 232 |
| Dingle 2000 | 40 |
| East Durham Task Force | 500 |
| East Gateshead Regeneration | 30 |
| East Kent Initiative | 25 |
| Economic Development Support for New Business | 850 |
| Elland Initiative Partnership | 5 |
| Employment Creation in the Hawtec Area | 1,725 |
| Empowering Enterprise in Local Communities | 20 |
| Energise Eastbourne | 200 |

*Challenge fund scheme under rounds 1 and 2 and the forecast number of business start-ups over the lifetime of each scheme are as follows:*

| *Scheme* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Enhancing the Development of Ethnic Minorities | 17 |
| Enterprise 200 Norfolk and Waveney TEC | 1,050 |
| EPICC | 21 |
| Epicentre Strategy | 500 |
| Foundations for the Future | 530 |
| Gainsborough Regeneration | 60 |
| Going for Growth (Doncaster) | 1,310 |
| Goole "Foundation for the Furure" | 48 |
| Grays Regeneration | 7 |
| Greater Peterborough TEC | 480 |
| Green Street SRB | 300 |
| Greenwich 2000—Tourism development | 80 |
| Grimsby Regeneration Partnership | 80 |
| Grow Your Own Job and Business Diversification Rural Areas | 790 |
| Growing Together: Youth and Inner City Regen etc. (Sheffield) | 34 |
| Hamilton Quarter Initiative | 94 |
| Hardwick Community Partnership Regeneration Project | 36 |
| Haringey and Enfield Young People and Offenders Emp. | 24 |
| Hayes/west Drayton Corridor | 200 |
| Heart of Barrow | 250 |
| Hertfordshire Enterprise Alliance | 38 |
| Hertfordshire TEC | 720 |
| Huddersfield Challenge | 92 |
| Hulls First SRB Bid | 1,450 |
| Huyton | 53 |
| Improving Labour Market Flexibility | 35 |
| Initiative Burnley | 1,391 |
| Inner City Lifeline | 166 |
| Investing in Derby People | 262 |
| Ipswich West Dock regeneration | 90 |
| Jobs Guidance and Training for Central London Refugees | 70 |
| Keighley: A Local Strategy | 630 |
| Knowsley Industrial Park | 100 |
| Lairdside | 77 |
| Lea Bridge—A Gateway to Opportunity | 151 |
| Lea Valley (Poplar) Joint Venture Initiative | 2 |
| Leeds: Rebuilding Our Communities | 77 |
| Leek Regeneration: Securing a Future for a Market Town | 12 |
| Leicester's 1996–97 Challenge Fund Bid | 128 |
| London East Manufacturing Initiative | 15 |
| London East TEC Assist | 300 |
| Loughborough Town Partnership | 30 |
| Loughborough University of Tech: a Competiveness Catalyst | 6 |
| Luton Dunstable Partnership | 157 |
| Luton Dunstable Partnership–Sustainable Regeneration | 210 |
| Maidstone Town Centre Initiative | 10 |
| Manchester City Council | 1,388 |
| Manufacturing Excellence Programme | 10,000 |
| Medway Towns Campus Programme | 30 |
| Meeting the Challenge of Change | 319 |
| Meeting the Needs of Newham's Communities | 151 |
| Middlesborough Pride and Enterprise | 93 |
| Middleton Pride | 94 |
| Netherton SRB | 54 |
| Networking Business and the Community | 5 |
| New Business Growth Programme | 850 |
| New Business Growth (Phase Two) | 155 |
| New Dimensions for Stratford and Temple Mills | 181 |
| New Enterprise Strategy Teeside TEC | 1,500 |
| New Entrepreneurs Challenge Programme | 2,000 |
| Newark and Sherwood | 200 |
| Newhaven Economic Partnership | 107 |
| Newstead Regeneration Partnership | 4 |

*Challenge fund scheme under rounds 1 and 2 and the forecast number of business start-ups over the lifetime of each scheme are as follows:*

| *Scheme* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Newton 21 | 28 |
| North East Lincolnshire Challenge Bid | 90 |
| North End/north Lynn Regeneration | 20 |
| North Liverpool | 250 |
| North London TEC Support for New Business | 900 |
| North Shields Town Centre Regeneration Strategy | 359 |
| North Solihull Challenge | 86 |
| North West Leicestershire Coalfield Priority Area | 55 |
| North West London TEC | 540 |
| Northampton Partnership | 98 |
| Northern Wards | 127 |
| Nottingham—Capturing the Dynamics | 600 |
| Old Trafford Initiative | 340 |
| Older People—harnessing Potential and Providing Support | 16 |
| Oldham Partnership | 1,400 |
| Owton/rossmere Partnership | 86 |
| Park Royal Partnership Ltd. | 16 |
| Peckham Partnership | 60 |
| Plymouth 2000 | 684 |
| Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Partnership | 633 |
| Qualitec and Partners | 1,100 |
| Queens Park Challenge Fund | 32 |
| Raffles Community Development Partnership | 90 |
| Raising Educational Achievement and Employment in Downham | 5 |
| Regenerating Central Brighton | 55 |
| Regenerating King's Cross—Gateway to Europe | 296 |
| Regenerating Wembley Park | 80 |
| Regeneration in West Chester | 252 |
| Regeneration of Shields Road District Centre and Newcastles ea | 24 |
| Regeneration Through People | 1,000 |
| Releasing Local Potential | 127 |
| Remaking Chalkhill | 5 |
| Removing Barriers—Creating Opportunities Leeds | 777 |
| Renaissance of Blyth | 40 |
| Revitalising the City Fringe | 60 |
| Reviving the Heart of the West End | 64 |
| Rochdale Canalside | 120 |
| Roding Valley Partnership | 15 |
| Roding Valley Partnership | 15 |
| Roding Valley Partnership—Combined Bid L0026, L0027, L0028 | 7 |
| ROYDS | 50 |
| Runcorn on the Mersey | 105 |
| Salford Partnership | 770 |
| Sanderson Kayser Green Steelworks Etc Pilot (Sheffield) | 12 |
| Sandwell Regeneration Partnership | 372 |
| Sandwell: Capacity Building for Urban Regeneration | 78 |
| Selby Waterfront | 27 |
| SESKU | 55 |
| Shaping Rotherhams Future | 804 |
| Sheffield SRB Scheme | 1,233 |
| Sherburn Road Regeneration Initiative | 6 |
| Shropshire Business Support | 750 |
| Silwood Community Forum | 3 |
| Sleaford Pride | 45 |
| Small Business Village | 15 |
| SOLOTEC Greenwich and Lewisham Access Success Progress | 247 |
| South Denes Peninsula Regeneration (Great Yarmouth) | 15 |
| South Leytonstone Community Partnership | 200 |
| South Tyneside | 60 |
| South Tyneside Youth to the Future | 116 |
| South Wandle Regeneration Strategy | 23 |
| Southampton Regeneration Partnership | 206 |
| Southampton's Bid | 99 |
| Speke Garston | 141 |

*Challenge fund scheme under rounds 1 and 2 and the forecast number of business start-ups over the lifetime of each scheme are as follows:*

| *Scheme* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| St. Helens Southern Corridor | 150 |
| Stratford Regional Station | 4 |
| Sunderland Partnership | 633 |
| Support for New and Young Business in Staffordshire | 2,100 |
| Sustainable Regeneration in Barnsley | 1,400 |
| Swadlincote Woodlands | 180 |
| Sydenham Estate Somerset | 40 |
| Tame Valley Initiative | 586 |
| Thames Gateway Technology Centre | 90 |
| The Bakewell Project: A Window of Opportunity | 65 |
| The Battle for Hastings | 280 |
| The Brentford Partnership | 23 |
| The Cannock Gateway Project | 136 |
| The Castle Pride Initiative Scarborough | 52 |
| The Centre for Sustainable Living, Castle Hill, Dudley | 12 |
| The Eastwood/oakhill Challenge (Rotherham) | 6 |
| The Glossopdale Project | 155 |
| The Harwich Dimension (Tendring) | 60 |
| The Heart of Worthing | 30 |
| The Island and Royal Manor of Portland | 115 |
| The Lancashire Manufacturing Partnership | 1,000 |
| The Learning Community Initiative | 20 |
| The Limes Farm Regeneration Partnership | 12 |
| The Merseyside Learning Partnership | 38 |
| The Miles Platting, Ancoats and Northern Quarter (Srb2) Bid | 123 |
| The Ragworth Regeneration Project | 2 |
| The Regeneration of Central Accrington | 49 |
| The Villages Initiative | 3 |
| The York Regeneration Initiative | 29 |
| This Partnership Means Business | 2,070 |
| Toureast London | 19 |
| Turning the Tide—the Western Approaches | 114 |
| Turning the Tide Morecombe | 100 |
| Unlocking the Potential of Young People | 2 |
| Upper Lee Valley Regeneration | 288 |
| Urban Regeneration in Barton and Tredworth | 202 |
| Vauxhall/Lambeth Walk Initiative | 3 |
| Vauxhall: Crossing the Line | 25 |
| Vital Centres and Green Links | 15 |
| Wandle Corridor Regeneration Project | 20 |
| West Central Halifax A Bid for Prosperity | 161 |
| West Cornwall Initiative | 488 |
| West London TEC Economic Development for New Business | 850 |
| Whitehaven Development Company | 72 |
| Wigan SRB Partnership | 1,589 |
| Wisbech | 30 |
| Wolverhampton | 1,246 |
| Wolverton: youth, community and Business Symbiosis | 8 |
| Work and Learn | 15 |
| Wrens Nest Comprehensive Area Regeneration Scheme | 13 |

## Local Government Finance

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in England the *(a)* total standard spending allocated and *(b)* amount spent in each year since 1990–91. [11595]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I have placed the information in the Library of the House.

**Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the outcome of consultation on the local government finance settlement; and if he will make a statement. [12731]

**Mr. Gummer:** I am today laying before the House the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1996–97, the limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1996–97, the Special Grant Report (No. 16) and the National Parks Supplementary Grant Report (England) 1996–97. These reports establish the amounts of revenue support grant and non-domestic rates to be paid to local authorities in 1996–97, and the basis of their distribution; specify the amounts which are to be used as the basis of comparison for measuring increases in certain local authorities' budgets in 1996–97 for the purposes of capping, provide for a special standard spending assessment reduction grant to be paid to certain authorities for 1996–97 and specify the amount of supplementary grant to be paid to certain authorities in connection with national parks. Drafts of these reports were issued for consultation on 30 November 1995. Two hundred and fifty authorities made written representations and Ministers met 84 delegations from local councils.

I shall be sending copies of these reports to all authorities today, together with tables showing each authority's standard spending assessment and its entitlement to RSG, NDR and special grant. I have also placed copies of the reports and further information to be sent to the local authority associations in the Library and the Vote Office.

## Asylum Seekers (Benefits)

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to the oral statement of 11 January, *Official Report*, columns 331-45 (1) in what proportion he plans that local authorities should be reimbursed for the costs they face in respect of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 1996; [11627]

(2) what estimates he has made of the likely total costs of the assistance he plans should be given to local authorities in respect of costs arising from the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 1996. [11628]

**Mr. Curry:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), on 23 January to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), *Official Report*, column *204*.

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities, housing authorities and other bodies on the implementation of clause 9 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill; and if he will place copies of all representations on this matter in the Library. [12109]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* No such representations have been received.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the additional costs

or savings to housing authorities as a consequence of the implementation of clause 9 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [12108]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* The effect of the provisions in clause 9 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill will be to relieve local housing authorities of an obligation to provide housing assistance for persons from abroad who are not entitled to social security benefits. Information about the present cost of housing such persons is not collected centrally, but it is expected that worthwhile savings will result in the longer term.

### Council House Receipts

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to the ministerial reply of 22 January, *Official Report*, column 81, relating to sums received by local government from sale of dwellings, if he will estimate the total unused amounts remaining with receiving local authorities. [11894]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Department does not have information on how much of the receipts from the sale of local authority dwellings is still unused. The stock of usable receipts from all assets stood at £1.5 billion at 31 March 1995. About 90 per cent. of these receipts are held by authorities whose responsibilities include housing. Since 1990, local authorities have been required to set aside 75 per cent. of their capital receipts from the sale of council housing to repay debt, but it is not known how much of these amounts have not yet been used for debt repayment.

Any unused receipts can be invested and will generate interest for the authority.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11923]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** My Department and its agencies do not at present use the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol, but there are plans to do so in the near future.

### Tenanted Council House Transfers

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much expenditure was incurred by *(a)* the Housing Corporation and *(b)* the local authority in relation to each of the proposals for a transfer of tenanted council housing in Torquay to another landlord since 1988; and what were the numbers and percentages of tenants voting (i) for and (ii) against each proposal. [11714]

**Mr. Curry:** The available information is as follows.

In January 1989, Torbay borough council balloted tenants on its proposal for a large-scale voluntary transfer of 3,425 dwellings to two housing associations. Fifty-nine per cent. of the eligible tenants voted in the ballot, of whom 27 per cent. were in favour of transfer and 73 per cent. voted against.

In August 1995, 1,971 eligible tenants were balloted on three separate proposals by the Torbay tenants' housing association to take over property in Torquay, Paignton and Brixham under part IV of the Housing Act 1988. Details are in the table.

| *Area covered by bid* | *Eligible tenants* | *Number (percentage) Votes cast* | *Ballot result (expressed as percentage of eligible tenants)* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *Against* | *For* |
| Torquay | 986 | 902 (92) | 844 (86) | 58 (6) |
| Paignton[1] | 715 | 667 (93) | 588 (82) | 77 (11) |
| Brixham | 270 | 254 (94) | 239 (86) | 15 (6) |
| Total | 1,971 (100) | 1,823 (93) | 1,671 (85) | 150 (8) |

[1] Two tenants indicated an express wish to abstain.

The Housing Corporation's total grant spend on the Torbay tenants' housing association was £1,546,866. The local authority's costs amounted to £650,000.

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for a transfer of tenanted council properties to another landlord under the provisions of part IV of the Housing Act 1988 have been made since 1988; how many tenancies have been involved; and what was the outcome of the tenants' ballot in each case. [11713]

**Mr. Curry:** Since part IV of the Housing Act 1988 came into force in 1989, there have been nine applications for a transfer of property, seven of which progressed to a ballot of tenants. The available information on these applications is contained in the table.

| *Case name* | *Number of units* | *Ballot* | *Ballot result (per cent.)* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *For* | *Against* | *Did not vote* |
| Walterton and Elgin Community Homes | [1]918 | Yes | 59 | 23 | 18 |
| Westside House, LB Merton | [1]8 | Yes | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Holtspur, South Buckinghamshire DC | [1]55 | Yes | 66 | 22 | 12 |
| Peterborough individual | [1]1 | Yes | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Hayles, LB Southwark | [2]21 | Yes | 75 | 20 | 5 |
| Wheathampstead, St. Albans | 500 | Yes | [3]— | — | — |
| Torbay Tenants | 2,709 | Yes | 8 | 85 | 7 |
| Trowbridge Community Homes | 260 | No | — | — | — |
| Dawson Heights, LB Southwark | 297 | No | — | — | — |

[1] Number of properties transferred.

[2] 18 properties to transfer when the transfer takes place.

[3] Ballot result not available, but the majority voted against transfer.

**Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total cost to public funds to date of the tenants' advice scheme set up under part IV of the Housing Act 1988 with particular reference to *(a)* setting up costs incurred by his Department and the Housing Corporation, *(b)* publicity and promotional expenditure, *(c)* annual revenue expenditure incurred by the Housing Corporation in each year since 1988, *(d)* grants to tenants' organisations and others and *(e)* any other expenditure. [11715]

**Mr. Curry:** The Housing Corporation's total salary costs for tenants' choice activities between 1988–89 and 1994–95 amounted to £2,001,913. Since the scheme's introduction in 1989, the Housing Corporation total grant spend in support of tenants' choice cases has been £3,826,853. The further information requested is not available.

### Charities (Funding)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he issues to local authorities in respect of the provision of public funds to charities, with special reference to charities for the aged. [11647]

**Sir Paul Beresford** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* None.

### Local Government Staff (Redundancy Compensation)

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to amend part IV of the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994; and if he will make a statement; [11971]

(2) how many representations his Department has received in the last 18 months on the operation part IV of the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994; and if he will make a statement. [11972]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Part IV of the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994 came into force on 28 December 1994 and gave local authorities in England and Wales discretionary powers to make compensatory payments by 28 June 1995 to former employees who had their pensions reduced as a consequence of a Court of Appeal judgment in Allsop *v.* North Tyneside metropolitan borough council. My right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce further provisions. Thirty-six items of correspondence were received while part IV of the regulations was in force; in addition, 35 items were received prior to the provisions coming into force, and since 29 June 1995.

### European Funding

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European LIFE programme and its predecessor programmes over the last available five years. [11650]

**Mr. Clappison:** Information on the distribution of monies from the EC LIFE fund and its predecessors is available for the last four years only. This is set out, indicating the standard statistical region where the organisation running each project is based.

| | *1992* | | *1993* | | *1994* | | *1995* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Value in ECUS* | *Value in pounds*[1] | *Value in ECUS* | *Value in pounds* | *Value in ECUS* | *Value in pounds* | *Value in ECUS* | *Value in pounds* |
| South West | 961,000 | 768,800 | 1,162,743 | 930,194 | 240,608 | 192,486 | 176,720 | 141,376 |
| South East | 643,000 | 514,400 | 5,015,790 | 4,012,632 | 4,113,498 | 3,290,798 | 4,586,232 | 3,668,985 |
| East Anglia | 1,771,900 | 1,417,520 | 0 | 0 | 300,000 | 240,000 | 0 | 0 |
| West Midlands | 159,048 | 127,238 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| East Midlands | 1,200,000 | 960,000 | 0 | 0 | 1,200,414 | 960,331 | 345,846 | 276,676 |
| North West | 1,720,000 | 1,376,000 | 0 | 0 | 1,452,868 | 1,162,294 | 2,296,450 | 1,837,160 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 0 | 0 | 517,500 | 414,000 | 1,397,801 | 1,118,240 | 503,700 | 402,960 |
| North | 1,868,500 | 1,494,000 | 611,354 | 489,083 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wales | 0 | 0 | 647,283 | 517,826 | 363,408 | 290,726 | 796,000 | 636,800 |
| Scotland | 1,071,500 | 857,200 | 575,151 | 460,120 | 987,022 | 789,617 | 280,500 | 224,400 |
| Northern Ireland | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 439,232 | 351,385 | 0 | 0 |
| UK total | 9,394,948 | 7,515,158 | 8,529,821 | 6,823,855 | 1,049,485 | 8,395,877 | 8,985,448 | 7,188,357 |

[1] To take account of currency fluctuations, £1 is considered to be equal to 1.2 ecu.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European LIFE programme under the current financial perspectives. [11651]

**Mr. Clappison:** There is no allocation of LIFE funds to any member state or region within the European Union. Funds were distributed to the highest quality proposals wherever they may come from, and are paid directly by the EC Commission to the successful applicant.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pound sterling by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European SAVE programme and its predecessor programmes over the last available five years. [11664]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** This information is not centrally available, as levels of funding for specific projects supported under the SAVE programme are a contractual matter between the European Commission and those carrying out each project.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pound sterling by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European SAVE programme under the current financial perspectives. [11665]

**Mr. Jones:** Payments from European Union expenditure programmes are not allocated to member states in the legislation supporting the programmes.

### Rents-to-mortgages Scheme

**Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the take-up of the rents-to-mortgages scheme in 1996. [11848]

**Mr. Clappison:** Returns so far received from local authorities for the period to 30 September 1995 report that 15 sales have already been completed, and around 50 more applications have been accepted which may translate into sales.

### Mine Safety

**Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action has been taken in the British coal industry to ensure that the Safety Committee Regulations 1977 are in place, with particular reference to the provision of information relevant to the maintenance of safety in the mine. [11484]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Health and Safety Commission issued a consultative document in October 1995 on proposed regulations concerning employers' duties to consult their employees about health and safety matters in undertakings where there is no recognised trade union. These regulations would apply to coal mines but they would also extend the provisions of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977, as amended by the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992, to coal mines where there are recognised trade unions.

### Rural Charter

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to launch the rural charter initiative promised in his White Paper "Rural England". [12337]

**Mr. Clappison:** The rural charter initiative, including the rural services checklist, was launched on 1 November 1995. I have arranged for a copy of the checklist to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

### Rural Planning Guidance

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the revised rural planning guidance note PPG7. [12338]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** We intend to issue a draft revision of planning policy guidance note 7, "The Countryside and the Rural Economy", later this year. This will fulfil a commitment made in the rural White Paper.

### Planning (Rural Business Use)

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation he has carried out on the introduction of a new rural business use class within the planning system; and if he will make a statement. [12339]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** My officials are currently preparing a public consultation paper on the possible introduction of a new rural business use class, as promised in the rural White Paper, Cm 3016. We hope to issue it in the spring.

### Business Rate Relief Scheme

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his consultative document on the new business rate relief scheme proposed in the White Paper "Rural England", and by what date comments on it will be expected. [12340]

**Mr. Clappison:** We expect to publish a consultation paper before Easter, and to allow six weeks for comments.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Unemployment Benefit (Women)

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women workers claimed unemployment benefit *(a)* successfully and *(b)* unsuccessfully while their partners remained in work in each of the last 10 years. [9937]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not available. Unemployment benefit is a personal benefit. Questions relating to the claimant's partner are asked only if an adult dependency addition is being claimed.

### Social Fund

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the expenditure in 1995 of providing *(a)* maternity payments, *(b)* funeral expenses and *(c)* cold weather payments for the last three years expressed in (1) cash terms, (2) cash terms at 1992–93 prices and (3) as a percentage of total social security expenditure, (i) in total, (ii) by region and (iii) by his Department's offices. [9485]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information requested by region and district office could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

| | *Cash terms (£ million)* | *1992–93 prices (£ million)* | *Percentage of total social security benefit expenditure per cent.* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Great Britain expenditure April—December 1995* | | | |
| Maternity payments | 16.21 | 15.05 | See note 2 |
| Funeral payments | 35.61 | 33.06 | See note 2 |
| Cold weather payments | 32.00 (estimate) | 29.70 | see note 2 |
| *Great Britain expenditure 1994–95* | | | |
| Maternity payments | 22.24 | 21.21 | 0.03 |
| Funeral payments | 62.83 | 59.92 | 0.07 |
| Cold weather payments | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.00 |

| | Cash terms (£ million) | 1992–93 prices (£ million) | Percentage of total social security benefit expenditure per cent. |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Great Britain expenditure 1993–94* | | | |
| Maternity payments | 23.27 | 22.61 | 0.03 |
| Funeral payments | 62.46 | 60.69 | 0.08 |
| Cold weather payments | 12.40 | 12.05 | 0.02 |
| *Great Britain experience 1992–93* | | | |
| Maternity payments | 23.07 | 23.07 | 0.03 |
| Funeral payments | 49.45 | 49.45 | 0.07 |
| Cold weather payments | 15.00 | 15.00 | 0.02 |

1. The percentage of total Social Security benefits expenditure has been calculated by reference to the figures in the Social Security Departmental Report for 1995. They include additional local authority expenditure on Housing Benefit, Community Charge Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

2. Figures for total benefit expenditure figures for 1995–96 are not yet available; a reliable comparison, based on planned expenditure, for a part year cannot be made.

3. Figures for total benefit expenditure figures for 1994–95 are estimated outturn.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the total social fund expenditure, *(b)* income from re-paid grants for each year since 1988, *(c)* the proportion of total income required for administration and *(d)* the number of loans and grants paid each year. [11672]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information relating to total social fund expenditure, recoveries from pre-paid awards, and the number of loans and grants awarded for year since 1988 is contained in the Secretary of State's annual reports on the social fund, copies of which are available in the Library.

For information on administration costs since 1988, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *748-50*.

## Social Security

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the proposal to limit housing benefit for single people under 25 years to the average cost of local shared accommodation; [8506]

(2) what is his estimate of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the freeze in *(a)* lone parent premium and *(b)* one parent benefit in April 1996; [8518]

(3) what estimate he has made of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the real increase in April 1996 in non-dependant deductions for housing costs; how many people he estimates will be affected in each of these years; and if he will make a statement setting out the reasons for the increase; [8504]

(4) what estimate he has made of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the change in the family credit rules from July 1996 regarding awards when the youngest child has left school; [8520]

(5) what is his estimate of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the proposal to double the minimum payment of child maintenance under the Child Support Act from April 1996; [8507]

(6) what estimate he has made of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the proposal to pay housing benefit in arrears rather than in advance; [8509]

(7) how the estimate given in his uprating statement on 29 November of £500 million in benefit savings in 1996–97 and over £1 billion savings in 1998 was calculated, itemising savings for each measure he is introducing. [8517]

**Mr. Burt:** Reductions in expenditure from measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. in the social security statement on 29 November, *Official Report*, column 1212–15 are set out in the table.

Overall figures differ from those underlying the statement following the announcement on benefits for asylum seekers on 11 January and other revisions to estimates in some areas. A number of measures are subject to the outcome of consultation and the passage of legislation. The number of cases affected by the changes to non-dependant deduction rates is, in 1996–97, 55,000 on income support, 390,000 on housing benefit and 475,000 on council tax benefit, and, in 1997–98, 55,000 on income support, 390,000 on housing benefit and 485,000 on council tax benefit.

*£ million, rounded to the nearest £5 million*

| Measure | 1996–97 | 1997–98 | 1998–99 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Asylum seekers and persons from abroad | –145 | –295 | –290 |
| Additional anti-fraud measures | –120 | –235 | –300 |
| Housing Benefit—changes for under 25s | –15 | –65 | –70 |
| Housing Benefit—effect of above RPI increase in non-dependent deductions | –30 | –35 | –35 |
| Housing Benefit—change in payment arrangements | –105 | –120 | –75 |
| One Parent Benefit—no cash increase in April 1996 | –5 | –5 | –5 |
| Lone Parent Premium—no cash increase in April 1996 | –10 | –10 | –10 |
| Child Support—increase in minimum maintenance | –10 | –10 | –15 |
| Disability Living Allowance—improving quality and level of information to decision-makers | –20 | –95 | –165 |
| Disability Living Allowance—mobility component for hospital in-patients | –30 | –40 | –45 |
| Industrial Injuries Benefit—changes to reduced earnings allowance | –25 | –35 | –35 |

*£ million, rounded to the nearest £5 million*

| *Measure* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family Credit—change in rules where youngest child has left school | –5 | –10 | –10 |
| Total | –520 | –955 | –1,055 |

1. Numbers affected are rounded to the nearest 5,000.
2. Figures cannot be aggregated due to overlapping benefit entitlement.
3. Some of the numbers affected (about 5,000 for each benefit in each year) will be gainers from the changes to income thresholds.

### Pensioners' Incomes

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioners are identified as receiving income from savings; and what is the mean and median amount received for the latest year for which figures are available. [10200]

**Mr. Heald:** The latest available information is for 1993, when it is estimated that 73 per cent. of pensioner units were receiving income from savings. The mean amount received in 1993 is estimated to be £28.40 per week and the median is estimated at £4.90.

*Notes:*

1. Source: Analysis of the 1993 family expenditure survey.
2. Amounts quoted are at July 1993 prices.
3. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age or a couple where the husband, or head, is over state pension age.

### Pensioners' Benefits

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he has taken and plans to take to improve income support and housing benefit take-up by pensioners. [10208]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The Government's role is to ensure that help is there for those who need it and that people are in a position to make informed choices on whether to claim benefit. To this end, the Department is involved in a wide range of national and local initiatives to ensure that accurate and accessible information is available. These are often undertaken in conjunction with local interest and advice groups.

Further, local authorities have a statutory duty to publicise housing benefit.

### Industrial Injuries

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to implement the recommendations of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on hand arm vibration syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [10180]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** We are currently considering the complex practical and administrative issues raised by the recommendations made by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council in its report "Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome" (Cm 2844) and expect to announce a response shortly.

### Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what guidance is being given to adjudication officers in the period when the guidance on myalgic encephalomyelitis is being re-drafted; [10767]

(2) what monitoring of the decisions of adjudication officers in respect of benefit claims made by people affected by myalgic encephalomyelitis is being undertaken by his Department. [10766]

**Mr. Burt:** Advice to adjudication officers on myalgic encephalomyelitis is contained in the disability handbook. This is currently being redrafted following discussions with the ME Association. In the meantime, adjudication officers are using existing guidance, but have been advised that they must consider all the evidence in the case to support their decision. Monitoring is undertaken on a random basis. Cases selected which involve myalgic encephalomyelitis are checked to ensure adjudication officers have taken this advice into account.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the number of claims made for *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* the disability living allowance by claimants who suffer from myalgic encephalomyelitis since the inception of the scheme; [10832]

(2) how many claims for *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* disability living allowance made by claimants who suffer from myalgic encephalomyelitis have been refused in each month since the inception of each scheme. [10765]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not available.

### Cold Weather Payments

**Ms Hodge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the criteria for determining the temperature at which cold weather payments are triggered *(a)* generally, *(b)* in the Barking constituency and *(c)* in the Dagenham constituency; and what plans he has to review these criteria. [11476]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The criteria for determining cold weather payment trigger temperatures are the same throughout the country: when the average temperature is, or is forecast to be, 0°C (freezing point) or below over any seven consecutive day period. We consider this to be a reasonable indication of a sustained period of very cold weather not normally expected to occur in the majority of British winters. The weather stations used for Barking are Heathrow and Stanstead. Dagenham is served solely by Stanstead.

There are no plans for major changes to the scheme.

**Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many times the Tiree monitoring station has triggered the system of cold weather payments since it was first designated for such purposes. [10679]

**Mr. Evans:** Since 1 November 1991, when Tiree was first used in the cold weather payment scheme, no triggers have occurred.

### Incapacity Benefit

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time between the lodging of an appeal to a tribunal and a decision being reached by a tribunal for people appealing against a decision relating to the all-work medical test for incapacity benefit. [11196]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Housing Benefits

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of expenditure in Scotland in 1995–96 and 1996–97 on *(a)* income support for mortgage interest payments and *(b)* housing benefit. [11141]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is set out in the table.

| | *Projected expenditure in Scotland* £ *million* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *1995–96* | *1996–97* |
| Income Support mortgage interest payments | 35 | 35 |
| Housing Benefit | 890 | 980 |

1. The income support mortgage interest figures for Scotland for 1995–96 and 1996–97 have been derived by applying the same percentage of estimated expenditure for Scotland in 1994–95 to projected expenditure for Great Britain in 1995–96 and 1996–97.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

### Benefit Fraud

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to improve the sharing of information and promotion of best practice by Government agencies and Departments in tackling organised benefit fraud. [9980]

**Mr. Heald:** Where more than one investigative body is engaged in the detection of organised fraud offences being perpetrated by the same offenders, it is our practice that those bodies work together where it is the most effective way of pursuing an investigation. In this context, information is shared whenever it is appropriate to do so.

Benefits Agency organised fraud investigators employed exclusively to tackle organised fraud are involved with Home Office initiatives such as the joint action group and the National Criminal Investigation Service which have been specifically set up to share information about serious fraud and discuss the best way of combatting this threat across different agencies. This multi-agency approach ensures that the most efficient and effective use of resources is employed, and best practices adopted.

### Welfare Provision

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what comparisons of the British welfare state provision he has made with those of Singapore; and if he will make a statement. [11521]

**Mr. Lilley:** I regularly consider international experience of alternative state welfare systems but these are not always directly transferable to the particular circumstances of the UK. I have not studied the Singapore system in detail but I note that the Singapore Government have control over the bulk of money people are required to invest for their pensions and other welfare benefits.

The International Monetary Fund recently reported that the average annual return on the state-run Singapore scheme since 1980 has been only 2 per cent. more than inflation. This contrasts with British pension funds which have yielded almost 10 per cent. more than inflation, and now stands at almost £600 billion.

### Benefit Statistics

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the take up level of *(a)* income support and *(b)* housing benefit for entitled persons in the (i) 60 to 65, (ii) 65 to 70, (iii) 70 to 75 and (iv) over 75 years of age groups; and if he will make a statement. [11522]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not readily available and, where obtainable, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Regulations

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the consultations that have taken place with welfare and refugee organisations since October 1995 concerning the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) draft Regulations. [11523]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Representations from many welfare and refugee organisations were received by the Social Security Advisory Committee during the course of its consultation exercise. The Committee's report to the Secretary of State for Social Security was approved on 8 December 1995 and subsequently published as part of Command Paper Cm. 3062. Appendix 1 of the report contains a list of the representations received.

### State Pensions

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the average level of state pension, the cost per head of the total population and the proportion of total Government expenditure required for state pensions for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Italy, *(d)* the Netherlands, *(e)* Singapore, *(f)* Japan, *(g)* Australia and *(h)* New Zealand. [11524]

**Mr. Heald:** Comparable information on state pensions is not available in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on retirement pensions in EU member states is contained in the "MISSOC" tables, "Social Protection in the Member States of the Community", published by the European Commission, and in the Eurostat publication "Digest of statistics on social protection in Europe Volume 1: Old Age." Information on old-age pensions in Australia may be found in comparative tables of social security schemes, published

by the Council of Europe. Information about state pensions in Japan and New Zealand and old-age benefits in Singapore are in "Social Security Programs Throughout the World", published by Social Security Administration, USA.

Copies of the publications referred to above are in the Library.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the cash level of the state pension for each year since 1975 and its value in 1975 prices; and if he will estimate the value since 1980 if the rate had been linked to earnings. [11525]

**Mr. Heald:** The available information is in the table.

*£ per week*

| | *Basic rates of retirement pension* | | *Value of RP at April 1975 prices* | | *Rate of RP if uprated by earnings since November 1979* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Single* | *Couple* | *Single* | *Couple* | *Single* | *Couple* |
| April 1975 | 11.60 | 18.50 | 11.60 | 18.50 | — | — |
| November 1975 | 13.30 | 21.20 | 11.91 | 18.98 | — | — |
| November 1976 | 15.30 | 24.50 | 11.91 | 19.08 | — | — |
| November 1977 | 17.50 | 28.00 | 12.06 | 19.29 | — | — |
| November 1978 | 19.50 | 31.20 | 12.43 | 19.89 | — | — |
| November 1979 | 23.30 | 37.30 | 12.65 | 20.26 | 23.30 | 37.30 |
| November 1980 | 27.15 | 43.45 | 12.79 | 20.46 | 27.60 | 44.20 |
| November 1981 | 29.60 | 47.35 | 12.45 | 19.92 | 30.75 | 49.25 |
| November 1982 | 32.85 | 52.55 | 13.01 | 20.80 | 33.35 | 53.40 |
| November 1983 | 34.05 | 54.50 | 12.86 | 20.58 | 36.25 | 58.05 |
| November 1984 | 35.80 | 57.30 | 12.88 | 20.62 | 38.05 | 60.95 |
| November 1985 | 38.30 | 61.30 | 13.07 | 20.91 | 41.35 | 66.25 |
| July 1986 | 38.70 | 61.95 | 12.99 | 20.79 | 43.15 | 69.15 |
| April 1987 | 39.50 | 63.25 | 12.70 | 20.33 | 45.55 | 73.00 |
| April 1988 | 41.15 | 65.90 | 12.73 | 20.38 | 49.10 | 78.70 |
| April 1989 | 43.60 | 69.80 | 12.48 | 19.98 | 53.45 | 85.70 |
| April 1990 | 46.90 | 75.10 | 12.27 | 19.65 | 58.65 | 94.05 |
| April 1991 | 52.00 | 83.25 | 12.79 | 20.47 | 64.20 | 102.95 |
| April 1992 | 54.15 | 86.70 | 12.77 | 20.44 | 69.25 | 111.05 |
| April 1993 | 56.10 | 89.80 | 13.06 | 20.90 | 72.65 | 116.50 |
| April 1994 | 57.60 | 92.10 | 13.07 | 20.90 | 74.75 | 119.85 |
| April 1995 | 58.85 | 94.10 | 12.93 | 20.67 | 77.75 | 124.65 |
| April 1996 | 61.15 | 97.75 | — | — | 80.25 | 128.65 |

1. The values of RP uprated by earnings have been rounded to the nearest 5 pence.
2. The retail price index (all items), and the average earnings index (Whole economy unadjusted) as published by the central statistical office
3. It is not yet possible to provide a figure for the April 1996 RP rates at 1975 levels.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the average level of pension expectation for holders of SERPS since 1978 in cash terms and at 1978 prices. [11547]

**Mr. Heald:** The amount of additional pension depends on the number of years a person has contributed to SERPS and their earnings in each year. The table shows entitlement to additional pension for men on average male earnings and women on average female earnings who have contributed to SERPS in each year since 1978–79 and who reached pension age in the year shown in the left-hand column.

*Additional Pension for a person on average earnings since 1978–79*

*£ per week*

| *Pension age reached in* | *At award* | | *At 1995–96 prices* | | *At November 1978 prices* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Men* | *Women* | *Men* | *Women* | *Men* | *Women* |
| 1991–92 | 42.30 | 25.30 | 47.40 | 28.40 | 16.30 | 9.80 |
| 1992–93 | 49.80 | 29.90 | 53.70 | 32.20 | 18.50 | 11.10 |
| 1993–94 | 56.90 | 34.50 | 59.20 | 35.90 | 20.40 | 12.40 |
| 1994–95 | 63.70 | 38.90 | 65.10 | 39.70 | 22.40 | 13.70 |
| 1995–96 | 69.70 | 42.80 | 69.70 | 42.80 | 24.00 | 14.80 |

All figures are rounded to the nearest ten pence

## National Insurance

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each year since 1966 *(a)* the total number of national insurance numbers in the United Kingdom, *(b)* the new numbers issued and *(c)* the total taken out of use; and if he will make a statement on the relation of *(a)* to *(c)* to the total number of people (i) working and (ii) potentially available for work. [11546]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

| *Tax year* | *Total number of National Insurance Numbers in the United Kingdom* | *Total number of new National Insurance Numbers issued* |
|---|---|---|
| 1965–66 | 35,885,700 | — |
| 1966–67 | 36,947,100 | 1,061,400 |
| 1967–68 | 37,725,600 | 778,500 |
| 1968–69 | 38,849,200 | 1,123,600 |
| 1969–70 | 39,766,000 | 916,800 |
| 1970–71 | 40,594,300 | 828,300 |
| 1971–72 | 41,626,500 | 1,032,200 |
| 1972–73 | 42,260,300 | 633,800 |
| 1973–74 | 42,568,800 | 308,500 |
| 1974–75 | 43,650,700 | 1,081,900 |
| 1975–76 | 44,858,700 | 1,208,000 |

| Tax year | Total number of National Insurance Numbers in the United Kingdom | Total number of new National Insurance Numbers issued |
|---|---|---|
| 1976–77 | 46,351,000 | 1,492,300 |
| 1977–78 | 47,401,100 | 1,050,100 |
| 1978–79 | 48,453,200 | 1,052,100 |
| 1979–80 | 49,547,100 | 1,093,900 |
| 1980–81 | 50,607,200 | 1,060,100 |
| 1981–82 | 51,634,600 | 1,027,400 |
| 1982–83 | 52,647,700 | 1,013,100 |
| 1983–84 | 53,655,600 | 1,007,900 |
| 1984–85 | 54,670,000 | 1,014,400 |
| 1985–86 | 55,682,000 | 1,012,000 |
| 1986–87 | 56,708,200 | 1,026,200 |
| 1987–88 | 57,722,900 | 1,014,700 |
| 1988–89 | 58,709,400 | 986,500 |
| 1989–90 | 59,659,800 | 950,400 |
| 1990–91 | 60,573,400 | 913,600 |
| 1991–92 | 61,420,100 | 846,700 |
| 1992–93 | 62,223,300 | 803,200 |
| 1993–94 | 63,020,900 | 797,600 |
| 1994–95 | 63,850,100 | 829,200 |

*Source:*

1 per cent. sample of the National Insurance Recording System (NIRS).

### EU Residents (Benefit Entitlement)

**Mr. Churchill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make an estimate of the saving to public funds of the introduction of a five-year residency rule for benefit entitlement in the case of citizens of countries outside the European economic area seeking to live in the United Kingdom. [12206]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** There is insufficient information upon which to base a reasonable estimate.

### Child Care

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the figures for the take-up in Wales, and the United Kingdom as a whole, of the child care disregard for families in receipt of housing benefit and family credit since its introduction; if he will provide the same figures for single parent families only; and if he will make a statement about what promotional activity has been undertaken to inform the public of the increase in the child care disregard announced in the Budget. [12402]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Between 4 October 1994 and 30 September 1995, approximately 28,000 families in Great Britain benefited from the child care disregard in family credit. As at 30 September 1995, about 21,000 families in Great Britain, of whom 20,000 were lone parents, were receiving help, including about 1,000 families in Wales. Information on families receiving the help through housing benefit will not be available until later this year and take-up estimates are not available for any benefit. Figures for Northern Ireland fall within the remit of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The further increase in the disregard announced in the Budget was publicised through a press release in November 1995. Further publicity measures are still under consideration but will include references in leaflets, the child benefit order book and in a newspaper covering work, benefit and training issues in an easy-to-read form, produced by the Department and distributed by the Benefits Agency and Employment Services.

*Source:*

Five per cent. sample of family credit awards between 4 October 1994 and 30 September 1995; and as at 30 September 1995.

### Disabled People (Access)

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment he has made of the accessibility of Benefits Agency offices to disabled people; what percentage remain inaccessible to disabled people in terms of *(a)* physical and *(b)* sensory disability; and if he will make a statement; [9284]

(2) how he assesses the accessibility of offices other than those of the Benefits Agency for which he is responsible to disabled people; what percentage remains inaccessible to disabled people in terms of *(a)* physical and *(b)* sensory disability; and if he will make a statement. [9251]

**Mr. Burt:** This is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 26 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking what assessment he has made of the accessibility of Benefits Agency offices to disabled people; and how he assesses the accessibility of offices other than those of the Benefits Agency (BA) for which he is responsible to disabled people; what percentage remain inaccessible to disabled people in terms of (a) physical and (b) sensory disability; and if he will make a statement.

The BA shares its public outlets with the Child Support Agency and War Pensions Agency. The Contributions Agency has public access at only 4 of its independent sites and the Independent Tribunal Service has 44 sites with public access. Caller enquiries relating to the BA, Contributions Agency, Child Support Agency and War Pensions Agency are generally all handled at offices operated by the BA.

Annexe A shows the percentage of offices that we consider are accessible to physically disabled persons.

The accessibility of buildings is assessed on a quarterly basis. The data collated includes details on whether the building is provided with level access, a ramp or lift to avoid steps or stairways, if it has a loop-aid or minicom system to assist those with hearing difficulties and if it has any special features to assist blind or partially sighted visitors. Disabled access is automatically considered for all new buildings and major refurbishments on existing buildings.

The provision of Loop Systems to aid the hard of hearing and special signs for the blind and partially sighted are a standard design consideration in major refurbishment or new buildings. Sixty seven percent of existing buildings have had loop-aid systems installed.

Offices which remain inaccessible are treated as a priority for capital funding, providing modification of the building is technically possible.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

*Annexe A*

| *Agency* | *Number with flat/ramped access* | *Number without flat/ramped access* |
|---|---|---|
| Benefits agency (including Child Support, Contributions and War Pensions Agency) | 614 (84 per cent.) | 117 (16 per cent.) |
| Contributions agency | 4 (100 per cent.) | 0 |
| Independent tribunal service | 38 (86 per cent.) | 6 (14 per cent.) |

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

### Widows' Pensions

**Mrs. Ann Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women in receipt of a widow's pension have had their income entitlement reassessed in the last six months because of miscalculations by his Department relating to the former husband having contracted out of his state pension arrangements. [12117]

**Mr. Heald:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Ann Taylor dated 26 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many women in receipt of a Widows Pension (WP) have had their income entitlement reassessed in the last six months because of miscalculations by his Department relating to the former husband having contracted out of his state pension arrangements.

All new awards of WP from October 1995 have been assessed correctly following a change to the computer system. The Benefits Agency is in the process of examining all WP cases that existed prior to October 1995. Until this exercise has been completed figures will not be available. Completion is due by the end of March 1996.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish *(a)* the current cost of providing social security payments to asylum seekers broken down by type of benefit, numbers of claimants and regional location and *(b)* any guidance or procedures issued which are currently in force on social security payments of any kind to asylum seekers. [12106]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. George Howarth, dated 26 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will publish *(a)* the current cost of providing social security payments to asylum seekers broken down by type of benefit, numbers of claimants and regional location and *(b)* any guidance or procedures issued which are currently in force on social security payments of any kind to asylum seekers.

The information is not available in the format requested. In May 1994, the most recent date for which complete information is available, expenditure on Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for asylum seekers was an estimated £4.7 million per week in total: this comprised £2.4 million Income Support, £2.2 million Housing Benefit and £0.1 million Council Tax Benefit. There were just over 42,000 claims to Income Support from Asylum Seekers, of which 28,000 were also claiming Housing Benefit and 11,000 claiming Council Tax Benefit. Regional figures and information on other benefits is unavailable.

Guidance on asylum seekers is available in the Adjudication Officer's Guide paragraphs 28751–28900. The Handbook "Persons from abroad for Income Support staff" provides procedural guidance for BA staff. These are available in the Library.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

## WALES

### NHS Trusts

**Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish information on the management costs of NHS trusts in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [6023]

**Mr. Richards** *[pursuant to his reply 12 December 1995]:* Management cost savings targets for 1996–97 amounting to £3.25 million will be issued today to health authorities and NHS trusts in Wales. This completes the transfer of £12.5 million to direct patient services which was announced in "Caring for the Future". A copy of the letter (DGM(96)10) has been placed in the Library of the House.

There are currently 29 NHS trusts in Wales. My right hon. Friend and I have received applications from the last three directly-managed-units in Wales to become NHS trusts from April 1996. Public consultation on these three applications ended on 24 December 1995.

Taking full account of the many representations received, and of the individual merits of each case, my right hon. Friend has decided to approve the applications.

Merthyr and Cynon Valley health unit will become the North Glamorgan NHS trust on 26 February 1996. The Glan Hafren NHS trust and Bridgend and district NJS trust will both be dissolved on 31 March 1996 and immediately re-established incorporating the Rhymney Valley health unit and Hensol health unit respectively. All three new trusts will become operational on 1 April.

The orders giving effect to these decisions have been signed today. We will announce shortly the details on the chairman and non-executive directors of the new North Glamorgan NHS trust.

Today's announcement confirms that, from 1 April 1996, all acute, community health, mental health and ambulance services in Wales will be delivered by NHS trusts. This will be a further stimulus to improving efficiency in the NHS in Wales.

### Hospital Patients

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average number of patients per hospital bed for each major specialty in each year since 1989–90; and what was the percentage change over the entire period. [10784]

**Mr. Richards:** The information, which relates to NHS hospitals in Wales, is given in the following table. Only acute specialities where there were in-patient cases in both 1989–90 and 1994–95 have been included.

*Number of in-patient cases per average daily available bed*

| | 1989–90 | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | Percentage change 1989–90 to 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General surgery | 43.0 | 42.8 | 44.8 | 47.0 | 50.0 | 52.1 | 21 |
| Urology | 46.0 | 45.5 | 49.0 | 49.9 | 51.4 | 55.5 | 21 |
| Trauma and orthopaedic | 30.6 | 31.5 | 34.1 | 35.8 | 35.6 | 37.6 | 23 |
| Ear, nose and throat | 67.5 | 66.2 | 71.5 | 77.4 | 80.6 | 78.6 | 16 |
| Ophthalmology | 51.5 | 53.8 | 57.9 | 64.6 | 67.0 | 72.5 | 41 |
| Oral surgery | 92.8 | 92.1 | 87.0 | 87.9 | 86.4 | 38.7 | –4 |
| Neurosurgery | 26.7 | 23.4 | 26.2 | 23.6 | 23.4 | 26.6 | 0 |
| Plastic surgery | 39.8 | 36.4 | 35.9 | 36.0 | 40.5 | 29.4 | –26 |
| Burns surgery | 13.5 | 15.2 | 13.4 | 15.1 | 16.3 | 3.5 | –74 |
| Cardiac surgery | 21.5 | 25.4 | 27.3 | 25.7 | 22.9 | 25.1 | 17 |
| Thoracic surgery | 25.4 | 25.4 | 22.9 | 21.2 | 19.9 | 21.0 | –17 |
| Paediatric surgery | 61.6 | 56.3 | 52.9 | 54.2 | 56.8 | 49.9 | –19 |
| Anaesthetics | 14.9 | 11.7 | 17.5 | 18.9 | 11.5 | 16.0 | 7 |
| General medicine | 36.9 | 39.6 | 42.2 | 43.6 | 45.7 | 47.0 | 27 |
| Gastroenterology | 22.2 | — | — | 46.8 | 538.9 | 146.5 | 560 |
| Haematology (clinical) | 51.9 | 51.7 | 51.1 | 50.3 | 43.8 | 46.1 | –11 |
| Palliative medicine | 21.2 | 16.0 | 19.6 | 18.7 | 19.5 | 18.7 | –12 |
| Cardiology | 49.0 | 54.1 | 58.5 | 54.4 | 51.9 | 54.7 | 12 |
| Dermatology | 15.8 | 17.8 | 19.7 | 18.0 | 18.6 | 20.7 | 31 |
| Thoracic medicine | 31.6 | 32.2 | 40.3 | 43.4 | 46.4 | 48.8 | 54 |
| Genito urinary medicine | 1.8 | 10.2 | 9.5 | 15.0 | 14.8 | 12.5 | 594 |
| Nephrology | 41.8 | 38.7 | 37.6 | 41.0 | 41.4 | 47.4 | 13 |
| Medical oncology | 13.1 | 14.1 | — | — | 147.5 | 87.2 | 566 |
| Spinal injuries | 8.9 | 7.6 | 5.5 | 7.0 | 6.7 | 6.0 | –33 |
| Other neurology | 21.5 | 21.8 | 24.4 | 24.4 | 22.8 | 23.1 | 7 |
| Rheumatology | 17.5 | 15.9 | 21.6 | 23.1 | 26.2 | 24.6 | 41 |
| Paediatrics | 56.0 | 59.0 | 63.9 | 64.4 | 68.5 | 74.0 | 32 |
| Gynaecology | 70.1 | 70.0 | 73.0 | 73.4 | 74.2 | 70.5 | 0 |
| GP other | 16.1 | 16.0 | 17.0 | 16.9 | 16.7 | 16.8 | 4 |
| Radiotherapy | 29.5 | 28.0 | 30.0 | 34.4 | 40.5 | 44.4 | 51 |
| Total all specialties | 23.9 | 24.8 | 26.8 | 27.9 | 29.1 | 30.5 | 28 |

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average length of an in-patient hospital stay for each specialty in each year since 1989–90. [10732]

**Mr. Richards:** The information, which relates to NHS hospitals in Wales, is given in the following table.

*Average duration of stay (days)*

| | 1989–90 | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General surgery | 6.3 | 6.3 | 6.2 | 6.0 | 5.8 | 5.7 |
| Urology | 6.1 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 5.5 | 5.1 | 5.2 |
| Trauma and orthopaedic | 9.2 | 8.8 | 8.4 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 7.6 |
| Ear, nose and throat | 3.3 | 3.4 | 3.2 | 2.9 | 2.8 | 2.7 |
| Opthalmology | 4.4 | 4.0 | 3.7 | 3.1 | 2.7 | 2.5 |
| Oral surgery | 2.3 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 2.2 | 2.4 | 2.3 |
| Restorative dentistry | — | — | — | 18.3 | 1.4 | 0.4 |
| Neurosurgery | 10.7 | 12.6 | 11.4 | 12.5 | 12.0 | 10.9 |
| Plastic surgery | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.9 | 5.7 | 5.1 | 6.1 |
| Burns surgery | 15.0 | 12.5 | 13.6 | 13.4 | 12.4 | 39.9 |
| Cardiac surgery | 14.0 | 13.2 | 12.2 | 12.4 | 13.8 | 12.3 |
| Thoracic surgery | 9.6 | 10.2 | 11.2 | 10.5 | 11.4 | 11.4 |
| Paediatric surgery | 3.4 | 3.3 | 3.8 | 3.6 | 3.1 | 3.0 |
| Anaesthetics | 7.4 | 3.4 | 2.6 | 2.2 | 2.6 | 4.7 |
| General medicine | 8.0 | 7.7 | 7.2 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 6.8 |
| Gastroenterology | 16.4 | — | — | 7.3 | 12.4 | 2.4 |
| Haematology (clinical) | 5.7 | 6.0 | 5.6 | 6.0 | 6.3 | 6.3 |
| Clinical physiology | — | — | — | — | 60.2 | — |
| Rehabilitation | — | — | 36.9 | 41.7 | 44.7 | 30.4 |
| Palliative medicine | 12.1 | 14.5 | 12.8 | 12.7 | 11.6 | 12.4 |
| Cardiology | 6.2 | 5.3 | 5.0 | 4.9 | 5.2 | 5.2 |
| Dermatology | 15.9 | 15.1 | 13.8 | 14.8 | 14.9 | 13.6 |
| Thoraic medicine | 7.6 | 7.6 | 7.1 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 6.2 |
| Infectious diseases | 8.8 | 11.0 | 0.7 | — | — | — |
| Genito urinary medicine | 21.9 | 16.4 | 11.0 | 10.1 | 12.3 | 13.4 |
| Nephrology | 6.3 | 7.7 | 9.1 | 7.8 | 8.1 | 6.6 |
| Medical oncology | 13.9 | 15.5 | — | — | 2.5 | 4.2 |

*Average duration of stay (days)*

| | 1989–90 | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spinal injuries | 27.8 | 33.9 | 33.0 | 29.8 | 35.4 | 36.2 |
| Other neurology | 10.6 | 11.1 | 11.0 | 11.1 | 10.5 | 10.1 |
| Rheumatology | 11.6 | 12.8 | 11.0 | 9.9 | 9.7 | 9.2 |
| Paediatrics | 3.5 | 3.4 | 3.2 | 2.9 | 3.1 | 2.9 |
| Paediatric neurology | — | 7.1 | 7.9 | 2.5 | 3.8 | 5.4 |
| Geriatric medicine | 28.5 | 26.5 | 23.6 | 21.9 | 20.8 | 20.3 |
| Obstetrics | 3.5 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 3.1 | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| Gynaecology | 3.4 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 3.2 | 3.1 | 3.3 |
| GP maternity | 4.0 | 3.4 | 3.2 | 2.5 | 2.7 | 3.0 |
| GP other | 16.9 | 16.5 | 15.9 | 16.2 | 16.6 | 16.1 |
| Mental handicap | 525.9 | 315.2 | 323.8 | 266.2 | 235.9 | 376.7 |
| Mental illness | 73.2 | 67.7 | 54.3 | 47.3 | 46.7 | 41.2 |
| Child and adolescent psychiatry | 134.2 | 105.4 | 97.0 | 53.4 | 49.5 | 47.9 |
| Forensic psychiatry | 53.8 | 45.1 | 48.3 | 153.2 | 151.8 | 170.0 |
| Old age psychiatry | 107.5 | 104.4 | 96.1 | 95.9 | 82.2 | 66.3 |
| Radiotherapy | 8.4 | 8.6 | 8.5 | 7.7 | 6.8 | 6.2 |
| Radiology | — | 3.7 | 0.9 | 6.8 | 9.8 | 0.8 |
| Chemical pathology | 3.7 | — | 2.0 | — | — | — |
| Occupational medicine | — | — | — | — | 141.8 | 39.7 |
| Haematology (non clinical) | 8.1 | 6.1 | — | — | — | — |
| Neuropathology | — | 18.3 | — | — | — | — |
| Accident and emergency | 1.5 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.2 |
| Total | 11.7 | 11.2 | 10.4 | 10 | 10 | 9.2 |

*Note:*
'—' means no in-patients were treated.

## Gross Domestic Product

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was Welsh gross domestic product per head as a percentage of United Kingdom gross domestic product per head for each year since 1978; and if he will include the latest available statistical revisions with the date and explanation of each revision. [12445]

**Mr. Hague:** The latest available estimates are shown in the following table. Figures for 1994 were published in the article "Regional Accounts 1994: part 1" in the December 1995 edition of "Economic Trends". The article includes revisions to data on gross domestic product per head for earlier years and an explanation of the reasons for the revisions. Copies of "Economic Trends" are available in the Library of the House.

*GDP per head at factor cost: current prices, Wales 1978–1994 (UK = 100)*

1978: 85.3
1979: 85.2
1980: 84.2
1981: 83.8
1982: 87.3
1983: 86.7
1984: 85.6
1985: 83.8
1986: 85.4
1987: 86.3
1988: 87.0
1989: 86.6
1990: 85.9
1991: 85.4
1992: 83.7
1992: 82.7
1993[1]: 84.7
1994[1]: 84.7

*Note:*
[1]Provisional.

*Source:*
CSO.

## Waiting Times Information Bulletin

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he has made for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to place copies of the Welsh waiting times information bulletin in the Library; and on what date the autumn 1995 edition was placed in the Library. [12447]

**Mr. Hague:** The waiting times information bulletin is an internal NHS document intended to help GPs advise patients on the most appropriate choice of hospital or consultant for referral. Copies are not routinely placed in the Library of the House. However, copies are available, at no charge, from the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, at Crickhowell house, Capital waterside, Cardiff CF1 5XT.

## Malnutrition

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of his departmental involvement in the inter-departmental low income project team and the nutrition task force; and what information he is proposing to publish on the extent of malnutrition and its relationship to low income and to public health issues arising from the work of the project team and the task force. [12444]

**Mr. Hague:** The nutrition task force and its low income project team formed part of "The Health of the Nation" programme which covers England only. My Department was represented at meetings of the main task

force by an official with observer status, but was not represented on the low income project team. The Department has also received papers relating to the work of the task force, including the report of the low income project team, for information.

In Wales, the Health Promotion Authority for Wales undertakes a wide variety of programmes designed to encourage people to eat healthier diets. Specific initiatives have also targeted those on low income.

### Estate Care Group

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of his decision letter pertaining to the privatisation of the EstateCare group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. [12446]

**Mr. Hague:** Bids to acquire NHS EstateCare are still being evaluated. No decision has been taken.

### Exel Logistics

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he was requested to approve the proposal to award the materials management contract work of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to Exel Logistics; on what date he gave his approval; what proposals he has to assist the funding of redundancy payments to those affected; and if he will make a statement. [12448]

**Mr. Hague:** The authority submitted its recommendation on 8 December 1995 and it had a response on 22 January. The authority and Exel Logistics will be responsible for handling the restructuring costs including the funding of staff reductions as part of the contract. Exel Logistics has experience in delivering significant levels of improvements in customer service and operating costs which will be of benefit to the health service in Wales.

### Internet

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the provision of a contract for the development of Internet access services for private business clients within and outside the Business Connect network. [12400]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

### Euro-freight Terminal

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the decision-making process on the Euro-freight terminal; if he will list each of the consultancy firms which have been or are currently contracted to carry out studies in relation to its feasibility; and if he will make a statement. [12442]

**Mr. Hague:** I regularly meet the chairman of the agency to discuss a wide range of issues. My officials dealing with the freight terminal are maintaining close contact with the agency.

My Department has not employed any consultants. The agency has employed three consultants:

Formerly: Touche Ross and Coopers and Lybrand

Currently: Price Waterhouse

The general position regarding the proposed freight terminals is as stated in my answer to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *4*.

### Hospital Beds

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many beds there were in Wales in 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995 or other statistically convenient dates for the *(a)* acute, *(b)* psychiatric, *(c)* geriatric, *(d)* psycho-geriatric, *(e)* private hospital and *(f)* private nursing home sectors of health provision. [12443]

**Mr. Hague:** The information is given in the following table.

| | *1980* | *1985–86* | *1990–91* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Average daily available beds in NHS hospitals:* | | | | |
| Acute | 10,112 | 9,778 | 9,056 | 8,479 |
| Psychiatric[1] | 7,558 | 6,495 | 4,022 | 2,640 |
| Geriatric | 4,108 | 4,230 | 3,811 | 3,345 |
| Psychogeriatric | 276 | 450 | 1,602 | 1,536 |
| Beds at 31 March[2]: | | | | |
| Private hospitals | [3] | 246 | 264 | 318 |
| Private nursing homes | [3] | 1,901 | 9,656 | 13,270 |

*Notes:*

[1] Includes the specialties of mental handicap, mental illness, child and adolescent psychiatry and forensic psychiatry.

[2] Figures for 1980 and 1985–86 are at 31 December.

[3] Not available.

### Alzheimer's Disease

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of Alzheimer's disease were recorded in Wales in (i) 1991, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1993, (iv) 1994 and (v) 1995. [10677]

**Mr. Richards:** The number of cases of Alzheimer's disease is not collected centrally. For each year, the number of in-patient or day case finished consultant episodes at NHS hospitals in Wales, where Alzheimer's disease was recorded as the principle diagnosis, is given in the following table. Complete data for 1995 are not yet available.

1991: 199[1]

1992: 189

1993: 126

1994: 133

[1] Includes three months of data, based on discharges and deaths, collected by the hospital activity analysis.

### Hypothermia

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of hypothermia were recorded in Wales in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995. [10683]

**Mr. Richards:** The number of cases of hypothermia is not collected centrally. For each year, the number of in-patient or day case finished consultant episodes at NHS hospitals in Wales, where hypothermia was recorded as the principal diagnosis, is given in the following table. Complete data for 1995 are not yet available.

1992: 97

1993: 106

1994: 72

### General Practitioners

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general practitioner practices there were in Wales in 1966, 1975, 1985 and 1995; and if he will make a statement. [10745]

**Mr. Richards:** At 1 April 1995, there were 538 general medical practitioner partnerships—including practitioners who practised single handed—in Wales. Information for 1966, 1975 and 1985 is not available centrally. Information on the number of general medical practitioners (unrestricted principals) for each of the years requested is given in the following table:

| *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1 October 1969 (earliest available) | 1,232 |
| 1 October 1975 | 1,290 |
| 1 October 1985 | 1,523 |
| 1 April 1995 | 1,710 |

### Sites of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which sites of special scientific interest in Wales will be affected by trunk roads and motorway schemes for which preferred routes have been announced. [11232]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Sites of special scientific interest which may be affected by schemes in the Welsh Office's forward programme for which a preferred route has been announced are:

| *Office* | *Route* | |
|---|---|---|
| *Dyfed* | Bishops Pond—Carmarthen | |
| | Fair Fach Railway Cutting—Llandeilo | |
| *Powys* | River Wye—Builth | |
| *Mid-Glamorgan* | Cwm Taf Fechan Woodlands—Nr Merthyr Tydfil | |
| *Gwent* | St. Brides | Gwent levels |
| | Nash and Goldcliff | Gwent levels |
| | Whitson | Gwent levels |
| | Redwick and Llandevenny | Gwent levels |
| | Mynydd Llangatwg | Nr. Brynmawr |
| | Cwm Clydach | Nr. Brynmawr |
| | Brynmawr Sections | Nr. Brynmawr |
| *Gwynedd* | Inland Sea | Nr. Holyhead |
| | Glaslyn Marshes | Nr. Porthmadog |
| | Fairy Glen Woods | Nr. Betwys-y-Coed |

### Trade Missions

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what has been the value of orders following Welsh trade missions in each year since 1992; [11816]

(2) how many jobs were created following Welsh trade missions in each year since 1992. [11813]

**Mr. Hague:** Trade missions provide an opportunity for initial contacts with prospective customers in overseas markets and any orders taken on a mission are normally awarded on a trial basis. Since April 1993, when the current subsidised trade mission programme commenced, orders taken during the course of Welsh Office trade missions have amounted to: 1993–94, £4,827,400; 1994–95, £2,677,250; 1995–96 January, £2,289,500. Anticipated follow-on orders amounted to: 1993–94, £12,274,000; 1994–95, £22,879,000; 1995–96 January, £38,183,700. Such orders may ultimately lead to the creation of new jobs and/or the safeguarding of existing jobs but it is rarely possible for mission participants to be specific about this in the short term.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Tuesday 30 January 1996*

## DEFENCE

### Trident

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the cost of distributing to each hon. Member a copy of the 1996 edition of his Department's annual progress report on the Trident programme. [11722]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The annual report on the progress of the Trident programme will be published shortly and, as usual, copies will be placed in the Library of the House. The precise cost of distributing the report to all hon. Members is not known, but would not exceed £1,000. However, it would not be a sensible use of resources to send individual copies to all right hon. and hon. Members as not all may wish to receive one.

### Defence Industry

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the competitiveness of the United Kingdom defence industry. [12102]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Due in part to my Department's procurement policies in recent years, the United Kingdom's defence industry is highly competitive both at home and abroad. Including the UK share of collaborative work, more than 90 per cent. by value of our equipment contracts are placed with UK firms. Our provisional estimate is that UK companies won defence export orders of £5 million in 1995. This represents around 19 per cent. of the world market. Only the USA has a large market share.

### Johore Bahru Jungle Warfare School

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those countries whose military forces have received training at the Johore Bahru jungle warfare school during the last three years. [12469]

**Mr. Soames:** This is a matter for the Malaysian Government.

### Thailand

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the British armed forces have served in Thailand during the last three years. [12468]

**Mr. Soames:** Other than a colonel attached to the British embassy in Bangkok as defence attaché and a colour sergeant to support him, no military personnel have served in Thailand during the last three years.

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will *(a)* list the countries he visited during his overseas tour in early January giving, in each case, the dates he was in the country and who he met and *(b)* list those accompanying him on this tour. [12241]

**Mr. Portillo:** Between 30 December 1995 and 10 January 1996, I visited the United Arab Emirates, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Japan. On 13 January, I visited Kuwait. The aim of the visits was to promote our bilateral relationships with international partners. I met a number of people in each of the countries visited including the respective Ministers of Defence, some of their ministerial colleagues and senior military and civilian officials. In the Philippines I called on the President and in the Republic of Korea I called on the Prime Minister. I was accompanied throughout by officials from my private office and the Ministry of Defence. My wife accompanied me from 30 December to 10 January at the invitation of the Governments of the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Japan.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11421]

**Mr. Soames:** The information requested is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

For some details of overseas travel costs for Defence agencies, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *758–67*.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (v) 1996–97. [11418]

**Mr. Soames:** Records of expenditure on hospitality in my Department before 1992–93 can be collated only at disproportionate cost, and estimates for the financial year 1996–97 have yet to be finalised. Total expenditure for the years 1992–93 to 1995–96 is given in the list:

(i) 1992–93: £4.952 million

(ii) 1993–94: £4.577 million

(iii) 1994–95: £4.867 million

(iv) 1995–96: £4.843 million (estimated final spend)

The figures include expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Defence itself, by formations and establishments of the armed forces at home and abroad, and by individual officers occupying command and

international appointments for which entertainment allowances are payable. Figures for agencies and non-departmental public bodies are not held separately.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11419]

**Mr. Soames:** Details of defence operating costs for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 4 of my Department's most recent departmental report, Cm 2801, of March 1995, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Figures for 1979–80 are not available in the form requested.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11422]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Until April 1995, all books, journals, newspapers and other commercial publications required for the official duties of the Department and the services were purchased by more than 150 purchasing authorities worldwide.

The total expenditure on commercial publications in 1993–94 was £6.134 million, of which it is estimated that £3.373 million was spent on scientific and technical journals, and £306,000 was spend on newspapers and weekly publications.

In 1994–95, the total spend was £6.626 million, with estimated spends of £3.644 million on scientific and technical journals, and £331,000 on newspapers and weekly publications. In 1995–96, £6.191 million was allocated for the purchase of commercial publications. This sum was disaggregated to the budgets of individual units in April 1995, and the spend to date is £2.257 million.

There are no central records of which material was purchased from 1993 to date, and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11331]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Individual budget holders in my Department have delegated powers to employ external consultants as they think fit within the limit of their resources and consistent with all requirements for propriety and value for money. The information required is currently not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11332]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Details of recent central MOD expenditure on publicity is contained in the MOD departmental report, Cm 2801, and the MOD performance report, Cm 3055, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11334]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Some information about my Department's telephone costs for the period 1993–94, is contained in the 14th report of the Committee of Public Accounts, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Details for other years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Pay Services Directorate

**Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Pay Services Directorate. [12906]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The Pay Services Directorate will become a defence agency of the Ministry of Defence on 1 February 1996 following the restructuring of the Defence Accounts Agency, DAA. The agency, to be known as the Pay and Personnel Agency, PPA, is located in Bath; Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire, and Worcester, with a small satellite office in Malta and will have a staff of some 960 MOD civil servants. The agency is responsible for providing pay services and personnel information support services in respect of civilian staff of the MOD and for other public sector customers. Pay services encompass payroll, all aspects of principal civil service pension scheme administration and expenses management. In addition, the agency will provide financial management information to budget holders and other customers.

A chief executive has been selected by open competition. He will be required to develop the current organisation's professional expertise and improve the high performance standards to fulfil the agency's aim of providing its customers with an efficient service which offers the best value for money. The chief executive will be set the following key targets: to deliver the range of agency services to the required time scales and to the set standards of accuracy, as published in the pay services

customer charter; to achieve annual efficiency savings year on year of 3.5 per cent. of cash allocation through a reduction in operating costs; to obtain quality registration to BS EN ISO 9001 standard in one further sector of the agency by 31 March 1996; to meet the Treasury accounts direction and to install a computerised, full-cost, accruals accounting system by 31 March 1996; to have new business systems hardware—known as POPSI—delivered and installed and the personnel system completed to the specification required to achieve savings, by 31 December 1996; to complete an investigation into the best commercial practices for measuring customer satisfaction with agency services by 31 December 1996; to introduce the new principal civil service pension scheme administration system—known as QUASAR—to the required specification, by 31 March 1997; to obtain quality registration to BS EN ISO 9001 standard in two further sectors of the agency by 31 March 1997; and to set an accruals baseline to permit the use of accruals—based performance targets for the agency accounts, by 31 March 1997.

I am arranging for copies of the agency's framework document to be placed in the Library of the House.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11420]

**Mr. Soames:** No estimate is made of the cost of empty and under-utilised property and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the mobile phones which have been supplied to his Department in each of the last four years have been cloned; and on what dates. [11007]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* During 1995, 24 mobile telephones supplied to the MOD were cloned as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| January | 8 |
| February | 2 |
| March | 11 |
| May | 2 |
| June | 1 |

Figures before 1995 are not available.

### Gulf War Syndrome

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will instigate an epidemiological study into alleged Gulf war syndrome. [12122]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* My Department has been conducting a continuing and detailed investigation into the health aspects of service in the Gulf. The medical assessment programme, under which more than 350 individual veterans have been examined, was endorsed by the Royal College of Physicians in a clinical audit last July.

The royal college recommended that we contact leading civilian specialists in specific areas of medicine relevant to conditions alleged to have been caused by Gulf service. Separate discussions have since been held with eminent specialists in toxicology, immunology, tropical diseases, epidemiology and birth defects, and a comprehensive medical statistical database has been prepared which will provide the basis for epidemiological studies.

As part of this continuing work, the Surgeon General convened a meeting last Thursday with the following leading medical and scientific experts: Professor A. Kay, Imperial college of science, technology and medicine (immunology); Professor L. Borysiewicz, university of Wales (immunology); Professor D. Warrell, John Radcliffe medical school, Oxford (tropical diseases); Professor A. McMichael, London school of hygiene and tropical medicine (epidemiology); Dr. A. Proudfoot, director, Scottish poisons information bureau (toxicology); Professor Sir C. Berry, Royal London hospital (birth defects); and Professor P. Blain, Newcastle upon Tyne medical school (environmental and occupational medicine).

Having reviewed the work undertaken to date, the experts fully approved the basis of our approach. They also agreed that there is no evidence at present to indicate the existence of a unique and previously unknown condition or illness associated with service in the Gulf, and noted that this echoed the US experience of its much larger assessment programme of 17,000 veterans.

We accept that a number of Gulf veterans are ill, and that there is public concern about the possible effects of Gulf service on the children of veterans who have been born with birth defects. As the next stage of its work, my Department will commission a series of epidemiological studies comparing the health of Gulf veterans with similarly matched control groups of service personnel who did not go to the Gulf. The aim of these studies, some of which will be conducted in-house and some by commissioning external research, will be to establish whether there is any increased prevalence of illness among Gulf veterans or of birth defects among their children.

We will also commission research into the alleged causes of Gulf-related illness, including the possibility of interaction between the vaccinations received by service personnel and the nerve agent pretirement sets—NAPS—taken for protection against the very real threat of chemical attack. We shall of course work very closely with the US, but will not duplicate its efforts.

The cost of the research will be met by my Department. The Medical Research Council has been invited to oversee and review the conduct of the programme, and the results will be published.

We will continue to offer assessment and counselling services under the medical assessment programme, and wish to encourage any serving or ex-service personnel who may be concerned about their health as a result of Gulf service to come forward to the solicitors acting for those who are ill asking them to urge their clients to participate in the programme.

## TREASURY

### Tax (Self-assessment)

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how long, on average, Inland Revenue staff have spent training to deal with self-assessment. [8314]

**Mr. Jack:** The Inland Revenue has in place a four-year training programme for staff dealing with self-assessment. The programme started in April 1994 and runs through to October 1998. So far staff have spent, on average, three and a half days in training covering the basic elements of self-assessment.

From April this year, the training programme will address the specific needs of different staff groups to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to do their jobs when this is first needed.

On average, staff will receive seven days' training during 1996–97, four days in 1997–98 and three days from April to October 1998. The training programme is designed as a staged incremental progress to ensure that staff are able to handle the work as it first arises.

On-the-job support, guidance and information to consolidate this learning will be provided by the training organisation and line managers.

### Employment Statistics (London)

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of *(a)* manual part-time workers and *(b)* non-manual part-time workers, broken down into men and women, work less than (i) eight hours a week and (ii) 16 hours a week in each London borough. [11861]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Estimates available from the labour force survey relating to Greater London as a whole are shown in the table. Equivalent estimates for individual London boroughs are not available.

*Part-time manual and non-manual workers by the total number of hours they usually work*

*Greater London summer 1995, not seasonally adjusted*

| | *Working less than eight hours a week* | | *Working less than 16 hours a week* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Thousands* | *Per cent.* | *Thousands* | *Per cent.* |
| *Men* | | | | |
| Manual part-time | n/a | n/a | 27 | 41 |
| Non-manual part-time | 13 | 16 | 34 | 40 |
| *Women* | | | | |
| Manual part-time | 15 | 11 | 57 | 42 |
| Non-manual part-time | 33 | 11 | 102 | 33 |

n/a Not available, estimate below 10,000.

### Lost Work Days

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the number of work days lost, in each of the work categories used by his Department, since May 1979, as a result of *(a)* the closure or restructuring of firms, *(b)* the withdrawal of local authority services, *(c)* the reduction in the size of Government Departments and the armed services and *(d)* changes in the scope of charitable employment. [11725]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The information is not available in the form requested. The available information closest to that requested is for the net change in jobs for the whole economy in the United Kingdom. There was a net increase of 141,000 jobs between September 1979 and September 1995.

Information providing estimates of employment in the public sector for 1979 to 1994 is published in the January 1995 edition of *Economic Trends*. A copy of the publication is available in the Library.

### VAT (Higher Education)

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much value added tax was paid by further education colleges and sixth form colleges in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95; and how much he estimates will be paid by these colleges in 1995–96. [11630]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** There are no figures available on the amount of VAT paid by colleges.

### Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in Scotland in each year since 1993–94; what it is estimated to be for 1996–97; and what the costs would have been in each of these years if relief had been available at 25 per cent. [11930]

**Mr. Jack:** The cost of mortgage interest tax relief in Scotland was estimated to be £300 million in 1993–94 and £240 million in 1994–95. In 1994–95 the rate of relief was 20 per cent. If relief had been available at 25 per cent., the cost would have been about £300 million. The estimated cost of the relief for 1993–94 is based on the regional distribution of the cost of mortgage interest relief from analyses of family expenditure surveys up to 1993. The estimate for 1994–95 is a projection based on applying the same regional distribution as in 1993–94 to the total figure for 1994–95. It is not possible to provide reliable estimates for regions for 1995–96 and 1996–97.

### Gross Domestic Product

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Wales of 19 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *838*, what are the reasons for the unavailability of the gross domestic product figures for the years after 1991. [11963]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Gross domestic product figures by county for 1993 would normally have been published in December 1995 in *Economic Trends*. However, extensive revisions to the figures for earlier years are necessary due to source data on the new standard

industrial classification, SIC(92), becoming available. Since these data became available very late, it was not possible to produce county estimates at that time. The county figures will now be published by the end of March 1996.

### VAT (Computerised Access Equipment)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement regarding reinterpretation of the VAT legislation in relation to VAT exemption on computerised access equipment for blind and partially sighted computer users. [12397]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Customs and Excise has not made any reinterpretation of VAT law. Specialised adaptations specifically for disabled people are relieved from VAT when supplied to a disabled person. General purpose computer equipment is, and always has been, liable to VAT.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11449]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Departmental expenditure on administration is included in the running costs published in the departmental report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's departments.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11452]

**Mrs. Knight:** Departmental expenditure on newspapers and magazines is included in the running costs published in the departmental report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's departments.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11370]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Expenditure on telephone costs by Her Majesty's Treasury, and agencies and non-departmental public bodies associated with HM Treasury, are included in the running costs published for the Department and each agency.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11368]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Expenditure on publicity for HM Treasury, and the agencies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is included in the running costs published for the Department and each agency.

### ECOFIN

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union. [12926]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** I represented the UK at the Economic and Finance Council of the European Union in Brussels on 22 January.

There was a public debate on the incoming Italian presidency's work programme. The Italian programme concentrates on continuing work towards economic and monetary union and fighting unemployment. I agreed with both these priorities and in particular stressed the importance of member states creating the right conditions to stimulate employment. I also encouraged the Council to respect EC budgetary restraints and to make rapid progress in the campaign against fraud and waste within the Community.

The Commission presented a proposal for extending the mandate for the European investment bank to lend to Asia and Latin America, which expired at the end of 1995, for one year. There was no discussion and the Council will return to this at a later date.

### Earnings (London)

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the average *(a)* weekly earnings, *(b)* total hours, *(c)* average hourly earnings and *(d)* median hourly earnings, including and excluding overtime, for (i) all part-time females and (ii) all part-time males on adult rates in each London borough, broken down to show (A) manual and (B) non-manual workers; [11860]

(2) what proportion of employees on adult rates earn less than *(a)* £3.20, *(b)* £3.50, *(c)* £4, *(d)* £4.60 and *(e)* £6 per hour in each London borough, including and excluding overtime for (i) all full-time males, (ii) all part-time males, (iii) all full-time females and (iv) all part-time females on adult rates, broken down to show manual and non-manual workers; [11858]

(3) if he will list the proportion of full-time employees on adult rates with weekly earnings of less than *(a)* £150, *(b)* £200 and *(c)* £250 per week, including and excluding overtime, in each London borough for all full-time (i) females and (ii) males on adult rates broken down to show manual and non-manual workers. [11859]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** As the information is contained in a number of tables, I will place a copy in the Library of the House.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile

and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9740]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* Due to the very low demand for mobile and car phones within HM Treasury, the office of the Paymaster General and the Royal Mint, they have been purchased as required.

The Central Statistical Office employs an enabling agreement with BT which is renewable annually. This does not involve a commitment to purchase an agreed total. Two car phones have been purchased in the current financial year at a cost of £400 per instrument.

The Valuation Office uses Inland Revenue procedures to obtain mobile and car phones. Current agreements are with DVH, FGE, BT and Vodafone. These agreements are short term and are based on best value for money, without a commitment to purchase any specific number of instruments.

Information concerning the cost to public funds of these agreements is currently unavailable.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9742]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* HM Treasury, the office of HM Paymaster General, the Central Statistical Office, the Royal Mint and the Valuation Office have not withdrawn from any such contracts.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9741]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* Due to the very low demand for mobile and car phones within HM Treasury, the office of the Paymaster General and the Royal Mint there has been no need to initiate a formal tender.

The Central Statistical Office employs an enabling agreement which was concluded after an informal evaluation of the market based on functionality, service and price.

The Valuation Office uses Inland Revenue procedures.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11369]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Information relating to the years 1979–80, 1989–90 and 1991–92 is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information relating to the other years requested is as follows:

| | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Absences* (average days per member of staff) | 5.8 | 8.5 | 7.3 |

[1] To date.

### Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* column *610,* how many staff are currently employed in maintaining the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood; and how many insignia are accounted for in the 1994–95 costs of £204,000. [11566]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* The Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood employs 11 staff. In 1994–95, 3,877 insignia were accounted for.

### Finance Bills (Drafting)

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pages of the Finance Bill were drafted otherwise than by parliamentary counsel; which were the outside agencies employed to draft sections of the Bill; how many pages were drafted by each agency; and how much was paid to each such agency for the pages drafted by it. [11946]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* The following sections of the Finance Bill were drafted by the private sector:

| | *Pages* |
|---|---|
| *Clauses 6 and 11, legislating two Customs and Excise extra-statutory concessions*<br>Mrs. Margaret Leates, a draftsman in private practice | 1 |
| *Clauses 21 to 25 and Schedule 2, putting into UK law the second VAT directive*<br>Nabarro Nathanson | 11½ |
| *Clause 146 and schedule 27, introducing new arrangements for the deduction of tax on foreign dividends by paying and collecting agents*<br>Freshfields | 14 |
| *Clause 186 and schedule 35, legislating 11 Inland Revenue extra-statutory concessions*<br>Members of Pump Court Tax Chambers | 6 |
| Total | [1]32½ |

[1] Thirty-one of these pages are in schedules which are set in the Finance Bill with a smaller typeface than the clauses.

The total payment to these draftsmen for work done up to the publication of the Bill is expected to be £130,000. This includes the cost of one page of legislation which Ministers decided, for policy reasons, not to include in this year's Bill.

The amount paid to each agency is a matter of commercial confidence.

### VAT (Disabled People)

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the levying

of VAT on computer and computer-related equipment purchased by disabled people and charities helping disabled people; if he will place a copy of the directive used by Customs and Excise head office to local offices regarding such imposition; and if he will make a statement. [12412]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* I have received a number of representations. Customs and Excise has not issued any general directive on the liability of computers supplied to disabled people. General purpose computer equipment is not, and never has been, relieved from VAT when supplied to disabled people. Relief is, however, available for adaptations designed to make it easier for disabled people to use the equipment. I have placed in the Library a copy of the Customs notice "VAT reliefs for people with disabilities", which is freely available in local VAT offices.

## TRANSPORT

### Air Traffic Control (Heathrow Airport)

**Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the recent changes in air traffic control procedures at Heathrow airport. [10671]

**Mr. Norris:** The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for the provision of air traffic control at Heathrow airport. My noble Friend the Minister of Aviation and Shipping has asked the chairman of the CAA to write to the hon. Member.

### Regional Airports

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions exist in respect of local authority-owned regional airports from borrowing money for airport development. [11305]

**Mr. Norris:** Capital finance for local authority-owned airports in England and Wales is governed by part IV of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. This applies directly in the case of the smaller airports. In the case of the larger airports, which are structured as public airport companies, part IV has been applied by the Public Airport Companies (Capital Finance) Order 1990, as amended. It is open to local authorities to make use of their basic credit approvals or of any other forms of credit cover available to them under the 1989 Act. For public airport companies, this includes in particular their undistributed profits. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport may issue supplementary credit approvals—SCAs—for specified projects. For Scotland, borrowing consents under section 94 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 may be considered.

### Lorry Ban, London

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to repiace the London lorry ban permit scheme. [11224]

**Mr. Norris:** I will discuss the next steps with the local authorities and other interested parties once I have received and considered the interim report form the consultants studying the options for improving the enforcement of the ban.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11913]

**Mr. Norris:** The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the Transport Research Laboratory have been symbol users for some time. The Department is encouraging its other agencies to follow suit while actively working with the Employment Service towards adopting the symbol centrally as a demonstration of on-going commitment towards achieving equality of opportunity for disabled people.

### Flight Permits

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department has taken against Air Ops in respect of its operating passenger-carrying flights from the United Kingdom in 1993 without permits. [12176]

**Mr. Norris:** Permits for these flights in the summer of 1993 were issued to Sultan Air on the understanding that Air Operations of Europe—Air Ops—was operating under a wet lease agreement with that airline. It was not until October 1994 that it emerged that the lease agreement might have been terminated before the flights took place. As announced on 10 January, the Department has now reviewed its permit procedures to clarify permit and safety responsibilities as regards applications involving the use of wet-leased aircraft.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances airports can be *(a)* empowered and *(b)* required to impound aircraft arriving without permits. [12175]

**Mr. Norris:** There are powers under article 107 of the Air Navigation (No. 2) Order 1995 enabling the detention of aircraft which are likely to be flown in breach of article 102 of the order. Powers also exist under section 48 of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990 that enable the detention of aircraft which arrive in the UK when they are prohibited from doing so in the circumstances described in the above section of the Act.

### Coastguard Service

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to replace auxiliary coastguards with watch assistants; [12193]

(2) what changes have taken place in the level of coastguard station officers over the last year; and if he will make a statement. [12192]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Coastguard Station Officers and Auxiliaries.

The Coastguard Agency intends to introduce a new permanent grade of Coastguard Watch Assistant. This new grade will replace the part time voluntary service currently provided in operations rooms by Auxiliary Coastguards and will enhance the reliability, training and expertise at this level. It is hoped that many of the present Auxiliaries will apply for the new post.

There have been no changes to the number of Coastguard Station Officer posts over the last year.

### Newbury Bypass

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional development is projected as a result of the Newbury bypass. [12095]

**Mr. Watts:** This is a matter for the local planning authorities.

### Track Access Charges

**Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out all the powers of the rail regulator to compel a change in Railtrack's track access charges before the quinquennial review and to publish the documents in which they are contained. [12014]

**Mr. Watts:** The terms on which the regulator can make changes to the charges made to passenger train operating companies are set out in schedule 7 to the track access agreements. These agreements are on the public register of agreements held by the regulator.

### West Coast Main Line

**Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contingency plans he has for the modernisation of the west coast main line if the proposed development of a transmission-based signalling system proves not to be viable. [12287]

**Mr. Watts:** A major priority of the modernisation of the west coast main line for Railtrack is to maintain and renew the network by using modern technology. During initial studies on the modernisation of the line, more conventional signalling systems were considered alongside the proposed transmission-based signalling system which Railtrack has chosen.

**Mr. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his estimate of the cost of resignalling the west coast main line using the proposed transmission-based signalling system; and what are the financial savings anticipated from its introduction; [12286]

(2) how many companies are included on the shortlist for the development of the transmission-based signalling system proposed for the west coast main line; and if he will list them; [12284]

(3) by what dates he will require signalling manufacturers, awarded contracts, to develop the transmission-based signalling system proposed for the west coast main line to complete or demonstrate *(a)* system design, *(b)* proof of performance, *(c)* safety validated working system and *(d)* manufacture of production equipment. [12283]

**Mr. Watts:** Railtrack is currently considering bids for the contract to develop the proposed transmission-based signalling system for the west coast main line. The system is expected to reduce maintenance and operating costs and provide improved reliability on the line. The other information requested is commercially confidential to Railtrack.

**Mr. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has for a transmission-based signalling system to be installed at major rail junctions on the west coast main line; [12280]

(2) what assessment he has made of the performance record of the transmission-based signalling technology proposed for the west coast main line; where it is in use elsewhere; how many miles of track it controls; and if it is in use at any rail junctions with traffic densities similar to those on the west coast main line. [12285]

**Mr. Watts:** Railtrack intends to introduce a transmission-based signalling system to the west coast main line as part of the core modernisation programme for the line. Railtrack informs me that the transmission-based signalling technology is currently employed in differing forms in various parts of the world, but it is not identical to the system planned for the west coast main line. For this reason, Railtrack intends to let development contracts for the signalling system during the first quarter of this year.

**Mr. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to authorise expenditure on signalling technology for the modernisation of the west coast main line prior to its capability being proven. [12278]

**Mr. Watts:** Railtrack will fund the core modernisation programme of the west coast main line, which includes the proposed new signalling system for the line, from the track access charges which it receives from passenger train operators. The level of these charges over the six years from 1995 has been agreed by the regulator.

**Mr. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many signalling manufacturers have expressed reservations to him about the viability of the proposed introduction of a transmission-based signalling system on the west coast main line. [12279]

**Mr. Watts:** None.

### Pollution Control

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to expand aerial surveillance of the extended sea limits in respect of pollution control; and if he will make a statement. [12463]

**Mr. Norris:** The use of aerial surveillance will continue to be reviewed to ensure that it remains a cost-effective method of enforcing marine pollution regulations within the waters under UK jurisdiction, including any future extension to this jurisdiction.

### Trains (Telephones)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if all trains are equipped with two-way telephones. [12384]

**Mr. Watts:** No. Installation of the line-side transmitter equipment for the national radio network is virtually complete. The planned engineering target is 98 per cent. of the network excluding tunnels and cuttings. Most modern train cabs have also been fitted with the necessary equipment.

In the former Network SouthEast area, British Rail has decided to fit the cab secure radio system, so that further modifications will not be necessary when driver-only operation is extended. About 65 per cent. of passenger train miles in the Network SouthEast area already have cab secure radio.

### Expenditure (Representations)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received following the announcement on 19 December 1995 of transport supplementary costs and credit approvals for transport expenditure by local authorities from *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* other organisations and individuals. [12387]

**Mr. Norris:** I have received 49 representations, including 30 parliamentary questions, from hon. Members following the announcement on 19 December. My officials are in regular correspondence with local authorities and others about transport policies and programme—TPP—submissions and about particular schemes. We have had 22 representations from local authorities and 12 from organisations and individuals, often about specific schemes.

### Bus Deregulation (Manchester)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effects of bus deregulation in the Greater Manchester area over the last five years. [12301]

**Mr. Norris:** Deregulation has brought great benefits to bus travellers in Greater Manchester as it has elsewhere in the country. There are now more operators running more bus miles at lower cost, with new buses on many routes, and significantly less public subsidy than previously.

### London Transport Staff

**Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *615*, what were the occupations of the staff who have left London Transport's employment since 12 November 1994; and if he will list them by category. [12759]

**Mr. Norris:** This is an operational matter for London Transport.

### Car Mileages

**Sir Timothy Sainsbury:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the average annual and daily mileage travelled by *(a)* a car commuter and *(b)* a car shopper. [12699]

**Mr. Norris:** The average annual car commuting mileage of a person who normally travels to work in a car was 3,040 miles in 1992–94, consisting of an average of 348 single-way journeys of 8.7 miles mean length. The average annual car shopping mileage of a driver in a car-owning household was 970 miles in 1992–94, consisting of an average of 186 single-way journeys of 5.2 miles mean length.

### Indian Sub-continent (Travellers)

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *270–71*, what is his assessment as to the reasons for the increase in arrivals and departures to the Indian sub-continent in the last two years. [12524]

**Mr. Norris:** The Department of Transport does not make assessments of the sort requested.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11462]

**Mr. Norris:**

*(a)* 1993–94: £375,000

*(b)* 1994–95: £140,000

*(c)* 1995–96: £125,000

Newspapers and magazines bought in 1995–96 include:

*Daily Telegraph*
*Financial Times*
*Guardian*
*Independent*
*Times*
*Accountancy*
*Aircargo News International*
*Auto Express*
*Automotive International*
*Automotive News*
*Aviation News/Air Pictorial*
*Aviation Week*
*Bookseller*
*Buses*
*Business Traveller*
*Business and Commercial Aviation*
*Car Mechanics*
*Coach and Bus Week*
*Coaching Journal and Bus Review*
*Commercial Motor*
*Containerisation International*
*Diesal Car*
*Economist*
*Executive Travel*
*Fairplay International Shipping Weekly*
*Flight International*
*Government Computing*
*Headlight*
*International Freighting Weekly*
*International Railway Journal*
*Light Railway and Modern Tramway*
*Modern Railways*
*Motor Transport*
*New Civil Engineer*
*New Scientist*
*Port of London Magazine*

*Rail*
*Rail News*
*Railway*
*Railway Age*
*Railway Gazette International*
*Roadway*
*Scientific American*
*Ships Monthly*
*Spectator*
*Surveyor*
*Traffic Engineering and Control*
*Travel Trade Gazette*
*Travel Weekly*
*Urban Transport International*

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11459]

**Mr. Norris:** Figures of my Department's expenditure on administration for *(b)* to *(g)* can be found in the transport report 1995, Cm 2806, which is available in the House of Commons Library. My final outturn figures for *(e)* and projected outturn figures for *(f)* will be presented in the transport report 1996, which is due to be published in the latter part of March. My Department's latest budget figure for *(g)* is £373 million.

Running costs figures for Departments were not calculated on the same basis prior to 1989–90, so comparable figures for *(a)* are not readily available.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11458]

**Mr. Norris:** The table represents an estimate of expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by the Department of Transport (central transport group), its agencies, and non-departmental public bodies for the years specified. Figures for 1979–80 and forecasts for 1996–97 are not available. Figures for 1995–96 are forecast outturns based on current expenditure and may include some non-entertainment costs which cannot readily be desegregated.

| | *1989–90* | *1991–92* | *1993–94* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Central Transport Group | 114,016 | 170,015 | 234,986 |
| Agencies | 4,586 | 28,143 | 40,718 |
| Non-departmental public bodies | 5,375 | 33,542 | 37,144 |

| | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|
| Central Transport Group | 127,248 | 202,524 |
| Agencies | 91,828 | 97,370 |
| Non Departmental public bodies | 25,903 | 34,768 |

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11461]

**Mr. Norris:** Information in the form requested is not available.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)*1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11460]

**Mr. Norris:** Prior to 1990, the civil estate was managed by the Property Service Agency. Its archived records can be accessed only at disproportionate cost.

The estimated annual cost of the vacant and under-utilised space on the Department of Transport's civil estate, excluding that for which the Department of the Environment's property holdings division is responsible, is:

| *Year* | *Vacant space* £ | *Under-utilised space* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 1,200 | 15,000 |
| 1993–94 | 1,289,000 | 45,000 |
| 1994–95 | 2,037,900 | 45,000 |
| 1995–96 | 2,657,600 | 40,000 |
| 1996–97 | 3,674,300 | 1,185,200 |

### Rail Stations (Assaults)

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was *(a)* the total number of assaults and *(b)* the number of assaults on women at rail stations in each year since 1990 by local authority area. [10522]

**Mr. Watts:** The information requested is not available in the format requested. However, the table details the number of notifiable assaults and assaults by gender at rail stations for 1994 and 1995, broken down by British Transport police areas. Similar information for previous years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

*Recorded assaults 1994 and 1995*

| *BTP area* | *1994* | | | *1995* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Male* | *Female* | *Total* | *Male* | *Female* | *Total* |
| London north | 192 | 36 | 228 | 165 | 25 | 190 |
| North-east | 54 | 16 | 70 | 28 | 12 | 40 |
| Scotland | 184 | 41 | 225 | 185 | 49 | 234 |
| North-west | 120 | 28 | 148 | 85 | 21 | 106 |
| Midlands | 43 | 12 | 55 | 35 | 2 | 37 |
| South-west | 44 | 10 | 54 | 29 | 14 | 43 |
| London south | 233 | 57 | 290 | 230 | 40 | 270 |
| London Underground | 394 | 119 | 513 | 261 | 65 | 326 |
| Force total | 1,264 | 319 | 1,583 | 1,018 | 228 | 1,246 |

### Rail Privatisation

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official*

*Report*, column *32*, about British Rail businesses which have been sold, whether he will give in respect of each business *(a)* the number of people employed by the business at the time of its sale, *(b)* the number of employees of the business made redundant by british Rail between 1 January 1993 and the date of its sale, *(c)* the cost to British Rail of these redundancy payments, *(d)* the name and address of the businesses' new owner and *(e)* the sum of money paid by the new owner to acquire the business; and what has been the total sum received to date from the sale of British Rail assets and rail franchises since the Railways Act 1993 received Royal Assent, listing all assets and franchises sold which did not appear in the answer. [11736]

**Mr. Watts:** In relation to the three franchises which have been awarded, the details requested in parts *(a)* to *(c)* of the question are matters for the British Railways Board. The details requested in part *(d)* are: the Great Western Trains franchise was awarded to Great Western Holdings Ltd., Milford house, Milford street, Swindon, SN1 1DW; the LTS Rail franchise was awarded to Enterprise Rail of Central house, Clifftown road, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1AB; and the South West Trains franchise was awarded to Stagecoach Holdings plc of Charlotte house, 20 Charlotte street, Perth, PH1 5LL.

In relation to the sales of BR businesses, the details requested in parts *(a)* to *(d)* are matters for the British Railways Board.

In relation to the sales of the three rolling stock leasing companies, the details requested in parts *(b)* and *(c)* are for the British Railways Board. The details requested in parts *(a)* and *(d)* are:

Angel Train Leasing Ltd. Fifty-five staff were employed at the time of sale. The address of the registered office is Mitre house, 160 Aldersgate street, London, EC1A 4DD;

Eversholt Leasing Ltd. Sale due to be completed shortly: Fifty-eight staff currently employed. The address is 9th floor, 1 Eversholt street, London NW1 1DN;

Porterbrook Leasing Ltd. Forty-seven staff were employed at the time of sale. The address is Burdett house, Beckett street, Derby, DE1 1JP.

In relation to the figures requested in part *(e)* and the final part of the question: the first three franchises were awarded as contracts to run services in return for the payment of grant and will not generate receipts for the Government; gross proceeds from the sales to date of other BR businesses amount to some £266 million. There have been no further sales of such businesses since 9 January. As explained in the Government's response of 14 December 1995 to the Transport Committee's fourth report, on railway finances, it would be contrary to the commercial interests of British Rail and the Government to publish details of individual sales at this stage, as that may prejudice similar sales still in progress. Details of individual sales completed by BR will be made public in due course.

The sale of the three rolling stock leasing companies have generated, or will generate on completion, receipts as follows: Angel Train Leasing Ltd., sale completed 17 January 1996—£696 million; Eversholt Leasing Ltd., sale due to be completed shortly—£580 million, including £80 million deferred and contingent; and Porterbrook Leasing, Ltd., sale completed 8 January 1996—£572 million.

The proceeds of the sales to date amount to some £2,114 million.

### Transport and the Environment

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish his response to "Transport and the Environment", the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution; and if he will make a statement. [12401]

**Mr. Norris:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 7 November, *Official Report*, column *755*.

### Electrification Scheme (West Yorkshire)

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take action to ensure leasing arrangements are put into place to enable new rolling stock to be acquired and operated under the west Yorkshire electrification scheme; and if he will make a statement. [12258]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 29 January]:* The acquisition of new rolling stock is a matter for the train operator, in conjunction with the West Yorkshire passenger train executives, to discuss with rolling stock leasing companies.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has called for reports into recent incidents concerning the failure of rolling stock being operated under the west Yorkshire electrification scheme; what subsequent action he has taken; and if he will make a statement. [12257]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 29 January]:* An incident on 17 November, when there was an electrical explosion on a class 308 electric multiple unit, has been reported to the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate, and an investigation by railway research staff is being monitored by HSE inspectors. All the trains in service have been examined and the inspectorate is satisfied that the necessary measures are in place to allow them to be used safely.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Pakistan

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan concerning child labour. [12299]

**Mr. Hanley:** We regularly express our concerns to the Government of Pakistan about child labour. We welcome recent steps that they have taken to improve the situation on bonded and child labour, such as widening access to schooling and the setting up of vigilance committees. However, we recognise that much remains to be done to resolve the problem.

### Endangered Species (Hong Kong)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he made to the Chinese authorities on his recent visit

regarding the future protection of endangered species in Hong Kong. [12335]

**Mr. Hanley:** The Chinese agreed in December 1991 that the United Nations convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora—CITES—would continue to apply to Hong Kong after the transfer of sovereignty on 1 July 1997. Hong Kong's strict customs controls and legislation on endangered species will also continue to apply. Therefore, no such representations were made, since these would not have added to the strong safeguards that already exist.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspaper and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11442]

**Mr. Hanley:** Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing expenditure in the UK on newspapers and magazines was as follows:

1993–94: £95,631

1994–95: £101,909

1995–96: £77,395 (to the end December)

Additionally, posts overseas spent the following on books, periodicals and newspapers. Figures for 1995–96 will be available only at the end of the financial year.

1993–94: £1,072,972

1994–95: £1,104,409

Figures for newspapers and magazines alone, purchased overseas, could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Overseas Development Administration does not maintain separate records of expenditure on newspapers and magazines alone. Expenditure on all publications, including books, newspapers and journals, by the ODA including the Natural Resources Institute, was as follows:

1993–94: £244,857

1994–95: £264,821

1995–96: £196,776 (to date)

The FCO buys a very wide selection of publications in the UK and from around the world. A list could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11439]

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Member to appendix A of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental report for 1995—Cm 2802—and previous years, copies of which can be found in the Library of the House. Our 1996 departmental report will be published in March. Information on expenditure in 1979–80 can be obtained from the FCO diplomatic and aid wings appropriation accounts 1979–80, which is also available in the Library of the House. When comparing expenditure over different periods, it should be noted that there have been a number of structural changes in the FCO since 1979–80 which are explained in the departmental reports and appropriation accounts.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11440]

**Mr. Hanley:** Since 1989–90 the only cost to the FCO diplomatic wing for empty or under-utilised properties in the UK was incurred in 1995–96. Both freehold properties concerned are being sold. Rents—payable to property holdings—amounted to £98,173 with a further £114,444 contribution in lieu of rates. There were offsetting savings of £34,000 from lettings on both sites. Information in respect of 1979–80 is not available.

In respect of the overseas estate, the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It is departmental policy to dispose of vacant or under-utilised elements of the overseas estate as quickly and as cost-effectively as possible.

The ODA does not have any empty or under-utilised property.

Of the FCO's agencies and non-departmental public bodies, only the Natural Resources Institute has empty or under-utilised property and it will write to the hon. Member with full details. The information requested in respect of the British Council could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*Letter from Anthony Beattie to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 29 January 1996:*

I have been asked by Mr. Hanley to reply for the Natural Resources Institute to your question to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs about the cost of empty and under-utilised accommodation.

The Institute, which was formed by the amalgamation of a number of scientific units of the Overseas Development Administration, became a Next Steps agency on 1 April 1990.

When the Institute moved to Chatham in the period 1988–1990, a site at Culham in Oxfordshire became surplus to requirements. Disposal of the site, which was originally acquired by the Crown for wartime use as an airfield, has been complicated by both legal and planning issues. These have been resolved and the site is now in the process of sale.

Pending disposal, the Institute pays rent at an assessed rate to Property Holdings (Department of the Environment). The cost to the Institute, (but not to the Exchequer) has been some £366,000 per annum, this figure being reduced in 1995–96 to £277,000 following a reassessment. The running costs of the site (primarily maintenance and security) come to some £35,000 a year. We expect to dispose of the property by the end of this financial year, although planning restrictions will limit the realisable value.

As regards the Chatham site itself, a view has been taken of future accommodation requirements in the light of the first triennial review of NRI as an agency (completed 1993) and a subsequent review of business prospects up to the end of the century. These studies have also formed the basis of the current offer of the Institute for sale.

The Institute's declining requirement for accommodation has enabled us to let accommodation to the University of Greenwich, thus securing an income of some £900,000 in 1994–95 and an estimated £1.3 million in 1995–96.

Our objective in the context of restructuring and sale of the Institute is further to reduce our accommodation to some 6,400 square metres (compared with a total site area in excess of 17,000 square metres), thereby releasing space for letting to other users.

I trust the above provides the information you require.

### Official Trade Missions

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he makes of political circumstances, and what weight he attaches to human rights abuses, when deciding whether official trade missions should take place. [12289]

**Mr. Hanley:** Decisions to send official trade missions are taken in the light of a number of factors, including the political and economic situation of the country concerned, the commercial opportunities for British companies and their interest in the market. Trade missions are briefed by British diplomatic posts on all relevant aspects of the country's political situation including its human rights record.

### Diplomatic Service (Science-related Posts)

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* costs and *(b)* the number of science-related posts in the diplomatic service for each year since 1979. [12325]

**Mr. Hanley:** The costs, including salaries, allowances, travel costs and accommodation, and numbers for science-related posts in the diplomatic service are as follows:

| | *Numbers* | *£ cost* |
|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 24.4 | 2,240,586 |
| 1994–95 | 24.4 | 2,313,237 |

Details for previous years are not readily available and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the planned *(a)* expenditure on and *(b)* cost of science-related posts in the diplomatic service over the next three years. [12326]

**Mr. Hanley:** The forecast total cost and expenditure for science-related posts in the diplomatic service over the next three financial years are as follows:

1995–96: £2,174,000
1996–97: £2,139,906
1997–98: £2,193,404

### European Union Staff

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes will take place in European Union staff numbers as a result of enlargement; what changes were originally forecast; what is the average length of service of those receiving redundancy; how the cost of redundancy is related to length of service; and what is the average length of service of those receiving redundancy per head in respect of *(a)* permanent staff, *(b)* temporary staff, *(c)* professional staff and *(d)* clerical and other staff. [10347]

**Mr. David Davis** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* On 1 January 1995, the EU enlarged to 15 member states with the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden. Many of the new posts created as a result have not yet been filled. The final changes as a result of enlargement are therefore not yet known.

The forecast staff numbers are agreed by the Council in the budget. The table lists the successive budgets which have increased staff numbers, at least in part as a result of enlargement.

*Table 1: Staff numbers in EU institutions as amended by successive budgets*

| | *1994* | *1995* | *1995* | *1995* | *1996* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Total staff* | *Budget increase* | *Supplementary budget increase* | *Total staff* | *Budget increase* |
| Court of Justice | 837 | 0 | 113 | 950 | 0 |
| Court of Auditors | 427 | 31 | 45 | 503 | 0 |
| Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions | 599 | 62 | 55 | 716 | 0 |
| Council | 2,304 | 75 | 86 | 2,465 | 42 |
| Commission | 14,918 | 650 | 268 | 15,836 | 193 |

1. Only a part of the 1995 budget increase in staff numbers were in response to enlargement.
2. The 1995 supplementary budget staff increases were almost all due to enlargement.
3. The increase in Commission staff for 1996 is divided mainly between enlargement (95 staff) and fraud prevention. The Council increase is mostly for enlargement.

*Source:*
Report of the Budget Committee to COREPER, on the 1996 budgetary procedure, 7 July 1995. Ref 8770/95.

With the latest enlargement, the European Parliament grew by 59 new MEPs. From 1995 to 1997, it will be taking on 335 extra staff, 157 for translation and interpreting.

Following enlargement only, the European Parliament has a redundancy programme. The programme was agreed by the Budget Council on 17 November 1995 and runs for five years. It is therefore too early to say what the average length of service is for those staff being made redundant. However, the programme is open only to "fonctionnaires"—permanent staff—with more than 10 years' service, and "agents temporaire"—on fixed-term contracts—with more than 15 years' service. The minimum age for fonctionnaires to be eligible for the scheme is 55. For agents temporaire, it is 50.

The cost of redundancy is not related to the length of service. Redundant staff receive 70 per cent. of their basic

pay until the age of 65, or until they are entitled to receive a full pension, whichever is earlier.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Access to Work

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *738*, what guidelines her Department has issued to placing, assessment and counselling team managers and regional PACT managers on the funding of access to work. [12216]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about guidelines to Placing, Assessment and Counselling Team (PACT) and regional PACT managers on the funding of Access to Work.

Funding for Access to Work is devolved to regions. PACT managers and regional PACT managers have general guidance on the management of budgets and, from the outset of Access to Work, they have had specific guidance on the management of Access to Work resources.

Since the Secretary of State's announcement on 14 December 1995 we have issued further guidance to ensure that resources are being targeted in line with the announcement.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the funds allocated to *(a)* access to work schemes and *(b)* the supported employment schemes are cash limited in (i) the present financial year and (ii) 1996–97 financial year. [11975]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about whether the funds allocated to the Access to Work and Supported Employment programmes are cash limited.

I can confirm funds allocated to Access to Work and to Supported Employment programmes are part of a cash limited Vote in both the present and the 1996–97 financial years.

However, as a Next Steps Agency the Employment Service has specific financial flexibilities, which enable me to switch provision in-year between programmes, within the overall Vote. Exercising these flexibilities are subject to HM Treasury confirmation.

I hope this is helpful.

### Park School, Barnstaple

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to reply to the letters from the hon. Member for North Devon of 5 October and 9 November 1995 and 3 January 1996 concerning Park school, Barnstaple. [12514]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 25 January 1996. We have not received the letter of 3 January 1996.

### Head Teachers

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of secondary school head teachers were women in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1985, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* 1995 (i) by local education authority and (ii) nationally. [10518]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The information requested is shown in the table.

*Percentage of secondary school headteachers who were women in each local education authority area in England 1975–1995*[1,2]

*Position in January each year*

| | *1975* | *1980* | *1985* | *1990* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corporation of London | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Camden | n/a | n/a | n/a | 73 | 55 |
| Greenwich | n/a | n/a | n/a | 53 | 47 |
| Hackney | n/a | n/a | n/a | 40 | 70 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | n/a | n/a | n/a | 30 | 67 |
| Islington | n/a | n/a | n/a | 50 | 67 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | n/a | n/a | n/a | 60 | 75 |
| Lambeth | n/a | n/a | n/a | 40 | 55 |
| Lewisham | n/a | n/a | n/a | 29 | 54 |
| Southwark | n/a | n/a | n/a | 44 | 62 |
| Tower Hamlets | n/a | n/a | n/a | 57 | 40 |
| Wandsworth | n/a | n/a | n/a | 45 | 33 |
| Westminster | n/a | n/a | n/a | 63 | 38 |
| ILEA | 41 | 39 | 45 | n/a | n/a |
| Barking and Dagenham | 18 | 18 | 9 | 0 | 13 |
| Barnet | 25 | 28 | 26 | 33 | 33 |
| Bexley | 26 | 25 | 42 | 41 | 19 |
| Brent | 17 | 28 | 17 | 27 | 31 |
| Bromley | 42 | 41 | 35 | 32 | 41 |
| Croydon | 29 | 28 | 17 | 19 | 20 |
| Ealing | 24 | 19 | 20 | 23 | 42 |
| Enfield | 19 | 18 | 25 | 24 | 13 |
| Haringey | 38 | 36 | 20 | 44 | 33 |
| Harrow | 27 | 27 | 45 | 30 | 20 |
| Havering | 14 | 14 | 24 | 21 | 28 |
| Hillingdon | 14 | 20 | 5 | 17 | 20 |
| Hounslow | 20 | 29 | 36 | 29 | 36 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 42 | 42 | 45 | 50 | 40 |
| Merton | 26 | 32 | 42 | 50 | 36 |
| Newham | 25 | 19 | 31 | 40 | 71 |
| Redbridge | 30 | 29 | 25 | 7 | 20 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 17 | 33 | 25 | 50 | 38 |
| Sutton | 35 | 33 | 38 | 36 | 43 |
| Waltham Forest | 26 | 25 | 22 | 31 | 38 |
| Birmingham | 26 | 23 | 20 | 25 | 33 |
| Coventry | 23 | 23 | 19 | 11 | 21 |
| Dudley | 15 | 13 | 12 | 16 | 18 |
| Sandwell | 20 | 12 | 8 | 9 | 5 |
| Solihull | 12 | 11 | 11 | 21 | 15 |
| Walsall | 4 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 25 |
| Wolverhampton | 17 | 14 | 14 | 20 | 15 |
| Knowsley | 13 | 10 | 6 | 0 | 9 |
| Liverpool | 35 | 34 | 33 | 28 | 31 |

*Percentage of secondary school headteachers who were women in each local education authority area in England 1975–1995*[1,2]

*Position in January each year*

| | *1975* | *1980* | *1985* | *1990* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| St. Helens | 12 | 11 | 12 | 8 | 0 |
| Sefton | 26 | 19 | 17 | 14 | 23 |
| Wirral | 32 | 34 | 31 | 36 | 33 |
| Bolton | 10 | 20 | 11 | 6 | 19 |
| Bury | 11 | 6 | 13 | 0 | 14 |
| Manchester | 25 | 29 | 22 | 18 | 21 |
| Oldham | 5 | 0 | 6 | 20 | 27 |
| Rochdale | 0 | 7 | 11 | 17 | 21 |
| Salford | 4 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 11 |
| Stockport | 19 | 18 | 16 | 13 | 27 |
| Tameside | 28 | 29 | 11 | 11 | 22 |
| Trafford | 35 | 35 | 29 | 24 | 25 |
| Wigan | 10 | 7 | 10 | 12 | 14 |
| Barnsley | 13 | 4 | 5 | 11 | 14 |
| Doncaster | 13 | 10 | 3 | 9 | 15 |
| Rotherham | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Sheffield | 14 | 18 | 13 | 9 | 32 |
| Bradford | 11 | 8 | 13 | 20 | 26 |
| Calderdale | 8 | 13 | 26 | 24 | 13 |
| Kirklees | 13 | 8 | 8 | 16 | 13 |
| Leeds | 27 | 24 | 24 | 20 | 13 |
| Wakefield | 7 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 14 |
| Gateshead | 10 | 11 | 6 | 0 | 23 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 19 | 14 | 22 | 26 | 38 |
| North Tyneside | 11 | 15 | 25 | 15 | 22 |
| South Tyneside | 15 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 18 |
| Sunderland | 6 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 12 |
| Isles of Scilly | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Avon | 21 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 17 |
| Bedfordshire | 8 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 19 |
| Berkshire | 24 | 22 | 22 | 31 | 32 |
| Buckinghamshire | 18 | 17 | 20 | 22 | 25 |
| Cambridge | 6 | 6 | 9 | 20 | 18 |
| Cheshire | 24 | 21 | 18 | 15 | 18 |
| Cleveland | 7 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 14 |
| Cornwall | 13 | 6 | 6 | 10 | 13 |
| Cumbria | 13 | 15 | 12 | 14 | 10 |
| Derbyshire | 9 | 7 | 10 | 14 | 15 |
| Devon | 12 | 10 | 15 | 12 | 17 |
| Dorset | 20 | 18 | 18 | 24 | 16 |
| Durham | 5 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 9 |
| East Susex | 19 | 11 | 9 | 9 | 26 |
| Essex | 17 | 22 | 17 | 14 | 15 |
| Gloucestershire | 13 | 11 | 14 | 16 | 14 |
| Hampshire | 20 | 16 | 13 | 20 | 24 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 10 | 13 | 11 | 8 | 12 |
| Hertfordshire | 17 | 13 | 19 | 22 | 22 |
| Humberside | 16 | 14 | 18 | 20 | 20 |
| Isle of Wight | 6 | 0 | 10 | 14 | 19 |
| Kent | 29 | 27 | 25 | 28 | 30 |
| Lancashire | 10 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 16 |
| Leicestershire | 17 | 17 | 20 | 23 | 28 |
| Lincolnshire | 15 | 14 | 14 | 16 | 17 |
| Norfolk | 14 | 13 | 13 | 9 | 12 |
| North Yorkshire | 12 | 10 | 24 | 10 | 14 |
| Northamptonshire | 18 | 15 | 10 | 20 | 21 |
| Northumberland | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Nottinghamshire | 15 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 20 |
| Oxfordshire | 7 | 4 | 15 | 19 | 20 |
| Shropshire | 18 | 12 | 15 | 14 | 23 |
| Somerset | 3 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 10 |
| Staffordshire | 12 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 15 |
| Suffolk | 11 | 9 | 11 | 15 | 18 |
| Surrey | 18 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 12 |

*Percentage of secondary school headteachers who were women in each local education authority area in England 1975–1995*[1,2]

*Position in January each year*

| | *1975* | *1980* | *1985* | *1990* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Warwickshire | 22 | 17 | 12 | 16 | 32 |
| West Sussex | 19 | 21 | 15 | 12 | 27 |
| Wiltshire | 9 | 10 | 14 | 9 | 16 |
| England | 18 | 16 | 16 | 18 | 21 |

n/a not applicable.

[1] Excludes sixth form colleges.

[2] Excludes headteachers employed by local education authroities who were not attached to a particular school.

## Equal Pay Act 1970 (Claims)

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many new claims were initiated under the 1983 equal value amendment to the Equal Pay Act 1970 in each year since 1983; how many were successful; and what was the average length of each case; [10520]

(2) how many new claims have been initiated under Equal Pay Act 1970 in each year since 1970; how many were successful; and what was the average length of each case. [10521]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The precise information requested is not available.

The Equal Pay Act 1970 came into effect on 29 December 1975. Statistics showing the number of equal pay cases disposed of in each year since 1976, and the number of successful cases in each of those years, are shown in the following table.

| *Year* | *Equal pay cases disposed of*[1] | *Number successful*[2] |
|---|---|---|
| 1976 | 1,742 | 213 |
| 1977 | 751 | 91 |
| 1978 | 343 | 24 |
| 1979 | 263 | 13 |
| 1980 | 91 | 4 |
| 1981 | 54 | 6 |
| 1982 | 39 | 2 |
| 1983 | 35 | 9 |
| 1984 | 70 | 11 |
| 1985 | 302 | 37 |
| 1986 | 517 | 44 |
| 1987 | 1,043 | 7 |
| 1988 | 813 | 14 |
| 1989 | 397 | 33 |
| 1990 | 508 | 10 |
| 1991 | 227 | 5 |
| 1992 | 240 | 21 |
| 1993 | 780 | 19 |
| Total | 8,215 | 563 |

[1] Many equal pay cases typically consist of a single complaint to which is linked a number of identical claims made by colleagues of the complainant who are employed by the same employer. When a tribunal disposes of a complainant's case, all other cases linked to it are disposed of in the same way and are recorded as such in tribunal statistics.

[2] This column records the *actual* number of successful complaints decided by tribunals. The figures do not include linked complaints which were not actually heard by tribunals.

## Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of her Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 to date; and if she will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11535]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Detailed financial information is not held in the form requested. However, the following annexe lists newspaper and magazine publications currently purchased by the Department's library.

Annexe: Comprehensive list of newspaper/magazine (mainly weekly) titles obtained by the library

*ABC Guide to International Travel*
*ABC Railway Guide*
*ABC World Airways Guide*
*Accountancy*
*Accountant*
*Architectural Review*
*Asian Times*
*Bookseller*
*British Journal of Photography*
*Building*
*Campaign*
*Caterer and Hotelkeeper*
*Catholic Herald*
*Child Education*
*Church Times*
*Construction News*
*Contract Journal*
*Cooks European Timetable*
*Daily Express*
*Daily Mirror*
*Daily Star*
*Daily Telegraph*
*Der Spiegel*
*Design*
*Economist*
*Education*
*Engineer*
*Engineering*
*European*
*Evening Standard*
*Financial Times*
*Gramophone*
*Guardian*
*Health Service Journal*
*History Today*
*Independent*
*Independent on Sunday*
*International Herald Tribune*
*Junior Education*
*L'Express*
*Lloyds List*
*Local Government Chronicle*
*Mail on Sunday*
*Management Today*
*Manchester Evening News*
*Marketing*
*Marketing Week*
*Media Week*
*Morning Advertiser*
*Morning Star*
*Municipal Journal*
*Nature*
*New Law Journal*
*New Scientist*
*New Statesman*
*News of the World*
*Newsweek*
*Northern Echo*
*Nursing Times and Nursing Mirror*
*Observer*
*Le Point*
*Post Magazine and Insurance Monitor*
*PR Week*
*Printing World*
*Private Eye*
*Radio Times*
*Scientific American*
*Sheffield Star*
*Sheffield Telegraph*
*Spectator*
*Stage and Television Today*
*Sun*
*Sunday Express*
*Sunday Mirror*
*Sunday People*
*Sunday Telegraph*
*Sunday Times*
*Tablet*
*Time International*
*Time Magazine*
*Time Out*
*Times*
*Times Education Supplement*
*Times Higher Educational Supplement*
*Times Literary Supplement*
*Today*
*Tribune*
*TV Times*
*The Voice*
*UK Press Gazette*
*Universe*
*Die Zeit*

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11531]

**Mr. Squire:** The first year for which figures are readily available for the new Department and its agencies is 1993–94. Figures for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The available outturn figures (rounded to the nearest £'000) are:

£ 000

| | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|
| DFEE | 121 | 88 |
| Agencies (Teachers' Pensions Agency and Employment Service) | 36 | 11 |

Latest estimated outturn figures for 1995–96 are:

| | £'000 |
|---|---|
| DFEE | 85 |
| Agencies (Teachers' Pensions Agency and Employment Service) | 8 |

While overall administration budgets for 1996–97 have been settled, detailed budgets for individual activities, such as hospitality and entertainment, have not yet been finalised.

Information on expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by the Department's sponsored non-departmental public bodies is not available centrally.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the annual cost to her Department and her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11533]

**Mr. Squire:** Information is not held in the form that has been requested.

However, the Department for Education and Employment currently has 14 empty properties costing around £2.1 million per annum. Only marginal changes are expected in 1996–97. Figures for earlier years could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

For the Department's agencies, the Employment Service currently has 143 empty properties currently costing around £7 million per annum. Most of these have arisen from integrating benefit offices and jobcentres. Figures for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In the five years to March 1995, 840 properties were disposed of.

Information on the Department's non-departmental public bodies could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

For properties occupied by the Department but which currently form part of the common user estate, reference should be made to the answer provided by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11532]

**Mr. Squire:** Details of the Department's expenditure on administration for the years 1989–90, 1991–92 and 1993–94 are contained in the annual reports of the former Employment Department and Department for Education, Cm 2805 for Employment and Cm 2810 for Education. The annual reports also show expenditure planned at the time of publication for 1995–96 and 1996–97. Expenditure for 1994–95 is included in the Department's published appropriation accounts. Expenditure for 1979–80 is contained in the Government's expenditure plans, Cm 9428–II. Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the expenditure of her Department, her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11534]

**Mr. Squire:** The information is as follows:

OVERSEAS TRAVEL, ACCOMMODATION AND OTHER ASSOCIATED EXPENSES.

*Expenditure by the Department*

(a) 1979–80: Figures are not available

(b) 1989–90: Figures are not available

(c) 1991–92: £792,290

(d) 1993–94: £892,933

(e) 1994–95: £842,917

(f) 1995–96: £810,000 (estimate)

(g) 1996–97: £810,000 (estimate)

For 1995–96 and earlier, the figures amalgamate the relevant expenditure of the former Department for Education and the former Department of Employment.

*Expenditure by the Department's Agencies*

Details of overseas travel by staff of the Employment Service are not separately recorded and could not be provided without disproportionate cost. Nil expenditure has been incurred, or is forecast to be incurred, by staff of the Teachers' Pensions Agency.

*Expenditure by Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) sponsored by the Department*

Information about overseas travel costs for the Department's NDPBs is not available centrally.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11504]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The estimated expenditure on newspapers and magazines by the Lord Chancellor's Department, including the Court Service, is as follows:

1993–94: £53,500

1994–95: £54,700

1995–96: £57,500

The publications that incurred the above expenditure were:

*Newspapers:*

Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Star, Daily Telegraph, European, Evening Standard, Financial Times, Independent, Independent on Sunday, Le Monde, News of the World, Observer, People, Sun, Sunday Telegraph, Sunday Times, The Times, Die Zeit.

*Magazines*

Accountancy, Architects Journal, Banking World, Bookseller, Building, Chartered Surveyor, Computing, Construction News, Design Week, Economist, Estate Times, Estates

Gazette, Justice of the Peace, Law Society's Gazette, The Lawyer, Legal Business, Litigation, Litigation Letter, Magistrate, Management Accounting, Management Matters, Management Services, Management Today, New Law Journal, New Scientist, New Statesman and Society, Online and CD ROM Review, PC Magazine, PC Plus, PC Week, Police Review, Practical Computing, Private Eye, Radio Times, Social Work Today, Socio-Legal Newsletter, Solicitors' Journal, Spectator, Which?, Which Computer?

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 19 January 1996, regarding the estimated cost of expenditure on newspapers and magazines in 1993–94, 1995–96 to date; and a list of the publications purchased for the latest year for which the information is available.

The figures provided below indicate the monies spent from the Books and Newspapers budget and will, therefore, include the cost of purchasing books as well as newspapers and magazines. The figures for the cost of newspapers and magazines alone could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

1993–94: £26,208

1994–95: £26,518

1995–96: £19,658 (to date)

The list of publications purchased in 1995–96 are as follows:

The Times

The Financial Times

The Independent

The Times (Saturday)

The Independent (Saturday)

Post Magazine

Solicitor's Journal

Taxation

Estates Gazette

Country Life

Money Management

ABC Railway Guide

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11501]

**Mr. Evans:** Expenditure on entertainment including all forms of hospitality are given in the table.

| | *Entertainment* | |
|---|---|---|
| *Financial year* | *LCD*[1] | *Legal Aid Board* |
| 1979–80 | Not available | Not available |
| 1989–90 | 18,886 | Not exceeding £500 |
| 1991–92 | 20,895 | Not exceeding £500 |
| 1993–94 | 20,477 | Not exceeding £500 |
| 1994–95 | [2]26,159 | Not exceeding £500 |
| 1995–96* | [3]27,694 | Not exceeding £500 |
| 1996–97* | [4]28,456 | Not exceeding £500 |

[1] Includes all non-departmental public bodies except the Legal Aid Board.
[2] Includes the Public Trust Office which became an agency on 1 July 1994.
[3] Forecast based on expenditure to December 1995. The Court Service became an agency on 3 April 1995.
[4] Forecast based on 1995–96 figure.

The first column of figures is for the whole of my Department apart from those years marked with an asterix which exclude the Court Service and Public Trust Office agencies. I have asked the chief executives of the agencies to reply direct for the years 1995–96 and 1996–97.

*Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply in respect of the Court Service to your question about annual hospitality and entertainment expenditure.

The estimated annual figures for hospitality and entertainment expenditure from 3 April 1995, the date on which the Court Service was established, are:

1995–96: £8,800

1996–97: £8,800

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 19 January 1996, regarding the estimate for expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment for the years 1979–80, 1989–90, 1991–92, 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97.

The Public Trust Office became an Agency on 1 July 1994 and the figures prior to that date will be included in our departmental Headquarters response. The estimated expenditure from 1 July 1994 are as follows:

1 July 1994–95: £530

1995–96: £685

1996–97: £705

*Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

*Parliamentary question—expenditure on hospitality and entertainment in HM Land Registry.*

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question on expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment, I can provide the following information for the years quoted:

(a) 1979–80: £747

(b) 1989–90: £6,299

(c) 1991–92: £13,993

(d) 1993–94: 7,083

(e) 1994–95: £12,888

(f) 1995–96: £8,622 (at 31 December 1995)

(g) 1996–97: Estimated expenditure figures for 1996–97 are not yet available. The annual non-staff budget setting process is currently taking place and the Land Registry Budget Committee has yet to decide the final budget allocation.

*Letter from Dr. Elizabeth Hallam Smith to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

In the absence of the Chief Executive, who is away from the Office on official business, I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about expenditure on hospitality and entertainment in the agencies for which he is responsible.

Expenditure since 1993–94 has been:

1993–94: £8,298

1994–95: £6,752

1995–96: £7,120

1996–97: £8,220 (budget)

Figures for earlier years could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

## Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11499]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The Lord Chancellor's Department does not keep comprehensive financial records for empty or under-used properties on the departmental estate and the information required could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, or is not available. The chief executives for each of the Department's agencies will be responding separately.

*Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to the above Question about the cost to the Court Service of empty or under used property.

The Court Service does not keep comprehensive financial records for empty or under used properties on the Departmental Estate and the information required could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 19 January 1996, regarding the estimated cost of empty and under utilised buildings for the years 1979–80, 1989–90, 1991–92, 1993–94, 1995–96 and 1996–97.

The Public Trust Office does not have any empty or under-utilised buildings.

*Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question on estimates of the costs of empty and under-utilised properties.

I understand that the Property Holding Division of the Department of the Environment will provide central figures for Common User Estate vacant space from 1990/91 to date. Figures prior to then are held by the Property Services Agency who, I am informed, could only access this information at disproportionate cost.

As to Land Registry accommodation that is not Common User Estate, I can provide the following estimates of costs of empty property for the years quoted:

(a) 1979–80: Nil

(b) 1989–90: Nil

(c) 1991–92: £15,200

(d) 1993–94: £244,360

(e) 1994–95: £240,099

(f) 1995–96: £379,728

(g) 1996–97: £397,931

The 1996–97 estimate represents the maximum potential costs over the full twelve month period. The properties are being actively marketed and the actual annual costs are likely to be lower.

Surplus accommodation has arisen in the Land Registry following reductions in its staff of some 3400 from the 1989–90 peak.

The Land Registry does not maintain any central records of the costs of under-utilised properties and this information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

*Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about the cost of empty and under-utilised properties in the agencies for which he is responsible.

The properties of the Public Record Office form part of the Common User Estate. Since 1979, none has been empty or under-utilised.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11502]

**Mr. Evans:** Details of my Department's running costs and administrative spending for the year 1979–80 are contained in table 3.9 of the "Government's Expenditure Plans 1985–86 to 1987–88", volume II (Cm 9428-II); figures for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 4 of my Department's annual report published in March 1995 (Cm 2809). Copies of these documents are available in the Members' Library.

*Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply in respect of the Court Service to your Question about estimated annual expenditure on administration.

The estimated annual figures for expenditure on administration for the Court Service from 3 April 1995, the date on which the Court Service was established, are:

1995–1996: £32,307,000

1996–1997: £31,600,000.

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 19 January 1996, regarding the estimated expenditure on administration for the years 1979–80, 1989–90, 1991–92, 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97.

The Public Trust Office became and Agency on 1 July 1994 and the administration costs prior to that date can be found in the Lord Chancellor's Department's Departmental Report. The Annual Report for 1994–95 provides details of expenditure for that year, a copy of which can be found in the House of Commons Library, however the figure for that year and the estimate for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are given below.

1994–95: £18.5 million

1995–96: £19.76 million (estimate)

1996–97: £19.48 million (estimate)

It is worth noting that the Public Trust Office is required to cover its cost by fee income.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11503]

**Mr. Evans:** Except for the Legal Aid Board—established on 1 April 1989—which incurred £4,215 of such expenditure in 1994–95, expenditure on overseas

travel and accommodation is not monitored separately in my Department and non-departmental public bodies and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. We estimate that the maximum spent in any one year is no more than £35,000. Since this is an operational matter, I have asked the chief executives of the Court Service and Public Trust Office to reply direct for the years since they became agencies.

*Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply in respect of the Court Service to your Question about estimated annual overseas travel and accommodation expenditure.

The Court Service does not have a budget for overseas travel, accommodation and expenses. Consequently, the estimated expenditure for the financial year 1995–96 is nil and no allocation has been provided for the financial year 1996–97.

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 19 January 1996, regarding the estimated expenditure for overseas travel for the years 1979–80, 1989–90, 1991–92, 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97.

The Public Trust Office became an Agency on 1 July 1994, prior to which no separate figures are available for the cost of overseas travel, however, the estimated costs for 1994 onwards are as follows:

1994–95: No overseas travel

1995–96: £4,900

1996–97: £8,850

*Letter from Dr. Elizabeth Hallam Smith to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

In the absence of the Chief Executive, who is away from the Office on official business, I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about expenditure on overseas travel, overseas accommodation and associated expenses in the executive agencies for which he is responsible.

The Public Record Office does not keep separate figures for overseas travel, accommodation and associated expenses. It has found from its experience in calculating 1994–95 expenditure (which was £7,708) in response to an earlier Parliamentary Question (12 July 1995, Official Report, Column 600), that such figures could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

*Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question on expenditure on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses. I can provide the following information for the years quoted:

(a) 1979–80: Figures are not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost:

(b) 1989–90: Figures are not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost:

(c) 1991–92: Figures are not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost:

(d) 1993–94: £3780

(e) 1994–95: £8084

(f) 1995–96: £2550 (at 31.12.95)

(g) 1996–97: Estimated expenditure figures for 1996–97 are not yet available. The annual non-staff budget setting process is currently taking place and the Land Registry Budget Committee has yet to decide the final budget allocation.

## Legal Aid

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consideration the Lord Chancellor has given to removing responsibility for the grant of criminal legal aid from the magistrates courts. [13087]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** This question highlights a difficult problem to which the Lord Chancellor has accorded high priority for a considerable time.

The Legal Aid Act 1988 vests in the magistrates courts the function of deciding on the grant or refusal of legal aid in criminal cases. In the performance of their functions the courts act independently of any Government Department.

In December 1993 my predecessor explained to the House that the Comptroller and Auditor General had repeatedly qualified his opinion on the Department's appropriation account because of material uncertainty as to whether the regulations governing the grant of criminal legal aid were being applied with sufficient rigour. He affirmed to the House that in no circumstances could any irregularity in dispensing public money be acceptable, and he recounted the measures that had been taken to rectify matters.

Among them was an examination of the feasibility of transferring the function to the Legal Aid Board. My predecessor explained to the House his reasons for declining to take that step at that time, and he undertook to give further consideration to that and alternative measures if other continuing action failed to achieve an acceptable result.

The Comptroller and Auditor General has again qualified his opinion of the 1994–95 appropriation account. During the last two years a number of statutory and administrative changes have been made, with the help and co-operation of the Legal Aid Board and the Justices' Clerks Society. The results have been closely audited both by my Department and by the National Audit Office. I am pleased to report that significant improvements in the levels of compliance with the regulations have recently become apparent. The improvement is marked enough to give reason to think that satisfactorily high levels of compliance could be achieved under the present arrangements, although further marked improvements are needed to achieve that result.

The Lord Chancellor has now proposed more fundamental reforms of the legal aid scheme as a whole, as described last year in the Green Paper "Legal Aid—Targeting Need". In these circumstances I do not propose any earlier change in the arrangements for the grant of criminal legal aid in the magistrates courts, so long as the improvement in compliance with the regulations is maintained. I will announce our intentions regarding the wider reforms when our consideration of the public responses to the Green Paper has been completed.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Internal Combustion Engines (Emissions)

16. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the level of the noxious emissions from internal combustion engines in 1995 in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [10383]

**Mr. Clappison:** Actual emissions for 1995 are not yet available but a forecast for 1995 based on national road traffic forecasts and the emissions performance of both old and new vehicles has been made. On this basis, we predict that total emissions from road vehicles will fall this year and again next year.

### Village Shops

17. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to preserve village shops in rural areas. [10384]

**Mr. Gummer:** The Government's plans for preserving village shops and post offices in rural England are set out in the recently published White Paper "Rural England—A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside".

### Housing Management (Compulsory Competitive Tendering)

18. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about his plans to extend compulsory competitive tendering to housing management. [10385]

**Mr. Curry:** The implementation timetable for housing management CCT provides the work to be phased in. The timetable provides for contracts to be awarded between 1 April 1995 and 1 April 1998, depending upon the size of the authority and its state of preparedness for CCT. Authorities reorganised as a result of the review of local government are allowed an additional 18 months.

### Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

19. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households have been assisted through the Government's home energy efficiency scheme during the last year; and what estimates he has been given by neighbourhood energy action for 1996–97 following the budget cut of £31 million. [10387]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** The estimated number of grants for 1995–96 is 600,000. NEA, formerly known as Neighbourhood Energy Action, has suggested that 400,000 grants will be paid next year, but it has not stated its assumptions. We have announced changes in the grant level which will reduce the average grant per installation, while fully protecting low-income households. The provision for next year therefore provides scope for considerably more than 400,000 grants.

22. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households have benefited from home energy efficiency scheme payments over the past two financial years; and what payment he estimates will be made in the current financial year. [10390]

**Mr. Jones:** A total of 270,148 grants were paid under the home energy efficiency scheme in 1993–94, and 449,902 in 1994–95. In the present financial year, I estimate that £98 million will be paid out in grants to around 600,000 households.

### District Auditor Service

20. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from local authorities regarding the role of the district auditor service. [10388]

**Mr. Curry:** I have had no such representations, although local authorities do raise audit matters with the Government from time to time.

### Council Tax

21. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will increase the number of council tax bands. [10389]

**Mr. Curry:** I have no plans to do so.

### City of Birmingham Housing Department

24. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date he approved the award of housing management contracts to the city of Birmingham housing department. [10391]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Secretary of State gave his consent to the city of Birmingham carrying out eight housing maintenance contracts on—18 October 1994 four contracts and on 20 November 1995 four contracts—as provided in a direction given to the council under section 19B of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.

### Regeneration Policies

26. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on current regeneration policies. [10394]

**Mr. Curry:** Our regeneration policies will focus on the single regeneration budget and this will continue to be distributed on a competitive basis.

### Compulsory Competitive Tendering

27. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what savings have been delivered by compulsory competitive tendering in the year 1994–95. [10395]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** This information is not available on a yearly basis. On the basis of research by Birmingham university, it is estimated that average annual savings of 6.5 per cent. have been achieved on services so far subject to CCT.

### Area Cost Adjustment

28. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for a public consultation on the findings of the review into the area cost adjustment. [10396]

**Mr. Curry:** We have asked the review team to produce a report by June this year with recommendations for determining the area cost adjustment of the standard spending assessment in a way which is conceptually sound, commands the widest possible acceptance among local authorities in all parts of the country and is practical to apply.

The report, which we are proposing should be available publicly, will be produced only after the review team has considered the representations and comments made to it by local government and other interested bodies and taking account of the results of the research that the review team require.

We shall consult, in the normal way, on any changes proposed to SSAs for future years which we consider should be made in the light of the review's report.

### Homelessness

29. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning his proposals to alter the housing priority for homeless families. [10397]

**Mr. Clappison:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) on 20 November 1995, *Official Report,* column *40.*

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he will publish his Department's evaluation of the homelessness code of guidance commissioned from Birmingham university in 1993; [12144]

(2) what evaluation he has made of the homelessness code of practice commissioned from Birmingham university; and what account he took of the condition of the report in drawing up his proposed homelessness legislation. [12145]

**Mr. Clappison:** The research, "Evaluation of the 1991 Homelessness Code of Guidance to Local Authorities", will be published shortly. Much of the research relates to matters which will not be affected by the reform of the homelessness legislation, but full account will be taken of the research in preparing a revised code of guidance.

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of the provisions of the Housing Bill upon the numbers of homeless families accepted for temporary housing by local authorities. [12140]

**Mr. Clappison:** We expect to see a decline in the number of households accepted as statutorily homeless, both because the legislation will not provide a fast track into a permanent social tenancy and as a result of some applicants finding suitable alternative accommodation.

### New Housing (Insulation Standards)

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will commission further research into insulation standards in newly built housing in the United Kingdom. [10393]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Government already commission a programme of research into insulation standards in newly built housing, and will continue to do so.

### Road Vehicles (Pollution)

**Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to deal with the long-term effect of pollution caused by road vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [10392]

**Mr. Clappison:** On 1 February, section 80 of the Environment Act will be commenced, requiring us to prepare and publish a national air quality strategy containing policies with respect to the assessment or management of the quality of the air. The strategy will include a chapter concerning transport policies.

### Water Metering

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that there will be no compulsory provision of metering as a basis for domestic water charges. [10382]

**Mr. Clappison:** It is for water companies to decide the most appropriate basis for charging in their areas. We wish to encourage companies and customers to consider switching to meters; we are not forcing them to do so.

### Water Pipes (Repairs)

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review his policy of making householders liable for the repair of water pipes outwith their property. [10379]

**Mr. Gummer:** The liability of householders for water pipes remain exactly as it was when the industry was nationalised.

### Environment Centres

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many towns and cities in the United Kingdom *(a)* have established and *(b)* are in the process of establishing environment centres open to the public in line with agenda 21 as agreed at the Rio summit. [11236]

**Mr. Clappison:** My Department does not hold this information centrally.

### Former Mineworkings, County Durham

**Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive and publish the results of the Coal Authority three-month trial to establish water flow patterns in former mineworkings in County Durham; and if he will make a statement. [11605]

**Mr. Clappison:** The results of the amended pumping regime are being monitored and assessed by the Coal Authority and the National Rivers Authority. If there are

further changes in the pumping regime, I would expect that the Coal Authority will wish to make this known.

### European Regional Development Fund

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *83*, on bids under the objective 1 process, if he will list the values of the bids approved for *(a)* the Wirral and *(b)* the Liverpool side of the river. [11893]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Projects approved which are based in or being delivered directly in Wirral total £27,868,638, projects operating across more than one borough, including Wirral, or across Merseyside as a whole total £24,599,120, and projects in the rest of Merseyside total £85,518,781.

### Renewal Areas (Research)

**Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of research undertaken in his Department in the renewal areas; what changes have occurred in respect of work priorities in these areas as a consequence of the research; and when he expects to publish the research report. [12077]

**Mr. Clappison:** The research has now been completed and we are expecting the contractor to deliver a final version of the report at the end of this month. A decision will then be taken about its publication and the form of any further guidance that the Department might produce.

The 10 local authorities selected as case studies have been informed of the contractor's findings. It is up to each individual authority to decide whether its work priorities towards its renewal areas should change as a consequence of the research.

### Hedgerows

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new initiatives he plans to stimulate the planting of hedgerows. [12181]

**Mr. Clappison:** Grants for planting new hedgerows are already available as part of both the environmentally sensitive areas scheme and countryside stewardship, which generally operates outside the ESAs. In the light of stewardship's successful pilot phase, and in advance of its transfer to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 1 April 1996, my right hon. Friend the Minister announced in November that an extra £5 million will be available for new management agreements under countryside stewardship for each of the years 1996–97 and 1997–98. This is in addition to the existing £11.625 million already available under the scheme.

### Domestic Gas Appliances

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward measures to assist low-income households to service and repair gas appliances which are at risk of carbon monoxide discharges. [12441]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** No resources are available to assist householders to service and repair gas appliances. For those in rented accommodation, responsibility for the maintenance of gas appliances lies with landlords. Hence low-income households in this sector will not be liable for the maintenance of gas appliances in their homes.

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the number of households with incomes of under £150 per week which have faulty gas appliances. [12440]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** No assessment has been made of the number of low-income households with faulty gas appliances. However, the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994 impose a responsibility on landlords to ensure that gas appliances in rented accommodations are maintained in good order and serviced annually. These regulations were introduced in order to achieve a reduction in the number of carbon monoxide poisonings in rented properties, where many of these incidents have occurred in the past.

### Regional Government, East Anglia

**Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about regional government in East Anglia. [10516]

**Mr. Curry:** None.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11430]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Prior to 1990 the civil estate was managed by the Property Services Agency. Its archived records could be accessed only at disproportionate cost.

On 1 April 1990 Property Holdings assumed responsibility for the whole of the Government common user (office) estate in which Government Departments and their agencies are housed. Separate identification of the costs of unoccupied property has been made since 1 April 1993. A considerable amount of surplus space has been disposed of since then. The costs of holding CUE space vacant, together with the costs of disposing of vacant space, have been or are expected to be:

1993–94: £86.5 million (actual)

1994–95: £90.9 million (actual)

1995–96: £161.6 million (estimated)

From 1 April 1996 individual Departments will be accountable for all the offices in which they have occupations, including any vacant space therein. All wholly vacant buildings on the common user estate will be transferred to a new body, Property Advisers to the

Civil Estate, for ultimate disposal. The continuing costs of vacant space to be transferred to PACE, together with costs associated with disposal of vacant space, are estimated to be £133 million for 1996–97.

Since 1990 the marked decline in civil service staff numbers, combined with rationalisation, relocation out of London and the more effective use of office space, has enabled Departments to declare an ever increasing volume of space surplus to requirements. Sluggish market conditions have not enabled disposals to keep pace with these surrenders. In the longer term, reduction in the size of the Government's office estate will provide the taxpayer with even greater value for money.

So far as the Department of the Environment itself is concerned, estimates of the cost of vacant space are:

1993–94: £0.6 million (estimated)

1994–95: £0.9 million (estimated)

1995–96: £0.5 million (estimated)

1996–97: £1.4 million (estimated)

These figures cover the Department and its agencies, including the residual Property Services Agency, as well as the Department's share of costs of unified Government offices. Information on costs within the 35 non-Crown NDPBs sponsored by DOE could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; [11428]

(2) what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11431]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The tables set out the available information in respect of expenditure on hospitality and entertainment, and on overseas travel, accommodation and related expenses.

*Expenditure on hospitality*

*£ thousands*

| | *1989–90* | *1991–92* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96 (forecast)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DOE (Central) | 51 | 56 | 68 | 76 | 71 |
| Property Holdings | n/a | 8 | 7 | 8 | 10 |
| Total Department | 51 | 64 | 75 | 84 | 81 |
| Planning Inspectorate | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Building Research Establishment | 4 | 17 | 12 | 10 | 10 |
| The Buying Agency | n/a | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Security Facilities Executive | n/a | n/a | 2 | 6 | 5 |
| QEII Conference Centre | n/a | 10 | 14 | 15 | 12 |
| PSA Services | 0 | 98 | 50 | 2 | 0 |

The figures for the planning inspectorate for 1989–90 is included within the departmental total.
The Buying Agency figure for 1991–92 is for the period 1 April to 31 December. The figure for 1993–94 is for the period 1 January to 31 December 1993.

*Expenditure on overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses*

*£ thousands*

| | *1989–90* | *1991–92* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96 (forecast)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DOE (Central) | 331 | 393 | 454 | 519 | 550 |
| PSA Services | 3,912 | 1,213 | 120 | 0 | 0 |

These figures exclude Property Holdings.

The remaining information requested is not held centrally in the form required and could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11432]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** My Department's expenditure on newspapers, magazines and other periodicals since 1994 is as follows:

1994–95: £276,700

1995–96: £250,700 (to date)

The figure for 1993–94 was £385,700 which includes expenditure on behalf of the DOE and DOT under joint supply arrangements.

Titles include daily and regional newspapers, weekly magazines and trade and technical journals. To list each would involve disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11429]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Figures for departmental administration for year *(a)* are found in sections 3.7 and 3.8 of the "Government's Expenditure Plans 1985–86 to 1987–88", Cm 9428-II, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. No separate figures for departmental running costs are available.

The figures for departmental running costs for years *(b)* to *(f)* are set out in my department's 1995 annual report, Cm 2807, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. Revised figures for 1996–97 taking account of the transfer of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to the Environment Agency will be published in the 1996 departmental report to be published in March.

### Sites of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many hectares within sites of special scientific interest have been *(a)* seriously damaged and *(b)* destroyed in respect of their conservation value during the last 10 years. [11486]

**Mr. Clappison:** Statistical information on damage to SSSIs in Great Britain is set out in the annual reports of the former Nature Conservancy Council. Since 1 April 1991 similar details for England, Scotland and Wales have been contained in the annual reports of the country agencies and, for Great Britain, in that of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Copies of these reports are in the Library.

### Nature Conservation

**Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what percentage the funding of nature conservation is planned to change between 1995–96 and 1996–97. [11702]

**Mr. Clappison:** English Nature's grant in aid settlement for 1995–96 was £40.419 million. In 1996–97 it will be £39.166 million, representing a reduction of 3.1 per cent.

### Biodiversity Action Plan

**Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional measures will be provided to achieve the awaited biodiversity action plan. [11703]

**Mr. Clappison:** The United Kingdom was one of the first countries to produce a national biodiversity plan when "Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan" was published in January 1994.

A biodiversity steering group, chaired by my Department, with members drawn from all sectors, was set up to advise the Government on individual costed action plans for selected species and habitats, a forward programme for improving biological recording and monitoring in the UK, and a programme for improving public awareness and involvement in conserving biodiversity.

The group published its findings on 13 December 1995. "Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report" contains a number of proposals including costed action plans for 116 species and 14 key habitats. It also recommends that costed action plans for a further 286 species and 24 key habitats be produced within three years.

The Government expect to publish their response to the report in the spring of 1996.

### Water Quality Improvement

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on plans for water quality improvement within the framework 4 and framework 5 plans of the EC. [11737]

**Mr. Clappison:** Research on water quality issues is included in the fourth European Community framework programme of research, technological development and demonstration, 1994 to 1998. Proposals for the fifth framework programme, beginning in 1998–99, are expected to be submitted to the Council and the European Parliament, by the Commission, next year. My Department's view on plans for "Framework Five" will be strongly influenced by how successful the current programme is at meeting its objectives.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was total Government spending in *(a)* Pendle, *(b)* Bath and *(c)* Bournemouth. [12618]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Central Government support comprises support for capital spending as well as revenue spending. The latest available figures for 1995–96 are as follows. Differences between districts' overall level of revenue support depend on a large number of factors including the size of the tax base from which council tax can be raised, as well as the Government's assessment of relative expenditure needs.

*£ thousand*

| | *Pendle* | *Bath* | *Bournemouth* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue support grant | 3,462 | 3,687 | 8,562 |
| Redistributed non-domestic rates | 2,872 | 2,780 | 5,347 |
| Specific and special grants inside AEF, excluding SSA reduction grant | 181 | 253 | 683 |
| SSA reduction grant | 540 | 0 | 646 |
| Specific and special grants outside AEF | 10,242 | 10,939 | 34,113 |
| Total revenue support | 17,297 | 17,659 | 49,351 |
| Credit approvals | 1,183 | 484 | 1,956 |
| Capital grants | 1,277 | 1,517 | 480 |
| Total central Government support | 19,757 | 19,660 | 51,787 |

*Source:*
Revenue support items: Budget Estimates from RA96 return.
Credit approvals and capital grants: most recent capital payments return. The figures for credit approvals relate to basic and supplementary credit approvals issued less receipts of specified capital grant.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the rest of England the capital receipts held by them resulting from the sale of land, property and other assets. [12617]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** A list of the amounts of accumulated usable receipts from all assets at 31 March 1995 for each English local authority was placed in the Library of the House in response to the question of 22 January 1996 from the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), *Official Report,* column *85.* The figures for authorities in Lancashire are:

*Amounts held at 31 March 1995 (£ million)*

| | *Usable receipts* |
|---|---|
| Lancashire county council | 0.751 |
| Blackburn | 0 |
| Blackpool | 7.480 |
| Burnley | 2.066 |
| Chorley | 1.047 |
| Fylde | 0.451 |
| Hyndburn | 0.315 |
| Lancaster | 0 |
| Pendle | 1.385 |
| Preston | 1.839 |
| Ribble Valley | 0.796 |
| Rossendale | 0.056 |
| South Ribble | 5.738 |
| West Lancashire | 1.131 |
| Wyre | 0.159 |

Local authorities are required to set aside 75 per cent. of their capital receipts from the sale of council housing and 50 per cent. of most other receipts, to repay debt. These amounts form part of the provision for credit liabilities, which also includes amounts set aside from revenue. Separate figures for set-aside capital receipts are not available.

### Challenge Funding

**Mr. Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to publish further details of the Government's proposals for the extension of challenge funding to local authority capital spending. [12981]

**Mr. Gummer:** The challenge funding concept has proved itself as one of the best approaches for funding elements of local authority spending. This is a chance to see how it might work when applied to the major areas of councils' capital expenditure.

Following my announcement on 30 November 1995, *Official Report,* column 1338, that the Government wish to build on the success of the challenge concept, I am today issuing to local authorities and other interested parties a consultation paper seeking views on one option for applying this approach to the funding of mainstream local authority capital expenditure.

Our proposals would give the more enthusiastic local authorities the opportunity to bid for a share of a capital challenge fund of up to £250 million and to supplement this with private sector cash. Local authorities will be able to decide their own priorities, so, for example, those who want to improve run down inner-city areas or enhance the rural environment will get more cash if they put their backs into developing imaginative projects and partnerships. All have the chance to do this. The best projects will be targeted with the most resources, bringing with it all the benefits of value for money, and the chance to get local people and businesses involved in projects that ultimately use their money.

Our consultation paper sets out ideas for a challenge fund to support capital spending across all services. In particular, it invites comment on the option of proceeding with a pilot scheme to test a mechanism for distribution a proportion of total credit approvals for capital expenditure in the 1997–98 financial year. This pilot would build on the competitive approach already taken to funding elements of local authority capital expenditure, and would offer local authorities greater freedom to decide on their own spending priorities across the board.

We will consider carefully all comments made in response to the consultation paper before deciding how best to proceed. A pilot scheme, if undertaken, would inform decisions on how to build on the competitive element which is already part of the capital financial system to enhance local accountability and value for money.

Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

### Drought Orders

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions of European law provide that an application for a drought order, where withdrawal of water from areas of sites of special scientific interest is being considered, is accompanied by an environmental impact assessment. [10853]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* Environmental impact assessment is required in accordance with directive 85/337/EEC for projects involving drilling for water supplies where groundwater abstraction is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. No drought orders made during the past 12 months have involved the construction of new boreholes. Environmental impact assessment is not required under the directive for surface water abstraction.

### Toxic Waste

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to prevent the incineration of toxic waste at sea; and if he will make a statement. [12383]

**Mr. Baldry:** I have been asked to reply.

The incineration of toxic waste at sea has been prohibited since the start of 1991.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Military Equipment Embargoes

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his reply to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), of 27 November 1995, on military equipment embargoes,

*Official Report*, columns *426-27*, if he will set out which parts and groups of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 apply in each case where an embargo has been imposed. [11051]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The UK interprets the embargoes on Argentina, Burma, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, UNITA (Angola), former Yugoslavia and Zaire as including all goods in group 1 of part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994.

In the case of Iran, the embargo also takes in goods or technology on the nuclear materials list in category 0 in annexe I to Council decision 94/942/CFSP on the control of exports of dual-use goods, the export of which is controlled by Council regulation (EC) 3381/94. There are two exceptions: the ban does not include equipment considered essential for the safety of civil aircraft and air traffic control systems, or radioactive material for medical equipment use, but the exceptions do not apply where there is knowledge or reason to suspect that the goods would go to a military end-user or be used for military purposes.

In the case of China, the scope of the EU ban has been left for national interpretation. We consider the following to be caught by the embargo: weapons and their specially designed components/ammunition, weapons platforms and any equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression. These categories fall under group 1 of part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994.

The voluntary embargoes on Armenia and Azerbaijan are in respect of arms and we interpret them as covering headings ML1, PL5002, PL5018, PL5021, ML2, ML3, ML4, PL5030, PL5006, ML5, ML6(a) and (b), ML7, ML8, ML9, ML10(a)–(f), ML16 (in respect of goods covered by headings ML1, ML2, ML3, ML4 and ML6(a) and (b), ML9, ML10(a)–(f), ML23 and ML26), PL520, ML23, ML24(a) and (b)2, and ML26 of group 1 of part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994. However, any applications for other military equipment for these countries would receive close scrutiny.

### Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986

**Mr. Bell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cases remain pending within his Department under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986; and if he will make a statement. [12207]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** As at 31 December 1995, there were 1,610 cases before the courts under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 which had been commenced by the Department but which had not been concluded.

### Burnley and Pendle Transport

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Office of Fair Trading has solicited the views of members of the travelling public in Burnley and Pendle concerning the proposed purchase by Stagecoach of Pendle council's 50 per cent. stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport. [12209]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** No. In the event that such a merger were announced, the Director General of Fair Trading would take account of all relevant factors, including the views of third parties.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Director General of Fair Trading consulted him before providing confidential guidance to the parties involved in the proposed sale of Pendle borough council's stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport. [12210]

**Mr. Taylor:** It is not the practice of the Government or the Director General of Fair Trading to disclose whether confidential guidance has been sought or given in specific cases. In general, before giving confidential guidance, the director general will consult my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

### Privatised Utilities

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people served on the boards of *(a)* British Gas, *(b)* British Telecom, *(c)* the Central Electricity Generating Board, *(d)* East Midlands electricity board, *(e)* Eastern electricity board, *(f)* London electricity board, *(g)* Manweb, *(h)* Midlands electricity board, *(i)* Northern electricity board, *(j)* Norweb, *(k)* South Wales electricity board, *(l)* South Western electricity board, *(m)* Southern electricity board and *(n)* Yorkshire electricity board in the final year before each was privatised. [12215]

**Mr. Page:** The information requested, in relation to the organisations for which my Department has sponsorship responsibility, is as follows:

| *Organisation* | *Number of people employed* | *Number of people on board* | *Total remuneration paid to those on board £ million* | *Year ended* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| British Gas | 89,747 | 12 | 0.5 | 31 March 1986 |
| British Telecom | 244,592 | 13 | 0.5 | 31 March 1984 |
| Central Electricity Generating Board | 47,631 | 10 | 0.4 | 31 March 1989 |
| | — | — | — | — |
| East Midlands Electricity | 7,478 | 11 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| Eastern Electricity | 9,970 | 12 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| London Electricity | 6,920 | 10 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| MANWEB | 5,551 | 12 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| Midlands Electricity | 7,738 | 11 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| Northern Electricity | 5,439 | 8 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| NORWEB | 8,249 | 10 | 0.3 | 31 March 1990 |
| SEEBOARD | 6,345 | 12 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| Southern Electricity Board | 8,233 | 11 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| South Wales Electricity Board | 3,770 | 12 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |

| Organisation | Number of people employed | Number of people on board | Total remuneration paid to those on board £ million | Year ended |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South Western Electricity Board | 5,641 | 12 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |
| Yorkshire Electricity | 7,153 | 10 | 0.2 | 31 March 1990 |

*Note:*

[1] The year in which the last Annual Report and accounts for the Central Electricity Generating Board as a whole was produced.

*Sources:*

Annual Reports and Accounts except Electricity Area Boards, where the Main Prospectus for the Regional Electricity Companies Share Offers was used.

### Nuclear Levy

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money has been raised by the nuclear levy on consumers' bills since 1990 to the present day in 1995 prices. [12477]

**Mr. Page:** The total amount raised by the fossil fuel levy for financing nuclear and renewables generators from 1990–91 to 1994–95—the latest figure available—is £6.686 billion in 1994–95 prices.

*Source:*

Office of Electricity Regulation. Converted to 1994–95 prices using the GDP Market price deflator.

### Nuclear Industry (Insurance)

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the requirements for insurance to cover the risk of accidents including radioactive materials following privatisation of the nuclear industry; what assessment he has made of whether appropriate cover is available from commercial insurance sources; what contingency plans have been drawn up for the Government to continue to cover such risks in the absence of commercial insurance; and what charge would be made to the privatised industry for such state insurance. [12240]

**Mr. Page:** Under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965, a UK nuclear generator is required to have insurance for third party nuclear liability of £140 million for any one incident. For claims over £140 million, compensation may be paid out up to a total of around £280 million, from public funds. Parliament may also vote further funds. These arrangements apply whether the operator is in the public or private sector in accordance with the UK's obligations under the Paris and Brussels conventions on civil nuclear liability. When these limits were set in 1994, they took into account the capacity of commercially available insurance.

### British Energy

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the net present value of estimated future profit of British Energy; and what discount rate this assumes. [12479]

**Mr. Eggar:** The net present value of estimated future profit of British Energy depends on the discount rate used. If such information is to be made available to investors, it will be included in the prospectus.

### Departmental Staff (Energy Matters)

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff *(a)* specialise in energy and *(b)* spend time on energy-related issues. [12481]

**Mr. Eggar:** Within my Department, there are at present 484 staff in the energy command, which deals with energy-related issues. There are also staff elsewhere in the Department who spend time on energy matters where these impact on their main areas of responsibility, but it is not possible to quantify the number of staff falling into this category.

### National Insurance Fund

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies made successful applications to the national insurance fund as a result of failing to meet statutory obligations to provide redundancy payments for employees under the terms of current employment legislation for each year since 1979; and if he will provide the figures for each year with regard to the total cost of the approved applications from the national insurance fund expressing the costs *(a)* on a consistent basis and *(b)* at constant 1979 prices. [12612]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The information is not available in the form requested. The total cost to the national insurance fund of statutory redundancy payments made to employees under section 106 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 is set out in the table. The figures include payments to former employees of insolvent businesses.

| Year | £ million | £ million at constant 1979 prices[1] |
|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 19.3 | 19.3 |
| 1980–81 | 42.0 | 35.5 |
| 1981–82 | 53.0 | 40.8 |
| 1982–83 | 72.2 | 51.9 |
| 1983–84 | 69.0 | 47.4 |
| 1984–85 | 57.1 | 37.4 |
| 1985–86 | 54.6 | 33.9 |
| 1986–87 | 50.2 | 30.2 |
| 1987–88 | 34.9 | 19.9 |
| 1988–89 | 32.4 | 17.4 |
| 1989–90 | 25.7 | 12.9 |
| 1990–91 | 67.6 | 31.3 |
| 1991–92 | 131.8 | 57.6 |
| 1992–93 | 161.9 | 67.9 |
| 1993–94 | 130.6 | 53.2 |
| 1994–95 | 89.5 | 35.8 |

[1] GDP Deflator used to calculate constant 1979 prices.

### Post Office (Privatisation)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultation he has had with the Post Office on a timetable for privatisation. [12605]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** None.

### AEA Technology

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress is being made in separating AEA Technology from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. [13066]

**Mr. Page:** The Secretary of State intends to give a direction to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority under section 1(1) of the Atomic Energy Authority Act 1995 to make a scheme providing for the transfer, on 31 March 1996, of the property, rights and liabilities of what constitutes AEA Technology to a single successor company, AEA Technology plc, owned by the Secretary of State.

From that date, the commercial activities of the authority will be carried on by the new company. The authority itself will focus in future on the safe and cost-effective maintenance and decommissioning of its nuclear liabilities. It will also continue to run the UK's nuclear fusion programme.

### Inward Investment

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the findings from the research into the wider effects of inward investment will be made available. [13067]

**Mr. Eggar:** The commissioning Departments for this research have received the consultants' report on the "Assessment of the Wider Effects of Inward Investment in Manufacturing in the UK". I have placed copies of the report in the Libraries of the House. Copies are available from my Department, regional development division, room 3.E.45, 1 Victoria street, London SW1H 0ET.

### Regional Selective Assistance

**Mr. Prescott:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each of the English regions the expenditure on regional selective assistance offers accepted by companies in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94 and *(d)* 1994–95, the proportion of regional selective assistance expenditure on foreign-owned firms and regional selective assistance expenditure per employee in manufacturing. [12703]

**Mr. Eggar:** Offers of regional selective assistance accepted in the period 1991–92 to 1994–95 were as follows:

| | *RSA offers accepted £000* | *Preparation to foreign-owned firms Percentage* | *Amount offered by head of employee in manufacturing projects £000* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1991–92* | | | |
| East | — | — | — |
| East midlands | 1,580 | 25 | 1,834 |
| London | — | — | — |
| Merseyside | 10,266 | 13 | 5,724 |
| North east | 16,912 | 15 | 3,944 |
| North west | 15,066 | 9 | 3,203 |
| South east | — | — | — |
| South west | 4,190 | — | 4,889 |
| West midlands | 12,620 | 60 | 3,032 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 18,012 | 72 | 7,077 |
| Total | 78,646 | 33 | 4,111 |
| *1992–93* | | | |
| East | — | — | — |
| East midlands | 848 | 18 | 2,681 |
| London | — | — | — |
| Merseyside | 8,861 | 42 | 6,719 |
| North east | 25,225 | 49 | 6,312 |
| North west | 18,773 | 32 | 4,281 |
| South east | — | — | — |
| South west | 6,376 | 41 | 5,643 |
| West midlands | 7,921 | 40 | 2,809 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 11,463 | 25 | 3,647 |
| Total | 79,467 | 39 | 4,623 |
| *1993–94* | | | |
| East | 240 | — | 3,169 |
| East midlands | 4,244 | 50 | 2,947 |
| London | 116 | — | 3,562 |
| Merseyside | 13,920 | 38 | 4,375 |
| North east | 33,698 | 50 | 5,870 |
| North west | 18,240 | 12 | 3,252 |
| South east | 478 | — | 3,093 |
| South west | 8,486 | 30 | 5,149 |
| West midlands | 21,950 | 32 | 3,656 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 17,225 | 13 | 3,756 |
| Total | 118,597 | 32 | 4,140 |
| *1994–95* | | | |
| East | 2,782 | — | 2,525 |
| East midlands | 5,546 | 30 | 3,006 |
| London | 2,396 | — | 2,419 |
| Merseyside | 13,541 | 41 | 3,820 |
| North east | 37,681 | 51 | 5,730 |
| North west | 25,382 | 43 | 2,939 |
| South east | 3,116 | — | 5,471 |
| South west | 14,321 | 27 | 4,771 |
| West midlands | 33,231 | 48 | 4,361 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 22,520 | 10 | 5,519 |
| Total | 160,522 | 37 | 4,335 |

**Mr. Hutton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value of regional selective assistance grants in each intermediate and development area in 1994 and 1995. [12388]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Offers of regional selective assistance accepted in 1994 and 1995 were as follows:

*£000*

| | 1994 | | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DA | IA | DA | IA |
| East | — | 2,273 | — | 1,844 |
| East Midlands | 4,190 | 2,229 | 1,739 | 4,263 |
| London | — | 1,102 | — | 3,643 |
| Merseyside | 12,104 | 357 | 14,679 | 150 |
| North-east | 27,680 | 1,455 | 33,940 | 957 |

£000

| | 1994 | | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DA | IA | DA | IA |
| North-west | 5,845 | 17,470 | 5,665 | 10,278 |
| South-east | 1,383 | 1,502 | 2,148 | 3,777 |
| South-west | 3,845 | 11,170 | 2,518 | 9,005 |
| West Midlands | 10,252 | 20,704 | 19,467 | 9,949 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 6,780 | 9,781 | 6,492 | 14,863 |
| Total | 72,079 | 68,043 | 86,648 | 58,729 |

## European Framework Programme for Research and Technological Activities

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give details of the individual awards given to United Kingdom based companies under the European framework programme for research and technological activities in each of the years from the establishment of the programme. [12324]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** Information on the funding provided to individual UK companies under the European Union's framework programme for research and technological development is held only by the European Commission and is not made available to member states.

## Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11436]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Disaggregated information on the basis requested is not available for the Department and the non-departmental public bodies and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I have asked agency chief executives to reply directly to the hon. Member as they have their own budgetary responsibility for travel and subsistence costs.

*Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on overseas travel, accommodation and other associated expenses incurred by The Insolvency Service.

Costs associated with overseas travel by The Service are:

*Financial Year—Costs including VAT*

1994/95: £9,000

1995/96: £12,500 (to date)

1995/96: £13,500 (estimated full year)

1996/97: £12,000 (estimated)

Prior to 1994/95 overseas travel was paid centrally by the Department of Trade and Industry. A breakdown of expenditure for the financial years preceding 1994/95 could only now be provided at disproportionate cost.

*Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about expenditure on overseas travel, accommodation and associated costs. I regret that disaggregated information on the basis you requested is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

*Letter from Michael Goddard to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Competition and Consumer Affairs has asked me to reply to your Question about overseas travel and subsistence costs. The information for the Radiocommunications Agency, which is only available in an aggregated form, for the periods quoted is as follows:

1991–92: £399,185

1993–94: £454,503

1994–95: £538,202

1995–96: £633,263 (estimated outturn)

1996–97: £615,864 (estimated)

The Radiocommunications Agency was set up with effect from 2 April 1990. Expenditure on overseas travel and subsistence before that date was the responsibility of the DTI and is not available.

*Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply, in relation to the Patent Office, to your Question about overseas travel.

The total expenditure on overseas travel, including accommodation and associated expenditure is:

1993/94: £172,921

1994/95: £184,754

1995/96: £245,000 (forecast)

1996/97: £260,000 (forecast)

Further disaggregation of the above and expenditure for 1979/80, 1980/90 and 1991/92 are not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

*Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 24 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about overseas travel by Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC), an executive agency of DTI.

The following table sets out the information that is readily available.

*Amount excluding VAT*

1991/92: £77,000

1992/93: £50,000

1993/94: £72,000

1994/95: £99,000

1995/96: £78,000 (estimated to year end).

Information on 1979/80 and 1989/90 could only be provided at disproportionate cost. A forecast for 1996/97 is not available.

*Letter from David Durham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

John M Taylor MP has asked me to reply in respect of Companies House Executive Agency to your question to the President of the Board of Trade on expenditure relating to overseas business travel by our staff for certain years since 1979.

The information you seek is as follows:

*Expenditure on Overseas Travel*

1989–90: £15,000

1991–92: £26,000

1993–94: £21,000

1994–95: £12,000

1995–96: £20,000 (to date)

1995–96: £24,000 (full year estimate).

The expected expenditure for 1996–97 is not available at this stage as Companies House is still developing its budget plans for next year. Information on earlier years can only be provided at disproportionate costs.

I hope this information is helpful.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11437]

**Mr. Taylor:** Excluding its agencies, my Department's expenditure on newspapers and mass circulation journals for the years requested was as follows:

1993–94: £291,270

1994–95: £255,512

1995–96: £204,875 (to end December 1995)

This includes expenditure on national daily and Sunday newspapers, regional newspapers, and mass circulation magazines and journals. A full list of titles cannot be supplied except at disproportionate cost. The titles taken change to meet the changing requirements of the Department.

I have asked each of the agency chief executives to write to the hon. Member about their expenditure on newspapers and magazines.

*Letter from David Durham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade for information about his department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines.

Attached is a summary of Companies House's expenditure for the years you requested to date, together with a list of the publications purchased in 1995–96 to date.

I hope this is helpful.

*Newspapers and Magazines Expenditure*

1993–1994: £11,201

1994–1995: £5,488

1995–1996: £2,235 (to date)

*Newspapers*

Y-Cymro

Financial Times x 2

Times

Western Mail

Daily Telegraph

Independent

Guardian

Liverpool Daily Post

South Wales Echo

*Magazines*

U.K. On-Line Users Group Newsletter

Wordperfect Magazine x 2

The Mac

Exhibition Bulletin

Management Today

Bulletpoint

What to buy for business

What's new in business information

On-Line CD-ROM

Health and Safety at work

Information World Review

Financial Regulatory Briefing

The Economist

The Administrator

Company Secretaries Review

Hansards—House of Commons

Hansards—House of Lords

Investors Chronicle

Direct Response

Equal Opportunity Review

Inside Release 1-2-3 Release 3

Windows User

PC Direct x 2

PC Magazine x 3

Inside Wordperfect for Windows

"Ingenuity" Tech Publication

Project Manager Today

Personal Computer World

PC Pro x 2

Software Futures

Computer Finance

*Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 24 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about expenditure on newspapers and magazines by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC), an executive agency of DTI.

We do not keep sufficiently detailed records of the newspapers and magazines purchased to provide a comprehensive reply to your question. The information sought could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

However, expenditure on the provision of services by the library (including scientific journals, newspapers and magazines; books; and on-line searches) was as follows:

*Excluding VAT*

1993–94: £89,000

1994–95: £108,000

1995–96: £36,000

*Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply, in relation to the Patent Office, to your Question about the purchase of newspapers and magazines.

The total expenditure is shown below and a list of publications purchased for the present year is attached.

1993–94: £50,903

1994–95: £59,442

1995–96: £42,674 (Year to 31 December 1995)

The range of publications purchased reflects the need for patent examiners, in particular, to have state of the art knowledge of developments in their work area.

*Publications Purchased For 1995–96*

ABC Rail Guide
ABC World Airways Guide
Advanced Battery Technology
Amateur Photography
American Dyestuff Reporter
Applied Optics
Applied Physics Letter

AT and T Technical Journal
Australian Law Reports
Author
Auto Motor und Sport
Autocar
Automative Engineer
B R E Update Package
Bike Magazine
Biotechnology
Bookseller
British Food Journal
British Journal of Photography
British National Formulary
British Printer
British Telecommunications Engineering and Supplement to British Telec Engineering
Byte
Cabinet Maker
Cable and Satellite Europe
Chemical Abstracts Service
Chemistry and Industry
Chilton's Automative Industries
Commercial Motors
Common Market law Reports and Antitrust Reports
Computer—IEEE Computer Magazines
Computer Journal
Computer Journal Abstracts
Control Engineering
Control and Instrumentation
Copyright World
Copyright and Design Law
Cryogenics
Current Papers in Electrical and Electronics Engineering
Daily Express
Data Communications International
Database—The Magazine of Databases References and Reviews
Defense Electronics
Dr Dobb's Journal—Software Tools For The Professional Programmer
Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin
Economist
Electric World and Wireless
Electrical Products
Electronic Engineering
Electronic Letters Plus All IEE Proceedings
Electronic Packaging And Production
Electronic Review
Electronics—Cleveland
Electronics and Communication Engineering Journal
Elektor Electronics
Engineer
Eureka
European Intellectual Property Review
European Patent Office Reports
European Patent Sourcefinder
European Plastics News
European Production Engineering
Filtration and Separation
Financial Times
Fire
Fish Farmer
Fleet Street Reports
Flight
Fluid Abstracts—Process Engineering
Food Trade Review
Future and The Inventor
Games and Puzzles
Glass
Glass Industry
Glass Technology and Physics and Chemistry of Glasses
Gramophone
Harpers Sports and Leisure
Heating and Plumbing Monthly
Hi Fi News
I P Asia
IBM Journal of Research and Development
IEE Review and IEE News
IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications
IEEE Journal on Selected Areas in Communications
IEEE Network—The Magazine of Computer Communications
IEEE Spectrum
IEEE Transactions on Antennas and Propagation
IEEE Transactions on Circuits and Systems for Video Technology
IEEE Transactions on Communications
IEEE Transactions on Consumer Electronics
IEEE Transactions on Electron Devices
IEEE Transactions on Image Processing
IEEE Transactions on Signal Processing
IEEE Transactions on Vehicular Technology
IEEE Transactions on Aerospace and Electronic Systems
Industrial Heating
Industrial Robot
Industry and Higher Education
Information Management and Technology
Information World Review
Information and Software Technology
Intellectual Property Decisions
Intellectual Property Newsletter
Intellectual Property Reports
International Defense Review and IDR Despatches
International Media Law
ITC—International Review of Industrial Property and Copyright Law
Journal of Cellular Plastics
Journal of Chemical Information and Computer Sciences
Journal of Imaging Science and Technology
Journal of Medicinal Chemistry
Journal of Micromechanics and Microengineering
Journal of Plastic Film and Sheeting
Journal of Systems Management
Journal of The Acoustical Society of America
Journal of The American Society for Information Science
Journal of The Copyright Society of The USA
Journal of The Patent and Trademark office Society
Journal of The Society of Dyers and Colourists and Review of Progress in Coloration
Key Abstracts—Antennas and Propagation
Key Abstracts—Computer Communications and Storage
Key Abstracts—Electronic Circuits
Key Abstracts—Electronic Instrumentation
Key Abstracts—Factory Automation
Key Abstracts—Machine Vision
Key Abstracts—Measurement in Physics
Key Abstracts—Neutral Networks
Key Abstracts—Robotics and Control
Key Abstracts—Telecommunications
Key Abstracts—Optoelectronics
Knitting International
Laboratory News
Lancet
Lastauto Und Omnibus
Leading Edge
Management Services
Management Today and Professional Manager
Managing Intellectual Property
Manual For The Handling of Applications For Patents, Design, Trademarks Throughout World
Materials Handling News
Measurement Science and Technology
Metal Finishing and Guidebook and Directory
Microprocessors and Microsystems
Mims Monthly Index of Medical Specialities
Mine and Quarry
Modern Plastics International
Motorboat and Yachting
Nature
New Law Journal and Supplements
New Scientist
New Zealand Law Reports

Nuclear Engineering International and World Nuclear Industry Handbook
Offshore Engineer
Online—The Magazine of Online Information Systems
Online and CD Notes
Optics and Laser Technology
OS/2 Pointers
Packaging—Highlands Ranch
Packaging Today
Packaging Week
Paper Technology
Patent Throughout The World and Supplements
Patent World
PC Support Advisor—Personal Computer
PC World
Physics Today
Pipes and Pipelines International
Playthings
Popular Science
Power Engineering Journal
Practical Householder
Proceedings of The Institution of Mechanical Engineers
Railway Gazette International
Recherche
Refrigeration and Air Conditioning
Research Disclosure
Road and 4 Wheel
Science—AAAS—Weekly Paper Edition
Science Et Vie
Scientific America
Solar Energy
South African Law Reports
Steel Times
Sunday Times
Surveyor
Television
Television—London
Textile Month
The Daily Telegraph
The Guardian
The Independent
The Observer
The Times
Trademark World
Trademarks Throughout The World
Trends In Food Science and Technology
Ultrasonics and Ultrasonics Sonochemistry
Virtual Reality World
Water Environment Research
What PC
What's New In Building
Woodworker
Woodworking
WordPerfect Magazine UK
World Intellectual Property Reports
World Oil
World Patent Information
Zeolites

*Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about newspaper and magazine expenditure by The Insolvency Service.

It is not possible from the existing financial database to specifically identify the cost of newspapers and magazines charged to a General Publications heading, a major part of which relates to legal and accountancy reference books and updates and technical journals covering law, accounting, finance, management and training. Expenditure on all publications in 1994/95 totalled £42,000 and in 1995/96, to date, £46,400. Newspapers purchased across The Service's 34 locations are generally limited to the national daily broadsheets.

*Letter from Michael Goddard to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about expenditure on newspapers and magazines.

The information for the Radiocommunications Agency for the periods quoted is as follows:

1993–94: £41,852.15

1994–95: £28,982.76

1995–96: £26,322.06 (to date).

These figures include periodicals in non-paper format; ie microfiche, disc and CD-ROM.

A list of current subscriptions, which runs to 19 pages and contains nearly 300 titles, is available if required.

*Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 30 January 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question expenditure on newspapers and magazines. Until recently the cost of magazines was not separately identified with the result that we do not have a figure for the cost of magazines in 1993/94. The Agency's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in 199495 was approximately £1,500 and I expect this year's figure to be similar.

The only newspaper purchased is The Times, and the following list of publications represents the latest position in a continuing review of expenditure on publications.

BSI News

Business Briefing

The Economist

The Engineer

Engineering Design and Manufacturing Index

Health and Safety at Work

Le Point

Measurement

Measurement and Control

New Scientist

Personal Computer World

Precision Engineering

Quality Today

Trading Standards Review

Training Officer

WordPerfect Magazine.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11433]

**Mr. Taylor:** Disaggregated information in the form requested in respect of the non-departmental public bodies, and for the financial year 1979–80 in respect of the Department and its agencies, could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1996–97 are still subject to the outcome of the Department's management information system for Ministers process. The other information requested is as follows:

| Area of Department | 1989–90 £ | 1991–92 £ | 1993–94 £ | 1994–95 £ | 1995–96 Budget £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Centre DTI (excluding net controlled agencies and trading funds) | 246,601 | 399,720 | 519,037 | 516,357 | 580,000 |
| *Net controlled agencies and trading funds* | | | | | |
| Accounts Service Agency | [1]— | 300 | 300 | 300 | n/a |
| Companies House | [2]— | 5,600 | 11,542 | 18,289 | 12,300 |
| Laboratory of the Government Chemist | [3]— | 17,685 | 27,122 | 29,000 | 33,000 |
| National Engineering Laboratory | [1]— | 36,000 | 10,000 | 13,500 | 8,162 |
| National Physical Laboratory | [1]— | 45,881 | 70,221 | 83,799 | 35,307 |
| Patent Office | [2]— | 8,000 | 18,000 | 15,143 | 17,500 |
| Radiocommunications Agency | [1]— | 21,993 | 33,575 | 35,921 | 48,388 |
| Total | | 535,179 | 689,797 | 712,309 | 734,657 |

[1] Established as net controlled agencies after 1989–90.
[2] Information not readily available for period before attainment of trading fund status in October 1991.
[3] Information not available for this period and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
Work previously carried out by the Accounts Services Agency, National Physical Laboratory was contracted-out on 1 April and 1 October respectively. The National Engineering Laboratory was privatised on 31 October 1995.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11434]

**Mr. Taylor:** Total running cost expenditure, net of VAT, for both the gross and net controlled areas of the Department is set out in the following table:

*£ million*

| Year | DTI running costs |
|---|---|
| 1979–80 outturn[1] | 66 |
| 1989–90 outturn[2] | 371 |
| 1991–92 outturn[2] | 433 |
| 1993–94 outturn[2] | 442 |
| 1994–95 outturn[3] | 401 |
| 1995–96 outturn[2] | 402 |
| 1996–97 plans[2] | 350 |

*Source:*
[1] Appropriation Accounts 1979–80, Volume 2: Classes IV–IX. This figure reflects the running costs for the then separate Departments of Trade and Industry. It does not reflect any machinery of government changes that took place after 1979–80.
[2] Trade and Industry Annual Report 1995.
[3] Appropriation Accounts 1994–95, Volume 4: Class IV.

The fall in expenditure over the years 1993–94 to 1996–97 reflects in part the contractorisation and privatisation of work previously carried out by the Department's agencies. The figures do not reflect the machinery of government changes announced on 5 July 1995. More up-to-date information will be published in March in the Department's 1996 annual report.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11435]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is providing figures for vacant space on the common user estate. These figures cover most of my Department's properties. This reply supplements the central response by supplying information covering properties classed as departmental estate for which my Department, including its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, currently has direct responsibility.

The cost of vacant property on the departmental estate for which my Department was responsible in 1995–96 is expected to be £215,000. Figures for empty property prior to 1995–96 are available only at disproportionate cost.

Responsibility for the remainder of the civil estate occupied by my Department will transfer to my Department from the Department of the Environment on 1 April 1996. The transfer is expected to increase the cost of vacant property for which my Department is responsible by £1,200,000 for 1996–97.

The annual cost of under-utilised property in my Department can be estimated only at disproportionate cost.

### Export Credit Guarantees

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what level of export credit guarantees extended to companies in or the Government of Nigeria has been claimed by United Kingdom companies; and what is the estimated cost to the taxpayer. [9822]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* As at 31 December, 1995 the Export Credits Guarantee Department had paid claims on Nigeria of £1,840 million which were yet to be recovered, the ECGD's records are not held in a way that enables it to arrive at a cumulative total of all claims which it has ever paid on Nigeria.

Such claims paid by the ECGD on its trading operations do not represent a direct charge against public expenditure, although to the extent payments by the ECGD in any one year exceed receipts there is a corresponding increase in the PSBR.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Robin Cook:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has *(a)* read, collated or received and *(b)* authorised civil servants or any other persons to read,

collate or receive copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated by Sir Richard Scott to Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10224]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The handling of extracts of Sir Richard's draft report, subject to guidance received from the inquiry, is for those to whom they are sent. The Government do not disclose details of correspondence between the inquiry and individual witnesses.

### Jordan and Saudi Arabia (Export Credits)

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the amount paid under Export Credits Guarantee Department guarantees since 1980 in relation to trade with *(a)* Jordan and *(b)* Saudi Arabia; if he will give the amount paid to banks under buyer credit and line of credit facilities, the amount paid directly to exporters under short-term or supplier credit facilities and the amount subsequently recovered; and if he will estimate the proportion of each figure paid in respect of (i) the export of military and related equipment and (ii) the export of military and related equipment where the end user has been assessed to have been Iraq. [11251]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* As at the end of December 1995, the total amount of claims paid and recoveries made since 1980 under ECGD guarantees in relation to trade with Jordan and Saudi Arabia was as follows:

*£ million*

| | *Claims Paid* | | *Recoveries* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Buyers credit and lines of credit* | *Short term and supplier credit* | *Buyer credit and lines of credit* | *Short term and supplier credit* |
| Jordan | 273 | 14 | 38 | 14 |
| Saudi Arabia | 0 | 63 | 0 | 26 |

The ECGD estimates that approximately 85 per cent. of the claims paid on Jordan in respect of project and capital goods were in respect of military and related equipment. The ECGD does not maintain its records in a way which enables it to categorise its short-term business by industry sector.

The ECGD has no record of cases where the end user was in Iraq.

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total principal value of payments by the Export Credits Guarantee Department to the Midland bank since 1980 in respect of trade with Saudi Arabia by *(a)* Astra Holdings and its subsidiaries, *(b)* British Aerospace and its subsidiaries, *(c)* Royal Ordnance and its subsidiaries, *(d)* Vickers and its subsidiaries, *(e)* Racal and its subsidiaries, *(f)* Plessey and its subsidiaries and *(g)* Thorn EMI and its subsidiaries. [11308]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The ECGD has no record of payments to Midland bank since 1980 in respect of capital goods and project business with Saudi Arabia by any of the named companies. In the case of its now privatised short-term business the ECGD maintains no record of the supplier in cases where it has paid claims to banks.

### Balance of Trade

**Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the percentage change in each year since 1990 in *(a)* the volume of manufactured exports and *(b)* the volume of manufactured imports; and in each year, what proportion of imports consisted of (i) capital and intermediate goods and (ii) consumer goods. [11900]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The information is given in the two tables:

*Volume of UK trade in manufactures (percentage changes[1] on previous year)*

| | *Exports* | *Imports* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 1.0 | –7.0 |
| 1992 | 2.0 | 7.5 |
| 1993 | –1.0 | 2.0 |
| 1994 | 13.7 | 8.8 |

[1] Changes in the indices of trade in 1990 prices.

*UK imports of capital, intermediate and consumer goods—(proportions[1] of total UK imports)*

| | *Capital and intermediate goods* | *Consumer goods* |
|---|---|---|
| | *Per cent.* | *Per cent.* |
| 1990 | 30.3 | 18.4 |
| 1991 | 31.0 | 17.2 |
| 1992 | 32.0 | 18.1 |
| 1993 | 33.2 | 18.7 |
| 1994 | 34.5 | 18.5 |

*Notes:*
[1] Proportions derived from imports in current prices.
*Source:*
Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics, CSO.

### Stamp Prices

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations his Department had with the Treasury prior to the 1995 Budget announcement regarding the impact on small and medium enterprises of a rise in the price of stamps. [11957]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* My Department had discussions with the Treasury on a range of issues in determining the financial targets which were set for the Post Office in the 1995 Budget. These did not specifically include the impact on SMEs of an increase in letter tariffs, as it is for the Post Office to assess the detailed impact of such changes on its customers which will depend primarily on the nature of their business. Letter tariff rates were last increased on 1 November 1993 and the Post Office has undertaken to maintain these rates until at least 31 March 1996, the longest period of stability since the late 1960s.

### Business Links

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the members of each business links board. [11961]

**Mr. Page** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* The information requested is not available. It could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what requirements are placed on business links to publish their membership; [11958]

(2) what requirement there is on business links to ensure that members of their boards include those working in firms with *(a)* under 50 employees, *(b)* 20 employees, and *(c)* 10 employees; [11960]

(3) in what form the membership of the boards of business links is published. [11949]

**Mr. Page** *[holding answers 29 January 1996]:* Business link proposals to be considered by the business link national assessment panel have details of board membership, giving names and company details, where known. Business links inform training and enterprise councils in their area of business link board membership. Although there are no formal requirements to publish their membership, most business links are required to register board membership with Companies House as private limited companies by guarantee.

Guidance on board membership is given in the October 1994 supplement to the business link prospectus. This states that the business link board should have a majority of members from private sector businesses.

### European Regional Development Fund

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the indicative allocations in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds (i) for the United Kingdom in total and (ii) by standard region, from *(a)* the European regional development fund and *(b)* the European social fund under objective 2 for the period 1997 to 1999. [11699]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* Indicative allocations of objective 2 grant from the European structural funds in 1997–99 will not be set until later in 1996. The European Commission will calculate a total for each eligible member state; the Government will allocate shares to each of the eligible areas of the United Kingdom and Gibraltar. Indicative figures for grants from each fund are also due to be settled before the end of 1996.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what estimate he has made of the number of jobs to be safeguarded by the European regional development fund's supported activities in the United Kingdom between 1994 and 1999; [11697]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of jobs to be created by European regional development fund supported activities in the United Kingdom between 1994 and 1999. [11698]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answers 29 January 1996]:* No such estimates have been made, but the 52 current single programming documents and community initiative programme documents, which provide for grants over varying periods of years from this and the other European structural funds, include targets for jobs to be created and safeguarded, as well as many other quantified objectives.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European regional development fund over the last available five years. [11658]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* The full information requested could be made available only at disproportionate cost. Allocations of ERDF grant money from 1989 to 1995 for the principle eligible areas are set out in ecu in the table. The table does not include the structural funds community initiatives, which are not generally allocated regionally, or some other minor schemes of ERDF grant. Receipts arise over varying periods subsequent to the allocations, and at varying exchange rates.

*UK European regional development fund allocations 1989 to 1995 under objectives 1, 2 and 5B*

*million ecu, 1994 prices*

| | *1989* | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* | *1989–95 Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Objective 1* | | | | | | | | |
| Merseyside | — | — | — | — | — | 65 | 71 | 136 |
| Highlands and Islands | — | — | — | — | — | 22 | 27 | 49 |
| Northern Ireland | 79 | 88 | 92 | 129 | 120 | 96 | 103 | 707 |
| Total Objective 1 | 79 | 88 | 92 | 129 | 120 | 183 | 201 | 892 |
| *Objective 2* | | | | | | | | |
| North east England | 52 | 62 | 59 | 81 | 77 | 73 | 77 | 480 |
| Eastern England | 80 | 95 | 90 | 124 | 118 | — | — | 507 |
| West Midlands | 60 | 71 | 67 | 93 | 89 | 88 | 92 | 560 |
| North west England | 70 | 83 | 79 | 108 | 103 | 73 | 76 | 592 |
| West Cumbria | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 30 |
| East Midlands | — | — | — | — | — | 19 | 20 | 39 |
| East London and Lea Valley | — | — | — | — | — | 18 | 18 | 36 |
| Plymouth | — | — | — | — | — | 7 | 8 | 15 |
| Thanet | — | — | — | — | — | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | — | — | — | — | — | 75 | 78 | 153 |

*UK European regional development fund allocations 1989 to 1995 under objectives 1, 2 and 5B*

*million ecu, 1994 prices*

| | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1989–95 Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Western Scotland | 69 | 82 | 78 | 107 | 102 | 71 | 74 | 583 |
| Eastern Scotland | 22 | 27 | 25 | 35 | 33 | 31 | 32 | 205 |
| South Wales | 34 | 41 | 39 | 53 | 51 | 45 | 47 | 310 |
| North east Wales | 10 | 12 | 11 | 16 | 15 | — | — | 65 |
| Total Objective 2 | 400 | 477 | 451 | 621 | 593 | 510 | 532 | 3,584 |
| *Objective 5b* | | | | | | | | |
| South west England | 11 | 28 | 24 | 16 | 13 | 17 | 23 | 132 |
| The Marches | — | — | — | — | — | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Midlands Uplands | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Northern Uplands | — | — | — | — | — | 8 | 10 | 18 |
| Lincolnshire | — | — | — | — | — | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| East Anglia | — | — | — | — | — | 5 | 6 | 11 |
| Rural Wales | 16 | 41 | 34 | 23 | 19 | 14 | 18 | 165 |
| Highlands and Islands | 15 | 38 | 32 | 21 | 17 | — | — | 124 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 24 |
| Borders of Scotland | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Central Scotland/Tayside | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Grampian | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Total Objective 5b | 44 | 112 | 93 | 62 | 51 | 64 | 83 | 510 |
| Total England | 276 | 343 | 321 | 426 | 404 | 467 | 500 | 2,737 |
| Total Scotland | 108 | 152 | 139 | 166 | 155 | 135 | 148 | 1,002 |
| Total Wales | 61 | 94 | 84 | 92 | 85 | 59 | 65 | 539 |
| Total Northern Ireland | 79 | 88 | 92 | 129 | 120 | 96 | 103 | 707 |
| Total Objectives 1, 2 and 5 b | 524 | 677 | 636 | 812 | 764 | 757 | 816 | 4,986 |

*£ million, 1994 prices*

| | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1989–95 Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Objective 1* | | | | | | | | |
| Merseyside | — | — | — | — | — | 54 | 59 | 113 |
| Highlands and Islands | — | — | — | — | — | 18 | 23 | 41 |
| Northern Ireland | 53 | 63 | 64 | 95 | 93 | 80 | 86 | 535 |
| Total Objective 1 | 53 | 59 | 62 | 87 | 80 | 153 | 168 | 661 |
| *Objective 2* | | | | | | | | |
| North east England | 35 | 44 | 41 | 59 | 60 | 61 | 64 | 365 |
| Eastern England | 54 | 68 | 63 | 91 | 92 | — | — | 368 |
| West Midlands | 40 | 51 | 47 | 68 | 69 | 73 | 77 | 426 |
| North west England | 47 | 59 | 55 | 79 | 81 | 61 | 63 | 445 |
| West Cumbria | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 23 |
| East Midlands | — | — | — | — | — | 16 | 17 | 33 |
| East London and Lea Valley | — | — | — | — | — | 15 | 15 | 30 |
| Plymouth | — | — | — | — | — | 6 | 7 | 13 |
| Thanet | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 3 | 7 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | — | — | — | — | — | 63 | 65 | 128 |
| Western Scotland | 46 | 59 | 54 | 79 | 80 | 59 | 62 | 439 |
| Eastern Scotland | 15 | 19 | 18 | 25 | 26 | 26 | 27 | 155 |
| South Wales | 23 | 29 | 27 | 39 | 40 | 38 | 39 | 235 |
| North east Wales | 7 | 9 | 8 | 12 | 12 | — | — | 47 |
| Total Objective 2 | 269 | 340 | 315 | 456 | 463 | 425 | 443 | 2,712 |
| *Objective 5b* | | | | | | | | |
| South west England | 8 | 20 | 16 | 12 | 10 | 14 | 19 | 99 |
| The Marches | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 3 | 7 |
| Midlands Uplands | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Northern Uplands | — | — | — | — | — | 7 | 8 | 15 |
| Lincolnshire | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| East Anglia | — | — | — | — | — | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| Rural Wales | 11 | 29 | 24 | 17 | 15 | 12 | 15 | 122 |
| Highlands and Islands | 10 | 27 | 22 | 16 | 14 | — | — | 89 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 18 |

*£ million, 1994 prices*

| | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1989–95 Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Borders of Scotland | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Central Scotland/Tayside | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Grampian | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Total Objective 5b | 30 | 80 | 65 | 46 | 40 | 53 | 69 | 383 |
| Total England | 185 | 245 | 225 | 313 | 316 | 389 | 417 | 2,090 |
| Total Scotland | 73 | 108 | 97 | 122 | 121 | 113 | 123 | 757 |
| Total Wales | 41 | 67 | 59 | 68 | 66 | 49 | 54 | 404 |
| Total Northern Ireland | 53 | 63 | 64 | 95 | 93 | 80 | 86 | 535 |
| Total Objectives 1, 2 and 5 b | 352 | 483 | 445 | 597 | 597 | 631 | 680 | 3,785 |

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how much in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom has received under the trans-European network programmes to date; [11670]

(2) how much in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the trans-European network programmes under the current financial perspective. [11671]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answers 29 January 1996]:* The size of the trans-European networks—TENs—budget is determined annually through the EU budget process. Amounts are not pre-allocated to member states, nor are receipts divided by region.

From the 1995 budget, the first year for which TENs grants became available, the United Kingdom expects to receive some 30 mecu, or £25 million, for UK TENs projects, plus an as yet unquantifiable amount from some joint projects in which it has an interest.

It is too early to estimate 1996 receipts.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European regional development fund under the present structural funds agreement. [11659]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* There is no single agreement. Currently, 26 single programming documents and 26 community initiative programme documents provide for grants, over varying periods of years, from this and the other European structural funds. The Community initiative programmes are not generally allocated regionally. The figures for grants from the European regional development fund in the single programming documents—SPDs—for eligible UK areas are set out in the table.

*UK SPD Allocations: 1994–99*

*million ecu, 1994 prices*

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Objective 1* | | | | | | | |
| Merseyside ERDF | 65 | 71 | 76 | 81 | 88 | 95 | 475 |
| Highlands and Islands ERDF | 22 | 27 | 28 | 31 | 34 | 38 | 180 |
| Northern Ireland ERDF | 96 | 103 | 110 | 119 | 121 | 129 | 677 |
| Total UK Objective 1 ERDF | 183 | 200 | 214 | 231 | 243 | 262 | 1,332 |

*Estimated UK SPD Allocations: 1994–99*

*(£ million, 1994 prices (Using an exchange rate of £1=1.20 ecu)*

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Objective 1* | | | | | | | |
| Merseyside ERDF | 54 | 59 | 63 | 67 | 73 | 79 | 396 |
| Highlands and Islands ERDF | 18 | 22 | 24 | 26 | 28 | 32 | 150 |
| Northern Ireland ERDF | 80 | 86 | 92 | 99 | 101 | 107 | 564 |
| Total UK Objective 1 ERDF | 152 | 167 | 178 | 192 | 202 | 218 | 1,110 |

*UK SPD allocations: 1994–96*

*Million ecu, 1994 prices*

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Objective 2* | | | | | | | |
| North-east England ERDF | 73 | 77 | 81 | — | — | — | 231 |
| West Cumbria ERDF | 6 | 6 | 7 | — | — | — | 19 |

*UK SPD allocations: 1994–96*

*Million ecu, 1994 prices*

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yorkshire and Humberside ERDF | 75 | 78 | 81 | — | — | — | 234 |
| East Midlands ERDF | 19 | 20 | 21 | — | — | — | 59 |
| West Midlands ERDF | 88 | 92 | 97 | — | — | — | 278 |
| North-west ERDF | 73 | 76 | 81 | — | — | — | 230 |
| East London and Lea valley ERDF | 18 | 18 | 19 | — | — | — | 56 |
| Thanet ERDF | 4 | 4 | 4 | — | — | — | 12 |
| Plymouth ERDF | 7 | 8 | 8 | — | — | — | 23 |
| Total England Objective 2 ERDF | 364 | 379 | 400 | — | — | — | 1,142 |
| Industrial South Wales ERDF | 45 | 47 | 49 | — | — | — | 141 |
| Eastern Scotland ERDF | 31 | 32 | 34 | — | — | — | 97 |
| Western Scotland ERDF | 71 | 74 | 78 | — | — | — | 223 |
| Total Scotland Objective 2 ERDF | 102 | 106 | 112 | — | — | — | 320 |
| Total United Kingdom Objective 2 ERDF | 510 | 531 | 561 | — | — | — | 1,603 |

*Estimated UK SPD allocations: 1994–96*

*£Million, 1994 prices (Using an exchange rate of £1 = 1.20 ecu)*

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Objective 2* | | | | | | | |
| North-east England ERDF | 61 | 64 | 68 | — | — | — | 193 |
| West Cumbria ERDF | 5 | 5 | 6 | — | — | — | 16 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside ERDF | 63 | 65 | 68 | — | — | — | 195 |
| East Midlands ERDF | 16 | 16 | 17 | — | — | — | 49 |
| West Midlands ERDF | 74 | 77 | 81 | — | — | — | 232 |
| North-west ERDF | 61 | 64 | 67 | — | — | — | 192 |
| East London and Lea valley ERDF | 15 | 15 | 16 | — | — | — | 46 |
| Thanet ERDF | 3 | 3 | 3 | — | — | — | 10 |
| Plymouth ERDF | 6 | 6 | 7 | — | — | — | 19 |
| Total England Objective 2 ERDF | 303 | 315 | 333 | — | — | — | 952 |
| Industrial South Wales ERDF | 37 | 39 | 41 | — | — | — | 118 |
| Eastern Scotland ERDF | 26 | 27 | 28 | — | — | — | 81 |
| Western Scotland ERDF | 59 | 62 | 65 | — | — | — | 186 |
| Total Scotland Objective 2 ERDF | 85 | 88 | 93 | — | — | — | 266 |
| Total United Kingdom Objective 2 ERDF | 425 | 443 | 468 | — | — | — | 1,336 |

*UK SPD Allocations: 1994–99*

*million ecu, 1994 prices*

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Objective 5b* | | | | | | | |
| South West England ERDF | 17 | 23 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 145 |
| The Marches ERDF | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 24 |
| Midlands Uplands ERDF | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| Northern Uplands ERDF | 8 | 10 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 65 |
| Lincolnshire ERDF | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 36 |
| East Anglia ERDF | 5 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 41 |
| Total England Objective 5b ERDF | 38 | 50 | 57 | 57 | 58 | 58 | 318 |
| Rural Wales ERDF | 14 | 18 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 115 |
| Borders of Scotland ERDF | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 21 |
| Dumfries and Galloway ERDF | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 34 |
| Central Scotland/Tayside ERDF | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 17 |
| Grampian ERDF | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 29 |
| Total Scotland Objective 5b ERDF | 12 | 16 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 101 |
| Total United Kingdom Objective 5b ERDF | 64 | 83 | 96 | 96 | 97 | 98 | 534 |

*Estimated UK SPD Allocations: 1994–99*

*£ million, 1994 prices (Using an exchange rate of £1 = 1.20 ecu*

| | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Objective 5b* | | | | | | | |
| South West England ERDF | 14 | 19 | 22 | 22 | 22 | 22 | 121 |
| The Marches ERDF | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 20 |
| Midlands Uplands ERDF | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Northern Uplands ERDF | 6 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 54 |
| Lincolnshire ERDF | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 30 |
| East Anglia ERDF | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 34 |
| Total England Objective 5b ERDF | 32 | 41 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 265 |
| Rural Wales ERDF | 11 | 15 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 96 |
| Borders of Scotland ERDF | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 17 |
| Dumfries and Galloway ERDF | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 29 |
| Central Scotland/Tayside ERDF | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 14 |
| Grampian ERDF | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 24 |
| Total Scotland Objective 5b ERDF | 10 | 13 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 84 |
| Total United Kingdom Objective 5b ERDF | 53 | 69 | 80 | 80 | 81 | 81 | 445 |

### Lloyds and Unichem Merger

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what study his Department is undertaking to ascertain the effect on small pharmacies of the Lloyds and Unichem merger. [12161]

**Mr. John M. Taylor** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* In the first instance, it is for the Director General of Fair Trading to advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on qualifying mergers. In giving his advice, the director general will take account of all relevant factors.

### Pharmacy Industry

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in respect of vertical integration in the pharmacy industry. [12162]

**Mr. John M. Taylor** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no general policy in respect of vertical integration in the pharmacy industry. Each case on which he is required to make a decision, whether or not involving vertical integration, must be considered on its own merits.

### Industrial and Provident Societies

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will amend the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts to increase the limit on shareholding to £50,000 to facilitate higher levels of capital formation. [9948]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** I have been asked to reply.

The shareholding limit for industrial and provident societies was doubled to £20,000 in 1994. Since then, there has been little demand from the movement for a further increase and the Government have no current plans to review the existing level.

## WALES

### Local Government Finance

**Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce his decision on the 1996–97 local government revenue settlement; and if he will make a statement. [13086]

**Mr. Hague:** I have given careful consideration to the representations that I have received on my provisional settlement proposals for local authorities and police authorities in Wales, which I announced on 28 November and 30 November. I chaired a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance on 18 December, at which settlement matters were discussed.

Having taken account of all the representations, I believe that my proposals provide the new unitary authorities with the appropriate level of funding in 1996–97, their first year of operation. Like the rest of the public sector, the new authorities will need to assess their budget priorities carefully. However, inflation remains low and the Government have made it clear that pay increases should be met from efficiency savings and other economies.

I also believe that, subject to a small adjustment in the figures due mainly to the postponement of the transfer of responsibility for warrant enforcement work from police authorities to magistrates courts, my provisional settlement proposals provide an appropriate level of funding for police authorities in Wales.

I have therefore decided to set total standard spending at £2,867.6 million and aggregate external finance at £2,517.9 million for 1996–97. The settlement provides for an increase in standard spending of £85.6 million, 3.1 per cent. on the comparable amount of 1995–96. Total standard spending includes £149.6 million for community care and £331.7 million to fund police services. Police funding comprises £165.5 million in cash-limited police grant provided by the Home Secretary and £166.2 million in standard spending assessments.

Aggregate external finance will comprise £1,792 million in revenue support grant, £459 million in distributable non-domestic rates, £237.8 million in specific grants, and £29.1 million to damp council tax increases arising from the disaggregation of county and district councils' 1995–96 standard spending assessments and budgets to unitary authorities.

My settlement proposals take account of a number of minor changes to specific grants within total standing spending and aggregate external finance. My decisions are subject to the approval of the House of Commons.

I have considered the representations that I have received about the potential average council tax increases which could arise if authorities budget to the maximum indicated by the provisional capping criteria which I announced on 13 December. I have decided that, in addition to the £29 million I am making available for damping within aggregate external finance, I will make available an extra £15.9 million for damping. This will be targeted so as to ensure that no council tax increase, excluding community council precepts, can exceed 25 per cent. This is a maximum figure, and I expect the great majority of increases to be well below this figure. I have assumed that authorities will make reasonable collection rate assumptions for 1996–97 and that capping principles will be adhered to. Details of the amounts proposed for individual unitary authorities under the two elements of the damping scheme are as follows:

*£000 (rounded)*

| | *Disaggregation* | *Targeted* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anglesey | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire | 1,450 | 541 | 1,991 |
| Aberconwy and Colwyn | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Denbighshire | 3,139 | 0 | 3,139 |
| Flintshire | 393 | 248 | 641 |
| Wrexham | 16 | 1 | 16 |
| Powys | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cardiganshire | 3,684 | 0 | 3,684 |
| Pembrokeshrie | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Carmarthenshire | 0 | 119 | 119 |
| Swansea | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Neath and Port Talbot | 3,293 | 452 | 3,745 |
| Bridgend | 0 | 1,877 | 1,877 |
| Vale of Glamorgan | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Rhondda, Cynon, Taff | 6,432 | 3,916 | 10,348 |
| Merthyr Tydfil | 687 | 394 | 1,081 |
| Caerphilly | 1,509 | 2,453 | 3,962 |
| Blaenau Gwent | 3,631 | 1,005 | 4,635 |
| Torfaen | 0 | 1,163 | 1,163 |
| Monmouthshire | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Newport | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cardiff | 4,895 | 3,621 | 8,517 |
| Total | 29,128 | 15,789 | 44,917 |

Actual council tax levels will depend on the budgetary decisions of individual local authorities.

I envisage this additional assistance as a "one off", giving authorities time to adjust service expenditure and bring it more in line with their standard spending assessments. In looking at next year's settlement, I shall have regard to the efforts of unitary authorities in this respect.

I propose to lay the local government finance report (Wales) 1996–97 before the House, for its approval, later this week. At the same time, I shall be laying for the house's approval the limitation of council tax and Precepts (notional amounts) report (Wales) 1996–97.

I am placing final settlement details for individual unitary authorities and police authorities in the Library of the House.

### Paediatric Emergency Services

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which units in Wales offer paediatric emergency services; and, of these, which currently do not have their full establishment of nursing staff. [11977]

**Mr. Hague:** This information is not collected centrally. The majority of NHS trusts/health units with casualty units are able to offer paediatric emergency services. Further information should be obtained directly from the relevant chief executives.

### Dentists

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much of the additional finance for NHS dentists in Wales has been spent; what assessment he has made of the response to the initiative; and if he will make a statement. [11965]

**Mr. Hague:** Recent reports from family health services authorities indicate that 26 general dental practitioners have so far been offered grants either to establish new, or to expand existing, dental practices. In addition, 12 NHS trusts have plans to recruit additional dentists.

More than £1 million has already been reserved but, in most instances, it will take a few months for the new dentists to become operational and the grant payable. To date, £50,000 has been issued to support the community dental service appointments.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11404]

**Mr. Hague:** The recorded running cost figures for my Department are as follows:

*£ million*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 17.8 |
| 1989–90 | 45.7 |
| 1991–92 | 58.1 |
| 1993–94 | 76.5 |
| 1994–95 | 77.4 |
| 1995–96 budget | 75.9 |

These figures are not strictly comparable over time; for example, running costs in 1979–80 did not include superannuation charges, the training and enterprise council management fee and various overhead costs including accommodation, which have added at least £22 million to the 1995–96 figure. The Welsh Office has

assumed additional functions over this period, for example, further responsibilities for industry, higher education and training. Information for 1996–97 will be published in March in the Welsh Office departmental report.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11406]

**Mr. Hague:** Records are not held separately for expenditure on overseas travel by the Welsh Office or its agency, and are not held centrally for NDPBs.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11403]

**Mr. Hague:** The figures are as follows:

| | *(a) Welsh Office* £ | *(b) Agency (Cadw)* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 35,982 | 481 |
| 1993–94 | 26,818 | 2,248 |
| 1994–95 | 28,784 | 1,734 |
| 1995–96 | [1]13,713 | [1]346 |
| 1995–96 | [2]28,000 | [2]1,500 |
| 1996–97 | [3]— | [3]— |

[1] Spend to 31 December 1995.
[2] Budget for year.
[3] Not yet determined.

Records for earlier years are not available and expenditure by NDPBs is not held centrally.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11407]

**Mr. Hague:** My Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines is as follows:

1993–94: £82,760

1994–95: £74,820

1995–96: £50,295 (April to December)

Details of the publications purchased have been placed in the Library of the House.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11405]

**Mr. Hague:** Welsh Office accommodation is part of the common user estate held in the name of the Secretary of State for the Environment and managed by Property Holdings, a directorate of DOE. Surplus accommodation and space on the common user estate are the responsibility of Property Holdings. Information for the common user estate will be provided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in his reply.

Information is not held centrally for agencies and NDPBs which are not housed on the common user estate.

### Labour Statistics

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest calculation of the numbers of Welsh jobs that have been moved out of Wales in each of the past five years indicating those which have been relocated *(a)* elsewhere in the United Kingdom, *(b)* elsewhere in the EU and *(c)* elsewhere in the world. [12167]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** No estimates of this kind have been made by the Welsh Office.

### Pemrhiwceiber School

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will be making additional funds available to build a new school at Pemrhiwceiber in the Cynon valley. [12738]

**Mr. Richards:** My right hon. friend is making available more than £508 million for local authority capital spending in 1996–97.

It is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources that are made available are allocated between services, including education, in the light of their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities.

### Health Service (Consultants)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with trusts and health authorities in relation to the performance of consultants who are listed in the waiting times information bulletin of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority published in November 1995 as having total combined out-patient and in-patient waiting times in excess of 104 weeks. [12532]

**Mr. Hague:** The purpose of the waiting times information bulletin is to help GPs offer informed advice to those patients who need to be referred to hospital. Patients are, of course, entitled to be referred to the consultant of their choice, even where charter targets may not be met, provided that they are aware of this and are offered alternative referrals.

My Department continues to work closely with health authorities and hospitals in Wales to reduce hospital waiting times, and my officials are currently visiting hospitals where progress has been below expectation. The waiting times information bulletin serves as useful background information to this dialogue with the NHS and for the hospital visits in particular.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to issue new guidelines on the private earnings of medical consultants employed by NHS trusts;

and what plans he has to make their NHS earnings directly proportionate to the number of sessions worked for the NHS. [12570]

**Mr. Hague:** I have no plans to issue new guidelines on the private earnings of medical consultants.

NHS earnings of consultants employed on national terms and conditions of service are already directly proportionate to their NHS work.

### Regional Selective Assistance

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all *(a)* loans, *(b)* grants and *(c)* other payments in excess of £100,000 made in each of the last five years by the Welsh Office to *(a)* the Tesco company and *(b)* other companies; and if he will make a statement. [12719]

**Mr. Hague:** The Welsh Office made an offer of regional selective assistance of £2 million in 1989 to the Tesco company in respect of a project to locate its administration centre in Cardiff. In 1992, an offer of £3.8 million was made to encourage the company to locate a distribution centre in Magor. Details of the amounts paid against these offers are commercially confidential.

The Welsh Office has made no other loans or payments to the company.

Details of regional selective assistance payments to other companies are also covered by commercial confidentiality. Total payments of RSA made in respect of projects in Wales in the last five years are shown in the table.

*£ million*

| | *RSA payments £ million (Gross)* |
|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 31.0 |
| 1991–92 | 55.1 |
| 1992–93 | 61.7 |
| 1993–94 | 50.8 |
| 1994–95 | 56.9 |

**Mr. Prescott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the expenditure on regional selective assistance offers accepted by companies in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94 and *(d)* 1994–95, the proportion of regional selective assistance expenditure on foreign-owned firms and regional selective assistance expenditure per employee in manufacturing. [12702]

**Mr. Hague:** The information is given in the following table.

| | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Value of RSA offers accepted | £76.9 million | £72.5 million | 94.6 million | 38.2 million |
| Percentage to foreign-owned firms | 55.7 | 42.2 | 58.2 | 33.0 |
| Grant per job in manufacturing projects | £5,764 | £5,784 | £7,361 | £6,031 |

### Welsh Health Common Services Authority (Correspondence)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he willl place in the Library a copy of the corrective letter issued by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to its September 1995 waiting times information bulletin with respect to the information on the orthopaedic waits for the University hospital of Wales; if he will specify what the inaccuracies were in that corrective letter, as referred to in the apology issued in the November information bulletin; and if he will make a statement. [12572]

**Mr. Hague:** A copy of the letter of 4 October 1995, distributed with the September 1995 edition of the NHS Wales waiting times information bulletin, will be placed in the Library of the House.

The table of hospital waiting times at University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS trust, which accompanied the letter, quoted a zero waiting time or that no data were available for first out-patient appointments in respect of the consultants listed for trauma and orthopaedic specialities. This mistake was corrected in the November 1995 edition of the bulletin.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11424]

**Sir John Wheeler:** Information for 1979–80 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Details of my Department's expenditure on administration for the years 1989–90 to 1996–97 are contained in table 11.1 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2816, copies of which are available in the Library.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental Ministerial public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11425]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Mr. Shiji Lapite

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Attorney-General what action he proposes to take following the jury verdict of unlawful killing of Mr. Shiji Lapite; and if he will make a statement. [12763]

**The Attorney-General:** Following the verdict of the inquest jury, the Crown Prosecution Service has requested transcripts of the evidence given at the inquest together with copies of any documents which may have been produced to the jury. Once this material has been carefully considered, together with the pre-inquest evidence, and any further inquiries which may prove necessary have been completed, the Crown Prosecution Service will decide whether criminal proceedings should be instituted.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Lockerbie

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column 17, if Her Majesty's Government will discuss with the Libyan Government guarantees that the two Libyans accused of crimes in relation to the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie would be made available for trial in The Hague if Britain set up a trial in Holland; and if he will examine the related issues of the absence of an extradition treaty with Libya. [11738]

**The Prime Minister:** No. The Government's position on a trial in a third country is clear.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Cardiff Bay Opera House

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will require the Millennium Commission to release the contents of all reports concerning the proposed Cardiff Bay opera house to the Cardiff Bay Opera Trust. [8694]

**Mr. Sproat:** Directions issued to the Millennium Commission under section 26 require it, where it considers it necessary, to take expert advice into account when making funding decisions. It is for the Millennium Commission to decide what information to publish.

### Disabled People (Sport)

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on her Department's policy in relation to the development of sports for disabled people. [9215]

**Mr. Sproat:** The Government fully support sport for people with disabilities. The Sports Council gives annual grants to the main disability sports organisations and has recently announced an additional grant of £200,000 to the British Paralympic Association to assist with training and participation in the Atlanta Paralympic games. The Government's sportsmatch scheme specifies sport for people with disabilities as one of its priority areas disability sport projects are also eligible for national lottery funding. The Sports Council is also working closely with the disability sports organisations and the governing bodies of sport on the implementation of the recommendations of the ministerial review report on sport for people with disabilities "Building on Ability".

### British Library

**Dr. John Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures her Department has made to monitor the efficiency and spending on the British Library building project. [10906]

**Mrs. Virginnia Bottomley:** Following its creation in 1992, the Department of National Heritage assumed responsibility for this project. I attach great importance to its successful delivery. A steering committee, chaired at a senior level, meets monthly to review progress and to take strategic decisions. The Department's project team, headed by a very experienced project director, is based at the site, and works closely with the consultants, contractors and project managers who are under contract to us. Progress is monitored against budget and a detailed programme of work, covering many thousands of activities. Spending is constantly under review, through detailed reports which show expenditure and expected outturn against each parcel of work.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list for her Department and each of the agencies for which she is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11908]

**Mr. Sproat:** This Department undertakes very little external recruitment. The positive about disabled people symbol is not currently used for either external recruitment or internal recruitment and promotion. However, my officials are currently considering its use for external recruitment. The Department has responsibility for two agencies: the Historic Royal Palaces agency and the Royal Parks agency. The agencies have their own arrangements for recruitment and promotion. At present, neither agency uses the symbol.

### National Lottery

**Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her estimate of the number of people who purchase national lottery tickets regularly; and what is the average sum spent each week by those purchasing such tickets. [7441]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 16 January 1996:]*: This is an operational matter. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery to write to the hon. Member and to place copies of the reply in the Libraries of the House.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her Department's agencies and *(c)* her Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1991–92, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1994–95, (iv) 1995–96 and (v) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11342]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* While all the information requested is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, the available information is as follows:

| | *1993–94 actual* £ | *1994–95 actual* £ | *1995–96 estimate* £ | *1996–97 estimate* £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Department of National Heritage | 168,000 | 203,598 | 257,000 | n/a |
| Historic Royal Palaces Agency | 109,702 | 158,349 | 158,824 | 202,000 |
| Royal Parks Agency | 163,031 | 190,871 | 196,000 | 160,000 |

My Department makes use of CCTA's metropolitan telephone service, which provides us with fully managed telephone and directory services. Internal telephone directories are available to staff in my Department and both agencies.

The Government telephone network connects over 1,000 Government offices nationwide. As a user of the GTN, a GTN dialling codes booklet is also available to all members of staff in this Department.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the expenditure of her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate she has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if she will estimate the savings accruing to her Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11339]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* My Department uses consultants for a wide variety of tasks, only a small proportion of which are aimed at achieving cost savings. No central record is held on overall savings and it would not be possible to isolate those consultancies and quantify the cost savings without incurring disproportionate cost. The available information is given in the following table:

| | *1993–94 actual* £ | *1994–95 actual* £ | *1995–96 spend to date* £ | *1995–96 estimate* £ | *1996–97 estimate* £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Department of National Heritage | 1,547,360 | 467,497 | 276,376 | 460,000 | n/a |
| Historic Royal Palaces Agency | 3,708,000 | 1,381,000 | 282,000 | 545,000 | n/a |
| Royal Parks Agency | 748,195 | 848,033 | 486,427 | 810,000 | 750,000 |

Information on non-departmental public bodies is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the total expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate she has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11340]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* While all the information requested is not available, the available figures are as follows:

| | *1993–94 (actual)* £ | *1994–95 (actual)* £ | *1995–96 (spend to date)* £ | *1995–96 (estimate)* £ | *1996–97 (estimate)* £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Department of National Heritage* | 103,850 | 57,000 | 192,353 | 302,000 | n/a |
| Advertising | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | n/a |
| Press and PR | 78,850 | Nil | 5,352 | Nil | n/a |
| *Historic Royal Palaces Agency* | 1,161,047 | 1,065,018 | 1,250,742 | 1,245,742 | n/a |
| Advertising | 1,019,047 | 955,417 | 1,140,516 | 1,120,516 | n/a |
| Press and PR | 102,000 | 88,000 | 90,000 | 105,000 | n/a |
| *Royal Parks Agency* | 46,240 | 52,459 | 65,110 | 103,672 | 107,610 |
| Advertising | 240 | 2,262 | 1,063 | 1,063 | 1,500 |
| Press and PR | Nil | 5,197 | 12,547 | 19,109 | 19,110 |

Information on DNH non-departmental public bodies is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

## Windsor Castle

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns 625-26, if she will list the name

of each of the 13 military knights in residence at Windsor castle, their rank at the end of military service and the principal ceremonial duties they undertake. [11565]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* There are normally 13 military knights at Windsor, although at present only 12 of the appointments are held. They are as follows:

1. Major General P. A. Downward—Governor
2. Brigadier A. L. Atkinson
3. Brigadier J. F. Lindner
4. Major W. L. Thompson
5. Major L. W. Dickerson
6. Major J. C. Cowley
7. Lieutenant Colonel N. L. West
8. Major G. R. Mitchell
9. Lieutenant Colonel R. Tamplin
10. Major P. H. Bolton
11. Brigadier T. Hackworth
12. Major R. J. Moore

The military knights undertake ceremonial duties at St. George's chapel on Sunday mornings, the Queen's official birthday, Garter day, St. George's day, the quarterly obit services and state visits when held at Windsor.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 18 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *625–26*, from what sources the balance of £25.2 million for that restoration of Windsor castle will be found. [11564]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* The balance will be met from the net surplus from visitor admissions to the state rooms at Buckingham palace and the precincts at Windsor castle.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### EC Dairy Regime

**Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in pounds sterling and ecu, the EC expenditure on the dairy regime in the latest year for which figures are available in each member state showing the average support per cow in each state and the European average. [10673]

**Mr. Baldry:** The information requested is set out in the table:

| | *1994 expenditure on the CAP dairy regime* | | *Average support per cow* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *MECU* | *£ million* | *ECU* | *£* |
| Netherlands | 995.1 | 762.5 | 566.4 | 434.0 |
| France | 942.7 | 722.4 | 198.7 | 152.3 |
| Germany | 677.5 | 519.1 | 129.5 | 99.2 |
| Denmark | 381.5 | 292.3 | 532.1 | 407.7 |
| Ireland | 320.2 | 245.4 | 252.3 | 193.3 |
| Belgium | 311.2 | 238.5 | 453.6 | 347.6 |
| UK | 290.7 | 222.8 | 106.3 | 81.5 |
| Italy | 187.7 | 143.8 | 90.7 | 69.5 |
| Spain | 74.1 | 56.8 | 55.3 | 42.4 |
| Portugal | 57.9 | 44.4 | 162.6 | 124.6 |
| Greece | 7.6 | 5.8 | 35.2 | 27.0 |
| Luxembourg | 2.6 | 2.0 | 53.1 | 40.7 |
| EC12 average | — | — | 219.7 | 168.3 |

### Emtryl (Game Birds)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to enforce European Commission regulation EC 1798 banning the use of Emtryl in treating game birds; what penalties he plans to apply to offences against the regulation when it comes into force; and what warnings have been issued to *(a)* landowners, *(b)* breeders, *(c)* owners of shooting rights and *(d)* others involved against using Emtryl. [11625]

**Mrs. Browning:** Banning therapeutic products containing dimetridazole, the active ingredient of Emtryl, would have serious health and welfare consequences for turkeys, game birds and pigs. The UK believes that such products can be used safely and, pending discussions with the European Commission, no action has been taken to withdraw the marketing authorisations for them. The use of DMZ for disease prevention, in accordance with EEC directive 70/524, is not affected by these regulations.

The Animals, Meat and Meat Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) Regulations 1991, as amended—the residues regulations—make it an offence to administer substances in annexe IV of the Council regulation to an animal, or to sell for human consumption any meat or meat product containing such a substance, provided the relevant amending Commission regulation is contained in schedule 1 to the residues regulations. The penalties for non-observance of these regulations are set out in regulation 21, which provides for a fine.

The application of the Commission regulation has been the subject of several discussions with game birds, poultry, farming and distribution interests.

### Veterinary Staff

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the range of hourly rates; and what is the overall average hourly rate charged to abattoirs for the services of official veterinary surgeons. [11892]

**Mrs. Browning:** The range of official veterinary surgeon hourly rates provided by the Meat Hygiene Service is from £17.50 to £140 before the application of capping for the 1995–96 financial year, which keeps the normal time rate to a maximum of £35 per hour. Overtime rates are not capped.

The overall average hourly rate charged to abattoirs for OVS services is £32.42.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many local veterinary inspectors there are currently; and how they are *(a)* selected and *(b)* paid. [11692]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* At 1 January 1995 there were 5,722 local veterinary inspectors. Data for 1 January 1996 have not yet been collated.

Before an LVI is appointed, he/she must be a member of an established veterinary practice. For an initial appointment they must have spent at least three months in the practice. They will be subject to interview and procedural training carried out by MAFF. The initial LVI appointment is provisional for a period of six months during which time a field assessment may be carried out by the divisional veterinary manager or one of his or her veterinary officers. If duties have been carried out satisfactorily, full appointment will be granted at the end of the six months period, otherwise further training must be undertaken.

Where LVIs carry out services directly for the Minister, they are paid in accordance with the scale of fees agreed between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the British Veterinary Association. Where an LVI carries out work directly for his/her client, the fee is a private matter between the client and the LVI.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the certification procedures operated by the local veterinary inspectors. [11693]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* A working party was set up by senior managers of the state veterinary service in September 1993. This working party was chaired by Mr. Hugh Morris, a divisional veterinary officer.

The terms of reference were to examine existing export procedures in both animal health offices and the field; to make recommendations to policy divisions and senior managers to ensure that high standards of veterinary health certification would be maintained and that there were mechanisms in place to monitor those standards.

The report of the working party, which has become known as the Morris report, was written for internal management purposes and was not intended for publication. It confirmed that the necessary information and instructions were already available. However, some deficiencies were identified both in the administrative procedures in some animal health offices and in the standards of identification and examination of animals by local veterinary inspectors. The report made more than 80 recommendations to correct these deficiencies, including the re-writing of existing instructions to make them more user friendly.

All necessary action has been taken on the major recommendations of the report to ensure that high standards of veterinary export certification are maintained.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11920]

**Mr. Boswell:** Neither the Ministry, nor its agencies nor the Intervention Board executive agency currently uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for external recruitment or for internal recruitment and promotion. The Ministry is consulting the Employment Service about the steps necessary for approved use of the symbol.

### Live Animal Transport

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what action his Department has taken to supervise collection centres for intra-Community trade in livestock; [11978]

(2) what responsibilities his Department has for the supervision of dealers' premises in respect of intra-Community trade in livestock. [11979]

**Mrs. Browning:** Local veterinary inspectors or veterinary officers are present to inspect animals during assembly at collection centres and dealers' premises of consignments for export to other member states. In relation to imports from other member states, dealers' premises are subject to random non-discriminatory checks as provided for under EC rules.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many breeding cattle were imported into the United Kingdom during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9856]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* Official overseas trade statistics recorded 3,842 pure-bred breeding cattle as having been imported into the United Kingdom during the period October 1994 to September 1995. Imports of non-pure-bred breeding cattle are not separately available.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are *(a)* the guidelines, *(b)* the enforcement procedures and *(c)* the monitoring arrangements in respect of the certification of live animals for export by local veterinary inspectors. [11690]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Written instructions are issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the form of animal health circulars and in sets of instructions. They are sent to all veterinary practices which have local veterinary inspectors approved for the certification of live animals for export. Notes for guidance of LVIs on completion of an individual certificate may also be issued with the certificate. In addition, it is incumbent upon every local veterinary inspector to follow the ethical guidance concerning veterinary certification given in the guide to professional conduct issued by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

Where there is evidence of statutory or procedural deficiencies, appropriate action is taken, including prosecution by local authorities.

Where an LVI infringes or fails to comply with his/her conditions of appointment, performs duties unsatisfactorily or is guilty of conduct which indicates that suspension or termination of the appointment may be necessary, an investigation will be mounted and the appropriate action taken.

Where a veterinary surgeon has issued misleading, inaccurate or untrue certificates, the matter may be considered by the disciplinary committee of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. In several cases, the disciplinary committee has held that the issue of inaccurate certificates has amounted to disgraceful professional conduct. The veterinarian's name has been removed from the Register of Veterinary Surgeons and the veterinarian has been unable to practise.

To monitor the arrangements for veterinary certification, audit visits are carried out by members of the veterinary field service to LVI practices to check that, among other things, the practice has a current set of instructions and that individual LVIs are aware of current procedures. LVIs are required to return copies of completed export certificates to animal health offices. These are checked to see that they have been completed correctly. Apparent errors in certification and non-receipt of copy certificates are followed up with the LVI concerned. Unannounced audit visits are carried out by members of the veterinary field service to check on LVIs carrying out export certification. In addition, certification and consignments of live animals may be checked at the port of export by Ministry staff. Any deficiencies found in certification or procedures are followed up.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he plans to take to ensure that local veterinary inspectors carry out their duties in accordance with his instructions in animal health circular 94/31 on "Procedures for checking the identification of cattle to be exported to EC Member States", and if he will make a statement. [12164]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* Procedures are already in hand to monitor the duties carried out by LVIs in respect of export certification. I refer to my earlier reply today.

### Animals (Definition)

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will press for a redefinition of animals in the treaty of Rome from agricultural products to sentient beings; and if he will make a statement. [12163]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* The Government attach high priority to animal welfare. We secured the declaration, attached to the Maastricht treaty, which calls for full account to be taken of animal welfare in agricultural and other policies. We are considering possible options for building on this declaration as part of our detailed preparations for the intergovernmental conference later this year.

### EU Funding

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total the United Kingdom received under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund over the last available five years in respect of (i) the structural funds and (ii) the price guarantees. [11654]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* A table containing details of UK receipts under the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund is set out. A breakdown by standard region is not available. The guidance section is one of the structural funds. The guarantee section finances market support.

*Total UK receipts under the EAGGF guidance and guarantee sections*

| | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *[1]1994–95* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *(a) Ecus (million)*[2] | | | | | |
| (i) Guidance section[3] | 93 | 134 | 100 | 104 | 82 |
| (ii) Guarantee section | 2,226 | 2,457 | 2,150 | 3,569 | 3,141 |
| *(b) £ (million)* | | | | | |
| (i) Guidance section[3] | 66 | 94 | 71 | 82 | 63 |
| (ii) Guarantee section | 1,579 | 1,718 | 1,525 | 2,810 | 2,416 |

*Notes:*
[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Exchange rates used are as follows: 1990–91: £1 = 1.41 ecu, 1991–92: £1 = 1.43 ecu, 1992–93: £1 = 1.41 ecu, 1993–94: £1 = 1.27 ecu, 1994–95: £1 = 1.30 ecu.
[3] Up to and including 1993–94 an element of EAGGF guidance section funding related to fisheries.
*Source:*
1990–91 to 1993–94: 1995 departmental report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's smaller departments, table 9.4, "Receipts from European Institutions analysed by Department".

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Information Technology

**Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report,* column *131,* if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the value of each contract. [12075]

**Mr. Willetts:** Information on the sale of spare computer capacity between Departments is not held centrally.

### Chauffeurs

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many chauffeurs are employed by Her Majesty's Government; and what percentage of them are disabled. [12227]

**Mr. Willetts:** This is an operational matter on which I have asked the chief executive of the Security Facilities Executive—SAFE—to write to the hon. Member direct.

*Letter from John King to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 29 January 1996:*

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Deputy Prime Minister seeking information on the number of chauffeurs employed by the Government and what percentage are disabled.

My Agency is responsible for the Government Car Service which employs the majority of the governments' chauffeurs. There are currently 148 GCS drivers/chauffeurs, none of which are at present registered disabled.

The nature of the GCS drivers duties, which includes security and safety considerations, call for people who can meet the exacting physical requirements for the job.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for 1995–96. [11373]

**Mr. Willetts:** The table gives the available absenteeism figures for the central Cabinet Office, including No. 10 and the executive agencies for which I am responsible. Figures for previous years and 1995–96 are not available.

| | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|
| Central Department | 8.48 | 8.45 |
| COI | 7.76 | 9.67 |
| CS college | 7.00 | 6.40 |
| HMSO | 9.86 | 7.03 |
| OHSA | 8.82 | 14.52 |
| RAS | 8.58 | 12.99 |
| Chessington | 9.00 | 10.37 |
| SAFE | 4.34 | 11.05 |
| TBA | 9.97 | 8.70 |
| Total | 8.35 | 8.61 |

Absence rates represent total days absent divided by total number of staff.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [11505]

**Mr. Willetts:** Details of running costs and administrative spending by the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's Office, and the Office of Public Service for the years 1989–90 through to 1997–98 are contained in tables 7.5 and 7.6 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2820, copies of which are available in the Members' Library. This years' report, due to be published at the end of March, will reflect the Cabinet Office's new responsibilities, following the machinery of government and other changes.

### Public Information Films (Cold Weather)

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many public information films on the effects of cold weather on plumbing have been shown in the cinema or on television since 1966, indicating who produced the films and when they were shown on television and cinema screens. [12704]

**Mr. Willetts:** Many energy efficiency campaigns have been run since 1966. All have contained information on the effects of cold weather on pipes. Details of these campaigns cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

### Deregulation

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the deregulation task force's priority areas for 1996; and what action has arisen as a result of priority area status. [12262]

**Mr. Freeman:** The priority areas for work in 1995–96 identified by the deregulation task force in its first annual report are: the labour market; planning; building regulations; financial services; the health sector; and longer-term issues, such as risk pricing and reviewing legislation. The task force is also following up areas covered in its 1994–95 report, such as taxation and national insurance, and health and safety.

The task force has been holding meetings with Ministers and officials from the relevant Government Departments. It expects to make recommendations on these areas in its next annual report.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Residence and Asylum Status (Revocation)

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the incidences since 1979 when Her Majesty's Government have *(a)* refused an asylum application and *(b)* revoked an existing residency or asylum permission granted to a foreign national as a result of the overriding interests of British diplomatic or trade relationships with the country of origin of the individuals concerned. [8646]

**Miss Widdecombe:** No asylum application has been refused and no grant of refugee status has been revoked on foreign relations or economic grounds.

### Crime (Old People)

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what number and proportion of recorded crimes were committed against people aged over the state retirement age in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will provide a breakdown by type of recorded crimes. [10202]

**Mr. Maclean:** Information on the victims of recorded crime is not routinely collected by the Home Office. However, extracts from an ad hoc survey giving information on the age and gender of victims of recorded offences of violence against the person for 1990 to 1992 were published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1994", a copy of which is available in the Library.

### Asylum Seekers

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, after 5 February, in respect of asylum seekers (i) appealing against a negative decision and (ii) applying for asylum in-country, lack of funds will be considered an acceptable reason for failing to attend an interview; and if his Department plans *(a)* to start interviewing asylum applicants at their homes and *(b)* to fund their travel-to-interview costs. [11831]

**Miss Widdecombe:** After 5 February, as at present, applicants will be expected to attend interviews. The immigration rules make it clear that failure, without reasonable explanation, to comply with a request to attend for interview may lead to the refusal of the application. Any reasons put forward by an applicant for failing to attend an interview will continue to be considered against his or her individual circumstances.

The Home Office has no plans to interview asylum applicants at their homes or to pay their travel costs.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the practice of withholding permission to work to asylum applicants for six months after 5 February. [11803]

**Miss Widdecombe:** The employment concession for asylum seekers is kept under regular review.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the administrative costs that might arise after 5 February in the serving of papers on asylum applicants not receiving benefits who are *(a)* homeless and *(b)* living in temporary nightshelters. [11804]

**Miss Widdecombe:** In cases where the Home Office has been supplied with details of a representative but does not know the whereabouts of the applicant, the decision will be served on the representative. The Immigration Appeals (Notices) Regulations 1984 provide that the requirement to serve a notice is satisfied if the notice is served on a person appointed to act on behalf of the applicant.

However, the Immigration Appeals (Notices) Regulations 1984 also make it clear that there is no requirement to give written notice of a decision if the officer or authority responsible for giving it has no knowledge of the whereabouts or place of abode of the person concerned. The onus will continue to be on the asylum applicant to maintain contact with the Home Office.

### Metropolitan Police (Arrests)

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* arrested and *(b)* charged by the Metropolitan police in the latest available period; and if he will break down the figures by age group. [11856]

**Mr. Maclean:** The available information has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and is contained in the table.

*Arrests and charges in the Metropolitan police district—12 months to June 1995*

| *Age group* | *Number of arrests* | *Number of charges* |
|---|---|---|
| 10–16 | 20,937 | 5,045 |
| 17–18 | 13,513 | 7,879 |
| 19–20 | 11,508 | 7,252 |
| 21–30 | 46,768 | 33,299 |
| 31–40 | 21,650 | 16,016 |
| 41–50 | 7,307 | 5,180 |
| 51 and over | 3,541 | 2,277 |
| Unrecorded age | 15,601 | 4,845 |
| Total | 140,825 | 81,793 |

### Police (Complaints)

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *484–85*, what explanation has been made to him regarding the increase in complaints against the North Wales police for 1994 compared with 1993. [11874]

**Mr. Maclean:** This is a matter for the chief constable of North Wales, but I understand that the figures for 1995 are expected to show a fall in the number of complaints recorded.

### Police (London)

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in each of the London divisions in each year since 1988–89; and how many of these officers were allocated to foot patrols. [11855]

**Mr. Maclean:** Information on the number of officers attached to individual divisions is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the total number of officers attached to divisions over the past eight years and the overall percentage of this time which was spent on street duties are set out in the table:

| | *1988* | *1989* | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall Man days (average per day) | 13,684 | 14,000 | 13,431 | 12,915 | 12,704 | 12,768 | 13,121 | 13,384 |
| Percentage of time spent on street duties | 31.1 | 31.8 | 31.9 | 31.8 | 32.3 | 34.6 | 34.9 | 35.0 |

### Crime (Young People)

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to combat crime among young people. [11857]

**Mr. Maclean:** Provisions in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 strengthened the powers of the courts to deal with the most serious and persistent juvenile offenders. The single regeneration budget supports many crime prevention activities with a youth focus. My Department also provides core funding for Crime Concern, which works closely with the business sector on a wide range of youth crime prevention programmes. The aim of the new ministerial group on juveniles, which held its first meeting on 18 January, is to strengthen measures to intervene effectively with those children who are most likely to offend.

### Mr. J. M. Roberts

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he is proposing to give a substantive response to the submission made on behalf of Mr. J. M. Roberts, J43565, following his letter of 11 July 1995, Ref. PO 11651/95. [12092]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Since receiving the letter of my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker), my officials, in consultation with Mr. Roberts' solicitors, have acted to secure further material which may be relevant to Mr. Roberts's conviction. As a result, we expect to be in a position to take a decision about the case soon.

### Crime Prevention

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount spent by each

police force area on crime prevention for each year since 1990. [10517]

**Mr. Maclean:** The information requested is not available.

### Private Security Industry

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation for the regulation and licensing of the private security industry. [11849]

**Mr. Maclean:** We are currently considering the case for statutory regulation of the private security industry.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11443]

**Mr. Howard:** Following is the information about expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by my Department:

| *Year* | *Department (excluding agencies and non-departmental public bodies)* £ | *Agencies* £ | *Non-departmental public bodies* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 28,630 | — | 527 |
| 1991–92 | 28,094 | – | 766 |
| 1993–94 | 15,233 | 33,784 | 2,270 |
| 1994–95 | 15,990 | 11,478 | 1,552 |
| 1995–96 (provisional) | 27,970 | 32,600 | 6,227 |
| 1996–97 (provisional) | 30,300 | 13,000 | 7,029 |

Details of expenditure in 1979–80 are not available.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11444]

**Mr. Howard:** Expenditure by my Department on administration, as set out at annexe 3 to the Home Office annual report 1995, Cm 2808, is as follows:

| | | *£ million* |
|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | Outturn | 1,085 |
| 1991–92 | Outturn | 1,441 |
| 1993–94 | Outturn | 1,623 |
| 1994–95 | Estimated outturn | 1,729 |
| 1995–96 | Plans | 1,746 |
| 1996–97 | Plans | 1,780 |

Comparable details of expenditure in 1979–80 are not available.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11446]

**Mr. Howard:** The estimate of expenditure for my Department on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses is as follows:

(a) 1979–80: not available.

(b) 1989–90: this information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

(c) 1991–92: this information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

(d) 1993–94: this information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

(e) 1994–95: £1,758,692.

(f) 1995–96: expenditure to date £2,055,439. An estimate of the total for the year can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

(g) 1996–97: an estimate for the year can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11447]

**Mr. Howard:** The information requested is as follows:

1993–94: £232,800

1994–95: £226,154

1995–96: £110,338 (to date).

These figures relate to newspapers and magazines purchased centrally through the Home Office information and library services for the Home Department, including the Prison Service headquarters and the immigration and nationality department. No central record is held of materials purchased from divisional funds, or in respect of purchases by non-departmental public bodies for which my Department is responsible.

My Department purchases or obtains free of charge a wide range of newspapers and periodical publications. A list of their titles has been placed in the Library.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11386]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The annual telephone costs to my Department are as follows:

*£ thousands*

| *Year* | *Department (excluding agencies and non-departmental public bodies)* | *Agencies* | *Non-departmental public bodies* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 4,706 | 8,400 | 392 |
| 1994–95 | 4,577 | 8,995 | 381 |
| 1995–96 (provisional) | 5,019 | [1]647 | 406 |
| 1996–97 (provisional) | 4,816 | [1]1,055 | 455 |

[1] Details of the provisional expenditure by the Prison Service executive agency in 1995–96 and 1996–97 are not yet available.

Details of expenditure prior to 1993–94 are not available.

Staff of my Department in central London offices make use of CCTA's metropolitan telephone service—MTS—which provides fully managed telephone and directory services. The MTS requires the Department to maintain a current directory of staff, location and telephone extensions to enable the MTS operators to provide a directory inquiry service to internal and external callers. All offices on the MTS are connected to the Government telephone network—GTN—as are many other offices of my Department outside the central London area. The GTN dialling codes booklet is available to all staff in these offices. It enables them to identify the operator in any other Government building for inquiry services.

The Home Office staff telephone directory is available to all staff in my Department and its agencies, and to staff in certain Home Office sponsored non-departmental public bodies. Other non-departmental public bodies produce their own internal telephone directories.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11445]

**Mr. Howard:** The Home Office, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies assume accountability for all the offices in which they have occupations, including any vacant space therein, from 1 April 1996 only. Up to that date, responsibility for the whole of the Government common user office estate—CUE—in which Government Departments were housed, rests with Property Holdings, and, prior to 1 April 1990, rested with the Property Services Agency. That part of the question covering previous years is, therefore, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

For 1996–97, the Home Office received a transfer of £1.4 million from Property Holdings to cover the costs of vacant space in offices occupied by the Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies.

For future years, efficiency plans being prepared within the Department are expected to lead to a reduced requirement for office accommodation, and the resultant rationalisation of the estate will enable the Home Office to deliver greater value for money across the range of services it provides.

### Holding Centre (Glasgow Airport)

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has held with the British Airports Authority concerning the building of a holding centre at Glasgow airport; what estimate he has made of the cost of construction; and if he will make a statement. [11675]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** There have been no discussions with the British Airports Authority about building a holding centre at Glasgow airport.

### Criminal Cases Review Commission

**Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the appointment of a chairman for the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [12323]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** An announcement will be made once the process of selection and appointment currently under way is completed.

### British Nationality (Hong Kong)

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made as to likely changes in the ratio of dependants to principal beneficiaries under the British nationality (Hong Kong) selection scheme. [12526]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** With almost 97 per cent. of the principal registrations under the scheme now completed, we do not expect there to be any change in this ratio. Some spouses and dependants who were not included in the original application may apply for registration before the end-1996 deadline, but these are not likely to affect the figure significantly.

### Restraint Techniques

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the commissioner of police for London on *(a)* the conduct of individual police officers and *(b)* the practices in respect of the unlawful killing of Mr. Shiji Lapite; what action he proposes to take to compensate Mr. Lapite's family; what measures he proposes to alter the practices which led to Mr. Lapite's death; and if he will make a statement. [12764]

**Mr. Maclean:** I understand that, following the verdict of the coroner's inquest, the case has been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions who will again consider the criminal aspects of the case. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the details of the case at this stage.

The Association of Chief Police Officers is currently considering its guidelines on the use of restraint techniques. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that no claim for compensation has yet been received from Mr. Lapite's family.

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ban the use of neck choke holds by

*(a)* the police and *(b)* prison officers; and if he will make a statement. [12722]

**Mr. Maclean:** No. The law provides that any person may use reasonable force in upholding the law. What particular means of restraint is reasonable is a matter for the courts in the circumstances of the particular case.

### Police Grant

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he plans to allocate police grant in 1996–97. [13101]

**Mr. Howard:** I yesterday laid before the House the police grant report (England and Wales) 1996–97. This should be read in conjunction with, for England, the Local government finance report, the special grant report (No. 16) and, for Wales, with the information laid before the House this afternoon by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

The police grant report includes the allocation of funding for the 5,000 extra officers announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Funding figures for each police authority are set out in the table:

*£ million*

| *Police force area* | *1995–96 funding*[1] | *1996–97 funding*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| *English Shire Forces* | | |
| Avon and Somerset | 147.8 | 154.6 |
| Bedfordshire | 55.4 | 57.3 |
| Cambridgeshire | 62.7 | 66.4 |
| Cheshire | 93.1 | 98.5 |
| Cleveland | 70.7 | 73.3 |
| Cumbria | 54.3 | 57.1 |
| Derbyshire | 88.3 | 92.5 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 146.5 | 153.4 |
| Dorset | 62.6 | 64.9 |
| Durham | 68.0 | 71.5 |
| Essex | 146.7 | 151.7 |
| Gloucestershire | 56.3 | 58.5 |
| Hampshire | 169.0 | 175.3 |
| Hertfordshire | 87.0 | 89.9 |
| Humberside | 98.1 | 103.1 |
| Kent | 158.1 | 163.9 |
| Lancashire | 155.5 | 163.5 |
| Leicestershire | 89.9 | 94.8 |
| Lincolnshire | 57.1 | 59.0 |
| Norfolk | 71.2 | 76.0 |
| Northamptonshire | 55.8 | 58.4 |
| North Yorkshire | 66.7 | 69.7 |
| Nottinghamshire | 110.2 | 115.2 |
| Staffordshire | 101.2 | 108.9 |
| Suffolk | 58.5 | 61.7 |
| Surrey | 85.1 | 88.0 |
| Sussex | 145.8 | 151.1 |
| Thames Valley | 192.8 | 202.6 |
| Warwickshire | 47.7 | 49.2 |
| West Mercia | 97.8 | 103.5 |
| Wiltshire | 58.7 | 60.7 |
| *English Metropolitan Forces* | | |
| Greater Manchester | 327.1 | 342.5 |
| Merseyside | 215.0 | 221.9 |
| Northumbria | 179.6 | 188.2 |
| South Yorkshire | 147.2 | 154.7 |
| West Midlands | 329.3 | 344.0 |
| West Yorkshire | 249.8 | 260.9 |
| *London Forces* | | |
| Metrpolitan Police[2] | 1,628.7 | 1,649.6 |
| City of London[3] | 57.3 | 59.1 |
| English Total | 6,092.6 | 6,314.9 |
| *Welsh Forces* | | |
| Dyfed-Powys | 46.3 | 458.6 |
| Gwent[4] | 60.1 | 62.8 |
| North Wales | 66.0 | 69.3 |
| South Wales[4] | 143.4 | 151.1 |
| Welsh Total | 315.8 | 331.7 |
| Total | 6,408.4 | 6,646.7 |

[1] Includes SSA, Police Grant and Special (SSA) Reduction) Grant (Police Funding Review). Figure are rounded to the nearest £100,000.

[2] Figure for the Metropolitan Police does not include funding allocated to the Receiver under the Other Services Block SSA for school crossing patrols, Magistrates' Courts and the Probation Service.

[3] Figure for the City does not include Capital Financing and Other Services Block SSAs which are allocated to the Common Council of the City of London as a whole in respect of all its functions.

[4] Figures for South Wales and Gwent police authorities have been adjusted to show what they would have received in 1995-96 had the transfer of the Rhymney Valley from South Wales to Gwent, due to take effect on 1 April 1996, been effective for 1995-96. These adjustments enable valid comparisons to be made between these forces' allocations for 1995-96 and 1996-97.

### Police Cautions (Burglary)

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the practice and policy of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis in respect of cautioning persons who have been apprehended following a reported or suspected burglary; and if he will make a statement; [11261]

(2) how many people have been cautioned in the Metropolitan police area over the past two years following their being apprehended following a reported or suspected burglary. [11262]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answers 29 January 1996]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that Metropolitan police practice and policy on the cautioning of offenders follows guidance provided in the Home Office circular number 18 of 1994 "The Cautioning of Offenders".

During 1994, 959 people were cautioned in the Metropolitan police district for burglary offences. Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

### Rough Sleepers

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will given an estimate on the number of physical attacks on rough sleepers in 1995; and if he will make a statement; [9974]

(2) if his Department keeps official statistics on the number of physical attacks on rough sleepers; and if he will make a statement. [9975]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answers 29 January 1996]:* This information is not collected centrally and there are no plans to do so.

## HEALTH

### Doctors and Nurses

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors and nurses worked in the NHS in each year from 1992 to 1995; and how many currently work in the NHS. [9504]

**Mr. Malone:** For figures relating to doctors, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health gave the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *947-50*. For the figures relating to the nurses, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 8 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *973*.

### Tobacco Advertising

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the Government health warnings on tobacco advertisements on the consumption of tobacco by teenagers. [10762]

**Mr. Horam:** We are not aware of any research which looks specifically at the effect of health warnings on consumption of tobacco by teenagers. In practice, many factors influence the teenagers' consumption of tobacco—notably, price and parental influence. It is very difficult to isolate the specific effect of health warnings on consumption from the influence of other factors.

### District Nurses

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patient contacts there were with district nurses in each year since 1989–90. [10928]

**Mr. Horam:** The information requested is published in "Patient Care in the Community, District Nursing, Summary for Information for 1994–95, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

### NHS Finance

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the overall NHS outturn against revenue and capital cash limits in 1994–95. [10934]

**Mr. Horam:** The information is shown in the table.

*National Health Service Cash Limited Spending (Voted) 1994–95*

*£ million*

| | *Final cash limit* | *Outturn* |
|---|---|---|
| Revenue[1] | 22,386 | 22,289 |
| Capital | 947 | 881 |
| Total | 23,333 | 23,170 |

*Source:*
Department of Health Appropriation Accounts 1994–95

*Notes:*
1 Includes amounts earned by NHS trusts through contract prices to fund capital spending and the costs of drugs prescribed by general practitioner fundholders.
1 Includes voted loans from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to NHS Trusts to finance trust capital spending.

### HealthNet

**Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the proposed applications for data to be transmitted on HealthNet; and how patient consent will be obtained for these purposes. [11189]

**Mr. Horam:** The following applications will not process patient identifiable information, so that the question of patient consent does not arise:

purchase of and payment for supplies;

knowledge bases;

bulletin boards;

statistical databases;

clinical education and training applications.

Patient information is involved in the following applications:

Test investigation requests and results;

GP referrals;

discharge information;

shared patient record information;

patient administration information;

commissioning and contracting information services;

prescription information.

In August 1994, the Department issued draft guidance on confidentiality of patient information. The guidance has been re-drafted to address many comments received, including those from the British Medical Association and the Data Protection Registrar. The guidance, which will be published shortly, will clarify who may have access to patient information and will require the national health service to inform patients about the purposes for which patient information is used. The guidance will apply to all patient information, whether conveyed on paper or via computer systems and networks. Copies of the guidance will be placed in the Library.

### Personal Information

**Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the categories of those who will have authorised access to patients' identifiable personal health information through the HealthNet network; what will be the process for obtaining patients' consent for such information to be available to these categories; and how patients will be informed that access has been made. [11679]

**Mr. Horam:** The categories of those who have authorised access to patients' identifiable personal health information, and the process for obtaining patients' consent and for informing patients are the same, whether or not the information is to be passed over a network.

In August 1994, the Department issued draft guidance on confidentiality of patient information. The guidance has been re-drafted to address many comments received, including those from the British Medical Association and the Data Protection Registrar. The guidance, which will be published shortly, will clarify who may have access to patient information and will require the national health service to inform patients about the purposes for which patient information is used. The guidance will apply to all patient information, whether conveyed on paper or via computer systems and network. Copies of the guidance will be placed in the Library.

### Psychiatric Hospitals

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will write to the chairs of all health authorities with a psychiatric hospital due to close by the year 2000 to ask for evidence to satisfy him that there are adequate replacement services. [12292]

**Mr. Bowis:** The national health service executive have already made it clear that no psychiatric hospital should close until appropriate replacement services are in place.

### General Practitioner Practices

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioner practices were below minimum standards by family health services authority for each year since 1990. [10519]

**Mr. Malone:** Available data are contained in health service indicators, copies of which are available in the Library.

### Insulin Injections

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to provide free injection pens for insulin injections were a clinical need for such injections has been approved. [10687]

**Mr. Malone:** The clinical needs of people requiring insulin injections may be met through the existing provision of disposable syringes and needles on general practitioner prescription. Disposable injection pens are also available on GP prescription and insulin injection systems may be provided free through the hospital service.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11538]

**Mr. Horam:** The buildings occupied by the Department of Health and its agencies formed part of the Government civil estate and then, from 1990, the Government common user estate. Vacant space has been the responsibility of Property Services Agency for the civil estate, then Property Holdings for the common user estate. From 1 April 1996, Departments take over responsibility for the vacant space in their buildings on the common user estate.

The estimated annual cost to the Department of Health, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties is £200,000 in 1991–92, £200,000 in 1993–94 and £910,000 in 1996–97. The increase in 1996–97 reflects the transfer of responsibility for vacant space from property holdings to the Department.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11537]

**Mr. Horam:** Details of the Department's administration costs from 1989–90 to 1993–94 are provided in the Department's annual report for 1995–96 to 1997–98, Cm 2812, copies of which are available in the Library. Figures for the Department of Health for 1979–80, prior to the split of the DHSS, are not available.

Departmental expenditure for 1994–95 was £242 million, and the estimated outturn for 1995–96 is £235 million. The planned expenditure for 1996–97 is £281 million, but this is on a new basis which is not comparable with previous figures.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11539]

**Mr. Horam:** Estimates of the expenditure of the Department of Health, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenditure for 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 are shown in the table.

1993–94: £1,823,000

1994–95: £1,698,000

1995–96: £1,436,000 (estimate)

1996–97: £264,000 (non-departmental public bodies only)

Figures for the central Department and its agencies and complete data for the non-departmental public bodies are not available for 1979–80, 1989–90 and 1991–92. The Department formed part of the Department of Health and Social Security until July 1988 and for 1989–90 and 1991–92 the Department's accounting records did not separately identify overseas travel costs from United Kingdom travel expenditure. Estimates for 1996–97 for the central Department and its agencies are not yet available.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11536]

**Mr. Horam:** For the amount spent on hospitality expenditure by the Department and its agencies for 1994–95, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Health gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 1 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *23*. For details of expenditure for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Health gave the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 1 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1073-74*.

For the amount spent on hospitality during 1995–96, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-West on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *935*. Estimates of expenditure in 1996–97 are not yet available.

Information on hospitality expenditure for non-departmental public bodies is not available for 1979–80. Figures for the other years requested are shown.

*NDPBs*

1989–90: £10,918

1991–92: £16,416

1993–94: £21,208

1994–95: £21,152

1995–96: £14,378

1996–97: £15,000

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11540]

**Mr. Horam:** The expenditure in the Department was as follows:

1993–94: £45,740

1994–95: £44,130

1995–96: £31,087 (up-to end December 1995)

A list of the titles currently received follows.

List of Newspapers currently received by the Department of Health

Title

*Daily Express*
*Daily Mirror*
*Daily Mail*
*Daily Record*
*Daily Star*
*Daily Telegraph*
*European*
*Evening Standard*
*Financial Times*
*Guardian*
*Independent*
*Mail on Sunday*
*Morning Star*
*Observer*
*News of the World*
*Northern Echo*
*South London Press*
*Sun*
*Sunday Express*
*Sunday Mirror*
*Sunday People*
*Sunday Telegraph*
*Sunday Times*
*Times*
*Wall Street Journal*
*Weekly Guardian*
*Yorkshire Post/Evening Post*

List of Magazines currently received by the Department of Health

Title

*Big Issue*
*Campaign*
*Care Weekly*
*Caterer and Hotel Keeper*
*Community Care*
*Computer Weekly*
*Economist*
*Health Service Journal*
*MacUser*
*MacWorld*
*Media*
*Nature*
*.Net*
*New Scientist*
*New Statesman*
*Nursery World*
*Nursing Times*
*Private Eye*
*Spectator*
*Tablet*
*TV/Radio Times*
*Voice*

## Population Statistics

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total number and percentage of the population of *(a)* men aged 65 years or over and *(b)* women aged 60 years or over in the years 2017 to 2040. [12168]

**Mr. Horam:** The latest available information using the mid-1992—based national population projections is shown in the table. Mid-1994-based projections will be available shortly. Summary figures will be published in Office of Population Censuses and Surveys monitor in February.

*England and Wales*

| | *Men aged 65 and over* | | *Women aged 60 and over* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Thousands* | *As percentage of total male population* | *Thousands* | *As percentage of total female population* |
| 2017 | 4,568 | 16.7 | 7,276 | 26.3 |
| 2018 | 4,635 | 16.9 | 7,370 | 26.6 |
| 2019 | 4,701 | 17.1 | 7,470 | 26.9 |
| 2020 | 4,759 | 17.3 | 7,575 | 27.3 |
| 2021 | 4,824 | 17.5 | 7,694 | 27.7 |
| 2022 | 4,897 | 17.8 | 7,822 | 28.1 |
| 2023 | 4,977 | 18.1 | 7,957 | 28.6 |
| 2024 | 5,061 | 18.3 | 8,097 | 29.0 |
| 2025 | 5,152 | 18.7 | 8,235 | 29.5 |
| 2026 | 5,256 | 19.0 | 8,362 | 30.0 |
| 2027 | 5,366 | 19.4 | 8,478 | 30.4 |
| 2028 | 5,480 | 19.9 | 8,579 | 30.7 |
| 2029 | 5,599 | 20.3 | 8,675 | 31.1 |
| 2030 | 5,713 | 20.7 | 8,752 | 31.4 |
| 2031 | 5,816 | 21.1 | 8,830 | 31.7 |
| 2032 | 5,907 | 21.5 | 8,885 | 31.9 |
| 2033 | 5,983 | 21.8 | 8,917 | 32.0 |
| 2034 | 6,054 | 22.1 | 8,926 | 32.1 |
| 2035 | 6,110 | 22.3 | 8,921 | 32.1 |
| 2036 | 6,164 | 22.6 | 8,902 | 32.1 |
| 2037 | 6,199 | 22.7 | 8,868 | 32.0 |
| 2038 | 6,211 | 22.8 | 8,836 | 32.0 |
| 2039 | 6,199 | 22.8 | 8,824 | 32.0 |
| 2040 | 6,176 | 22.8 | 8,820 | 32.0 |

## Hospices

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the separate dedicated registration of *(a)* adult and *(b)* children's hospices. [12391]

**Mr. Horam:** None at present.

**Mr. Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what factors underlay his decision to end the separate central funding of children's hospices from 1994–95; and what consultations his Department undertook with *(a)* children's hospices and *(b)* local health authorities prior to that decision; [12393]

(2) what discussions he has had with local health authorities in respect of the target of 50:50 funding for children's hospices from health authority purchasers; [12390]

(3) if it is his policy that children's hospices should be eligible for matching funding from the NHS. [12394]

**Mr. Bowis:** There was never separate central funding for children's hospices. The target of 50:50 funding was a national target and did not apply to individual hospices. It was never applied to children's hospices. From 1994–95, funding for specialist palliative care has been built into health authorities' general allocations. This was announced in the NHS executive letter EL(93)14 issued in February 1993, copies of which are available in the Library. Services for children with life-threatening illnesses are now eligible for funding and health authority commissioners can negotiate with children's hospices for the services that they wish to purchase in the same way as they do for adult hospices.

**Mr. Cunnigham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were cared for in each of the last three years in children's hospices in the United Kingdom. [12392]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not available centrally.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospice beds there were in each of the last five years. [12716]

**Mr. Horam:** The available information is shown in the table.

*Number of hospice beds from 1991 to 1995 (England)*

| *Year* | *Number of beds* |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 2,171 |
| 1992 | 2,321 |
| 1993 | 2,409 |
| 1994 | 2,521 |
| 1995 | 2,587 |

*Source:*
St. Christopher's Hospice Information Service.

## Deregulation (Still Birth Death Registration) Order 1996

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what cost-benefit analysis has been made of the saving to *(a)* business and *(b)* public funds accruing from the Deregulation (Still Birth and Death Registration) Order 1996. [12259]

**Mr. Horam:** I am advised by the Registrar General that he does not anticipate that there will be a large take-up of the proposed facility for the making of declarations of death and still birth before any registrar in England and Wales. There is likely to be no impact on business. Local authorities may incur some small additional expenditure in postage and telephone costs.

## Methadone (Child-proof Bottles)

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department issues in respect of regulating the dispensing of methadone into child-proof bottles. [12290]

**Mr. Malone:** None. However, the council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain has, since 1991, recommended that all dispensed preparations of methadone mixture should be supplied in containers with child-resistant closures. From 1 January 1995, it has been a professional requirement that all liquid medicines dispensed by pharmacists are dispensed in child-resistant containers.

## Sheffield Children's Hospital

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *549*, on what date he invited the Sheffield children's hospital to co-ordinate the monitoring of the occupancy of intensive care paediatric beds; on what date the hospital agreed to co-ordinate the monitoring; and if the decision was taken by the trust. [12319]

**Mr. Bowis:** We asked the chief executive of Sheffield children's hospital national health service trust to help us arrange this exercise on 20 December 1995 and he agreed immediately. I am most grateful for the trust's co-operation.

**Mrs. Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *549*, on what date the Sheffield children's hospital commenced the monitoring of the occupancy of intensive care paediatric beds; what resources are to be put into the monitoring exercise; and at what intervals each hospital asked for an information update. [12321]

**Mr. Bowis:** On 23 January. An administrator has been appointed to collect and analyse daily returns from the paediatric intensive care units.

**Mrs. Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis Ministers judged the adequacy of intensive care paediatric beds before their monitoring by Sheffield Children's hospital. [12322]

**Mr. Bowis:** It is for health authorities to assess the health needs of their resident populations and contract for the services necessary to meet their needs. The arrangements we have made for Sheffield children's hospital to undertake a national survey of occupancy and demand for paediatric intensive care beds will assist them with this task.

## Children (Life-threatening Illnesses)

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on services to children with life-threatening illnesses and their families; and if he will publish the results of those studies. [12389]

**Mr. Bowis:** In February 1992, we announced that £1 million would be provided each year for five years to pilot new services in England for children with

life-threatening conditions and their families. A number of projects have been commissioned, spread evenly across England, which have included both statutory and voluntary initiatives. These projects cover hospital-based services, community home nursing services, voluntary respite and sitting services, counselling and psychological support.

This initiative still has a year to run, but in June 1994 an interim report was prepared jointly by the Association for Children with Life-threatening or Terminal Conditions and their Families—ACT—and the Department of Health. Copies of this report can be obtained from ACT.

## NHS Staff

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *161–62*, on NHS staff, if he will provide a regional breakdown of the figures. [12775]

**Mr. Malone:** Provisional expenditure, by region is shown in the table.

*Hospital and Community Health Service Salary Costs for Managerial, Administrative Clerical Staff and Nursing and Midwifery staff 1994–95*

£000

| | *Managerial expenditure* | *Administrative and clerical expenditure* | *Nursing and midwifery expenditure* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire Region | 100,963 | 199,367 | 856,849 |
| Trent Region | 59,387 | 139,380 | 598,343 |
| Anglian and Oxford Region | 70,363 | 148,005 | 586,048 |
| North Thames Region | 122,388 | 285,923 | 974,093 |
| South Thames Region | 112,835 | 243,981 | 843,465 |
| South and West Region | 91,730 | 183,010 | 808,721 |
| West Midlands Region | 70,588 | 166,298 | 624,969 |
| North West Region | 93,474 | 212,515 | 885,259 |
| Special Health Authorities | 1,633 | 3,650 | 6,268 |
| Total England | 723,361 | 1,582,129 | 6,184,015 |

*Sources:*

1. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.
2. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

*Notes:*

1. The figures are provisional.
2. Salaries and wages costs incurred by family health services authorities and the special hospital service authority (HQ London, Broadmoor, Ashworth and Rampton hospitals) and the UK transplant support services are excluded as corresponding costs are not identified on the same basis.
3. Managerial staff consists of general and senior managers for health authorities and executive board members and senior managers for NHS trusts.
4. The figures are based upon gross costs including employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions.

## Casualty Departments

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of casualty departments by region. [12632]

**Mr. Horam:** The latest available figures are shown in the table. Information is collected on the basis of trusts and directly managed units with accident and emergency services. Some trusts include more than one hospital each with its own accident and emergency department.

*Trusts and directly managed units with accident and emergency departments by region in England 1994–95*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Northern | 11 |
| Yorkshire | 16 |
| Trent | 19 |
| East Anglian | 11 |
| North-west Thames | 13 |
| North-east Thames | 18 |
| South-east Thames | 18 |
| South-west Thames | 14 |
| Wessex | 12 |
| Oxford | 9 |
| South Western | 15 |
| West Midlands | 27 |
| Mersey | 12 |
| North Western | 21 |
| Total | 216 |

*Source:*
KHO3 returns

## Mental Health Beds (Wandsworth)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health beds there were in Wandsworth health authority area in each of the last five years. [12636]

**Mr. Horam:** Information on ward beds for patients with mental illness is published annually in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

## Cancer-related Deaths

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate the number of patients who died in hospital in each of the last five years as a result of cancer. [12717]

**Mr. Horam:** The number of deaths from cancer in hospitals and communal establishments for the care of the sick are published, for 1990–92, in "Mortality statistics—general", OPCS series DH1 Nos. 24, 26 and 27 (table 7), copies of which are available in the Library. Figures for 1993 onwards are not yet available.

## Tuberculosis

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the notification rate of tuberculosis by health authorities in each of the last five years. [12620]

**Mr. Horam:** The figures are shown in the table

*All tuberculosis rates per 100,000 population (excluding chemoprophylaxis)*

| | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 Provisional |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *RHA* | | | | | |
| Northern | 7.60 | 8.65 | 8.22 | 6.29 | 6.83 |
| Yorkshire | 13.31 | 10.57 | 12.57 | 10.75 | 12.15 |
| Trent | 9.46 | 8.87 | 10.87 | 9.60 | 10.52 |
| East Anglian | 4.03 | 3.69 | 3.39 | 2.87 | 4.23 |
| North-west Thames | 22.13 | 25.61 | 24.17 | 28.35 | 30.21 |
| North-east Thames | 19.99 | 22.35 | 21.14 | 23.93 | 23.51 |
| South-east Thames | 9.88 | 10.32 | 11.41 | 11.45 | 10.97 |
| South-west Thames | 7.73 | 8.14 | 9.07 | 8.78 | 8.45 |
| Wessex | 3.33 | 3.41 | 3.65 | 4.03 | 5.10 |
| Oxford | 7.19 | 7.48 | 8.21 | 5.32 | 7.96 |
| South Western | 3.61 | 4.10 | 4.65 | 5.37 | 4.54 |
| West Midlands | 15.55 | 16.47 | 14.90 | 13.79 | 12.50 |
| Mersey | 4.55 | 5.64 | 7.42 | 4.27 | 6.14 |
| North Western | 13.76 | 15.80 | 15.08 | 13.10 | 12.36 |
| Wales | 5.74 | 6.93 | 6.85 | 6.21 | 6.18 |
| England and Wales | 10.64 | 11.31 | 11.51 | 10.83 | 11.18 |

## NHS Eyesight Tests

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS eyesight tests were conducted in each year since 1978. [12622]

**Mr. Malone:** The numbers of national health service sight tests paid for by family health services authorities in England in each year since 1978 are as follows:

1978–79: 7.894 millions
1979–80: 8.331 millions
1980–81: 8.332 millions
1981–82: 8.469 millions
1982–83: 8.678 millions
1983–84: 9.266 millions
1984–85: 9.882 millions
1985–86: 10.246 millions
1986–87: 10.615 millions
1987–88: 11.695 millions
1988–89: 12.493 millions
1989–90: 5.280 millions
1990–91: 4.154 millions
1991–92: 4.979 millions
1992–93: 5.528 millions
1993–94: 5.935 millions
1994–95: 6.383 millions

In April 1989, NHS sight tests were restricted to certain groups of the population. The figures for 1989–90 include some sight tests paid for in 1989–90 but conducted in 1988–89 under the previous scheme and are not, therefore, directly comparable with those for 1990–91 onwards.

## Hospital Admissions

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-elective general and acute admissions there were by region and quarter for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [12624]

**Mr. Horam:** The information is shown in the table.

*G&A Non-elective FCEs*[1]

| *Region* | *Q1 1993–94* | *Q2 1993–94* | *Q3 1993–94* | *Q4 1993–94* | *Q1 1994–95* | *Q2 1994–95* | *Q3 1994–95* | *Q4 1994–95* | *Q1 1995–96* | *Q2 1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire | 142,361 | 138,971 | 143,879 | 147,711 | 144,692 | 148,375 | 152,309 | 150,440 | 153,811 | 154,312 |
| Trent | 92,432 | 92,814 | 101,048 | 101,871 | 101,016 | 102,026 | 104,242 | 109,248 | 105,211 | 107,594 |
| Anglia and Oxford | 86,480 | 86,147 | 90,419 | 91,085 | 89,674 | 90,288 | 96,997 | 97,991 | 93,873 | 95,553 |
| North Thames | 121,632 | 122,159 | 122,454 | 132,467 | 126,881 | 126,972 | 128,533 | 131,102 | 128,551 | 125,863 |
| South Thames | 112,589 | 125,229 | 119,552 | 117,715 | 118,540 | 122,221 | 123,613 | 127,016 | 122,827 | 125,031 |
| South and West | 116,155 | 121,228 | 123,401 | 125,056 | 124,826 | 122,042 | 127,908 | 129,339 | 130,744 | 132,950 |
| West Midlands | 100,397 | 100,536 | 102,638 | 102,143 | 101,067 | 103,052 | 111,984 | 107,956 | 105,957 | 111,828 |
| North-west | 148,074 | 142,317 | 154,767 | 155,404 | 155,341 | 152,765 | 146,889 | 165,908 | 157,420 | 163,281 |
| England | 920,119 | 929,401 | 958,159 | 973,451 | 962,039 | 967,740 | 992,476 | 1,019,001 | 998,394 | 1,016,412 |

*Source:*
Fast Track NHS Executive.

*Notes:*
1. All estimates are derived from the NHS Executive's quarterly fast track management system. Figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95 have been adjusted to take account of definitional changes to allow direct comparison with 1995–96 figures.
2. The estimates are on a "purchaser basis" and relate to activity purchased using NHS funds by health authorities and GP fundholders in England. This includes activity purchased from private hospitals and NHS hospitals outside England, but excludes private patients and patients from outside England treated in English hospitals.
3. The figures are on a different basis to the long standing series published annually in "Ordinary and day case Admissions for England". The annual series is on a "provider basis", and counts all patients treated in NHS hospitals in England, including private patients and patients from outside England.

### Nurse Prescribing

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on nurse prescribing. [12628]

**Mr. Malone:** Preliminary findings show that the existing nurse prescribing pilot scheme is improving patient health care. Plans are being developed to test the scheme on a wider basis.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the effect nurse prescribing has on quality of care for patients. [12629]

**Mr. Malone:** My Department has commissioned Professor K. Luker, department of nursing, at the university of Liverpool, to carry out a detailed evaluation into the nurse prescribing pilot project, currently under way at eight sites.

### General Practitioner Beds

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of GP beds in each of the last five years. [12630]

**Mr. Horam:** The available information on hospital beds, including information on general practitioner maternity beds, is classified by ward category, recognising the flexible use of bed facilities, and is published annually in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

### Hospital Beds

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* beds and *(b)* acute beds there were at St. George's, Tooting, and Guy's and St. Thomas's trusts in each of the last five years. [12634]

**Mr. Horam:** The national health service trusts were established on 1 April 1993. Details by trust are therefore available from 1993–94 and can be found in the publication "Bed availability for England 1993–94 and 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

### "Employer's Guide to Stress"

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *602*, how many copies of the document "Employer's Guide to Stress" were printed; and if he will list all other costs incurred in connection with the document. [12773]

**Mr. Bowis:** Some 5,000 copies of this document were printed. No costs other than those set out in my reply to the hon. Member on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *602*, have been incurred by the Department of Health.

### Prescription Charges

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if his Department employed consultants to advise on the form used to apply for rebates on prescription charges for 60 to 65-year-old men following the decision of the European Court; [12533]

(2) how many men between the ages of 60 and 65 years have claimed rebates on prescription charges following the decision of the European Court to treat men between these ages equally; and if he will make a statement. [12534]

**Mr. Malone:** No consultants were involved in advising the Department on the design of the refund claim form.

About 195,000 registrations in total have been received by the prescription claims processing unit. The unit expects to have issued all remaining claim forms by the end of this week. To date, 114,350 completed claim forms have been received.

### Drug Misuse Database

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *557*, on the ownership of the drug misuse database, if he intends to make the data codes and structure of the database available to all those organisations that supply software to local drug agencies; and if he will make a statement. [12613]

**Mr. Bowis:** Yes, provided any other copyright owners agree to the information being used for this purpose.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the PFI initiatives that have been approved so far in London indicating the capital cost and revenue cost for each scheme for the NHS in each of the next five years. [12631]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *343*, and to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on 6 December, *Official Report*, column *224*.

### National Health Service (Capital Projects)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the capital projects in the NHS with works costs of over £1 million *(a)* in the primary sector, hospital sector and *(b)* in total in each financial year since 1990–91; if he will indicate the cost of each project; and if he will make a statement. [12633]

**Mr. Horam:** The national health service has invested over £1.594 billion in big building projects over the period 1990–91 to date. The majority of these projects will be in the hospital sector. The information does not distinguish between capital projects in the primary or hospital sectors. For information from 1990–91 to 1993–94, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary for Health gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 23 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *329*. Information on the spending for each project with a works cost of over £1 million for the financial year 1994–95 will also be placed in the Library.

### Acute Hospital Beds

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of acute hospital beds in each of the last five years. [12718]

**Mr. Horam:** The information is published annually in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

### Emergency Admissions

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has carried out on the changes in levels of emergency admissions to hospitals in the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [12619]

**Mr. Horam:** National data are backed by a number of local studies which confirm that the rise is genuine. We are supporting five local projects to identify any lessons which can be learnt and examples of good practice.

### National Health Service (Complaints)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of complaints about the NHS in each of the last five years. [12623]

**Mr. Horam:** The most recent available figures are shown in the tables.

| *Year* | *Number of complaints* |
|---|---|
| *Hospital and community health services* | |
| 1990–91 | 37,350 |
| 1991–92 | 51,511 |
| 1992–93 | 58,889 |
| 1993–94 | 87,184 |
| 1994–95 | 100,033 |
| *Family health services* | |
| 1990 | 2,025 |
| 1991 | 2,205 |
| 1992 | 1,974 |
| 1993 | 2,520 |
| 1994 | 2,490 |

These figures should be seen in the context of total NHS activity.

The number of complaints for hospital and community health services represents only 0.4 per cent. of the number of in-patient episodes and first out-patient attendances.

The increase in number of complaints over the last five years reflects rising public expectations in general as well as the specific impact of the patients charter in making patients more aware that their complaints will be taken seriously.

### Official Hospitality

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the budget for official hospitality by his Department for 1995–96. [12625]

**Mr. Horam:** For the projected amount of expenditure on hospitality during 1995–96, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *935*.

### Casualty Units (Vacancies)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of vacancies in medical posts in casualty units around the country. [12627]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally.

### Ward Closures (London)

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what notification has been received by his Department in respect of ward closures at St. George's, Tooting, and Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS trust. [12635]

**Mr. Horam:** Neither of these trusts has recently notified the Department of ward closures.

## SCOTLAND

### Locate in Scotland (Inward Investment)

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans next to meet representatives in the Galloway and Nithsdale area to discuss how Locate in Scotland can best attract industry and inward investment to that area; if he will liaise with the President of the Board of Trade on such matters; and if he will make a statement. [9287]

**Mr. Kynoch:** My right hon. Friend has no plans at present for such a meeting. I have, however, recently agreed to meet representatives of Dumfries and Galloway regional council to discuss the economy of Upper Nithsdale and the Machars and this meeting is currently being arranged.

My right hon. Friend liaises closely with the President of the Board of Trade on a wide range of issues affecting industry throughout Scotland.

### Speech and Language Therapy

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Scotland if he will make a statement on the funding provided to local authorities for the purchase of speech and language therapy for children with a record of needs. [11637]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Where they make provision for a recorded child, education authorities have a statutory duty to ensure adequate provision of speech and language therapy where this has been identified as one of the child's special educational needs. The sum of £3 million is included in the annual local government financial settlement to enable education authorities to discharge this duty by contracting with health boards and other providers of speech and language therapy services.

### Monofilament Nets

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received, and from whom on the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986 as part of the consultation process. [11577]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Of the 95 organisations and interests consulted about the proposed amendment, responses were received from:

Atlantic Salmon Trust
Association of Scottish District Salmon Fishery Boards
West of Scotland Fish Producers' Organisation
Clyde Fishermen's Association
Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Anglo Scottish Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd.
South Wales, Sea Fisheries Committee
Highland Regional Council
Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Federation of Highland and Islands Fishermen
Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation
Hooktone Ltd.
National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
Macduff Shipyards
United Fish Selling Ltd.
Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland
Scottish Natural Heritage
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
English Nature
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
River Tweed Commissioners
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)
Marine Conservation Society
The Fishmongers Company.

In summary, the sea fishing organisations favoured the proposed change. The majority of the salmon fishing interests could accept a derogation for large mesh nets. Conservation interests were concerned that the change might lead to an increase in the incidental capture of marine mammals, and asked for this to be monitored.

**Mrs. Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effect of the ban on the carriage and use of monofilament gill nets in Scottish waters prior to the consultation process. [11578]

**Mr. Robertson:** Research undertaken by the marine laboratory, Aberdeen shows no evidence that large mesh monofilament nets will result in a larger by-catch than similar sized nets made of other synthetic materials.

**Mrs. Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the results of the consultation exercise before making changes too the legislation on the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Carriage of Monofilament Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986. [11579]

**Mr. Robertson:** Copies of the responses to the consultation exercise are available from the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department on request.

**Mrs. Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the future monitoring of the use of monofilament gill nets. [11580]

**Mr. Robertson:** The arrangements already in place for monitoring by-catches of cetaceans in fishing nets will be extended to any large mesh monofilament gill nets.

## EU Funding

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the schemes approved for European funding in Scotland by *(a)* name, *(b)* region and *(c)* level of expenditure under (i) PESCA and (ii) Leader II. [11588]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** Implementation of the UK PESCA programme and the Leader II programmes in Scotland is carried out at a local level as provided for in the approved programmes.

For PESCA, the two Scottish sub-programmes are delivered by local partnerships responsible for implementing business plans approved by the Scottish Office. For Leader II, separate programmes are managed by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise through business plans prepared and implemented by local action groups. Individual projects are selected for support by these local groups, within the terms of the approved business plans.

The tables detail the groups and the approved budgets for each plan.

*Table 1: PESCA (UK Programme)*

| *Local PESCA Group* | *Value of Business Plan (1995–1999)* | *Approximate value in £'s* |
|---|---|---|
| *Objective 1 subprogramme (mecu)* | | |
| Argyll | 0.676 | 571,342 |
| Caithness and Sutherland | 0.860 | 726,856 |
| Lochaber | 0.189 | 159,739 |
| Orkney | 0.286 | 241,722 |
| Wester Ross | 0.218 | 184,250 |
| Shetland | 0.442 | 373,570 |
| Skye and Lochalsh | 0.297 | 251,019 |
| Western Isles | 0.608 | 513,870 |
| Total | 3.576 | 3,022,368 |
| Regional projects | 0.387 | 327,082 |
| Management | 0.398 | 336,382 |
| Total | 4.361 | 3,685,836 |
| *Non-objective 1 subprogramme (mecu)* | | |
| Grampian | 8.149 | 6,887,383 |
| Tayside/Fife | 1.34 | 1,132,430 |
| South West Scotland | 1.34 | 1,132,430 |
| Borders | 1.34 | 1,132,430 |
| Total | 12.169 | 10,284,673 |

*Table 2: Leader II (two Scottish programmes)*

| *Local action group* | *Value of business plan (1995 and 1996)* | *Approximate value in £'s* |
|---|---|---|
| *Objective 1 programme (mecu)* | | |
| Argyll | 0.736268 | 622,280 |
| Caithness and Sutherland | 0.153125 | 129,418 |
| Ross and Cromarty | 0.487500 | 412,026 |
| Inverness and Nairn | 0.177500 | 150,002 |

*Table 2: Leader II (two Scottish programmes)*

| *Local action group* | *Value of business plan (1995 and 1996)*[1] | *Approximate value in £'s* |
|---|---|---|
| Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey | 0.158125 | 133,644 |
| Western Isles and Skye | 1.052500 | 889,553 |
| Orkney | 0.350000 | 295,813 |
| Shetland | 0.404750 | 342,087 |
| Lochaber | 0.475000 | 401,146 |
| Total | 3.994768 | 3,375,969 |

[1] Figures have yet to be finalised for 1997–99. (Total value for five year programme is 11.962 mecu).

| *Local action group* | *Value of business plan (1995 and 1999)* | *Approximate value in £'s* |
|---|---|---|
| *Objective 5B programme (mecu)* | | |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 2.771845 | 2,342,712 |
| North and West Grampian | 2.300047 | 1,943,957 |
| Rural Stirlingshire | 0.356348 | 301,179 |
| Scottish Borders | 1.769266 | 1,495,351 |
| Upland Tayside | 1.118042 | 944,948 |
| Total | 8.315548 | 7,028,146 |

## Housing

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local authority houses have been sold under the right-to-buy scheme in rural Scotland; what is the remaining stock of *(a)* land authority and *(b)* housing association rented housing in rural Scotland; and what is the level of homelessness in rural Scotland. [11968]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Information on the sales and remaining stock of local authority dwellings in each district and islands area will be published in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin HSG/1996/1 "Housing Trends in Scotland: Quarter ended 30 June 1995" on 31 January. A copy will be placed in the Library. Information on homelessness applications was published in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin HSG/1995/7 "Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland 1983–84 to 1993–94: District Analyses". A copy is available in the Library. Information on housing association dwellings available for letting in rural local authorities is set out in the table.

| *District/islands area* | *Housing association letting stock at 31 March 1994* |
|---|---|
| Berwickshire | 247 |
| Ettrick and Lauderdale | 441 |
| Roxburgh | 400 |
| Tweeddale | 412 |
| Stirling | 617 |
| Annandale and Eskdale | 115 |
| Nithsdale | 370 |
| Stewartry | 150 |
| Wigtown | 336 |
| North East Fife | 401 |
| Banff and Buchan | 990 |
| Gordon | 361 |
| Kincardine and Deeside | 404 |
| Moray | 856 |
| Badenoch and Strathspey | 121 |
| Caithness | 525 |
| Inverness | 308 |
| Lochaber | 292 |
| Nairn | 99 |
| Ross and Cromarty | 576 |
| Skye and Lochalsh | 159 |
| Sutherland | 112 |
| Argyll and Bute | 1,265 |
| Clydesdale | 230 |
| Cumnock and Doon Valley | 134 |
| Kyle and Carrick | 222 |
| Angus | 867 |
| Perth and Kinross | 1,289 |
| Orkney Islands | 188 |
| Shetland Islands | 181 |
| Western Isles | 102 |
| Total rural authorities | 12,770 |

*Source:*
Housing Associations Statistics 1994.
Scottish Homes.

## Mr. Stefan Adolf Kock

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in which years since 1990 Mr. Stefan Adolf Kock has appeared on the register of potential public appointees. [12732]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Mr. Kock does not appear on the current Scottish Office public appointments list and as far as I am aware has never applied for an appointment on a body sponsored by my Department.

## Departmental Properties

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11410]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Most of the office space occupied by the Scottish Office is part of the Government's common user estate—CUE—and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will provide the details of vacant space on the CUE which are available centrally. Information regarding other property occupied by the Scottish Office, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and details could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11411]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** Information on overseas travel and accommodation costs in the Scottish Office and its individual agencies is not held separately. It cannot be disaggregated from total expenditure on travel and accommodation without disproportionate costs in staff time.

Information on non-departmental bodies is not kept centrally.

### Children (Scotland) Act 1995

**Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of state for Scotland if he will make a statement on the necessary implications for the new unitary authorities of the implementation of the Children (Scotland) Act. [11618]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Many of the provisions in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 require significant preparation and training if they are to be successfully implemented. For this reason, the views of a number of organisations, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, were taken into account in setting a date of April 1997 for the implementation of those provisions involving local authorities.

### Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the loss of income to local authorities as a result of parents choosing non-local authority provision for the nursery voucher scheme will be calculated; and at what stage in the year a local authority will know how its funding has been affected. [11619]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** When an authority learns how many vouchers parents have presented at its schools, it wil be able to calculate the resulting income.

### Voluntary Organisations

**Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the allocations of funding for the current year and each of the past five years to voluntary organisations eligible for assistance under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. [11673]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information is set out in the table. Allocations of funding provided by the Scottish Office to voluntary organisations under section 10(1) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act for the current year and each of the past five years are:

1990–91: £4.483 million
1991–92: £4.830 million
1992–93: £5.213 million
1993–94: £5.373 million
1994–95: £6.745 million
1995–96: £7.202 million (budget figure)

Voluntary organisations are eligible for assistance from local authorities under section 10(3) of the Act. Information on this funding is not held centrally.

### Prisoners (Escapes)

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* male prisoners and *(b)* female prisoners have escaped from custody while (i) travelling to and from hospital and (ii) undergoing hospital treatment in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [11674]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 30 January 1996:*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of male and female prisoners who have escaped from custody whilst (i) travelling to and from hospital and (ii) undergoing hospital treatment in each of the past 10 years.

To provide the information you requested would only be achieved at disproportionate cost but you may find it helpful to have the number of escapes of category B prisoners from hospital escort since 1991. The information is as follows:

| *Year* | *Male* | *Female* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 4 | — |
| 1992 | 8 | — |
| 1993 | 8 | 1 |
| 1994 | 6 | — |
| 1995 | 6 | — |

### Advocates Depute

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the results of his review of the role and remuneration of advocates depute. [12128]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The review is being carried out by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate. A working group, appointed by his predecessor and chaired by the Solicitor-General for Scotland, has completed taking evidence and hopes to report to my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate by the middle of March.

**Mr. Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current salary of an advocate depute; and what has been the average length of service of advocates depute in the last 10 years for which information is available. [12135]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The current salary of an advocate depute is £43,147. The average length of service of advocate deputes in the last 10 years has been three years.

### Departmental Vacancies

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what in the current establishment of *(a)* the Crown Office and *(b)* the procurator fiscal service; and how many vacancies there are in each. [12129]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The current establishment of the Crown Office is 140.1 and there are three vacancies—two administrative and one typing grade.

The current establishment of the procurator fiscal service is 920.3 and there are four vacancies—legal grades.

A legal recruitment board is scheduled to take place next month to fill the current vacancies and any which arise during this year.

### Alcoholic Liquor Sales (Prosecutions)

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many licence holders were prosecuted for selling alcoholic liquor to persons who were under age in the last 10 years for which information is available; and in how many cases convictions were obtained. [12130]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The number of persons proceeded against where the main offence was under section 68(1) of the Licensing (Scotland) Act is in the table.

| *Year* | *Number proceeded against* | *Charge proved* |
|---|---|---|
| 1985 | 175 | 90 |
| 1986 | 212 | 106 |
| 1987 | 231 | 113 |
| 1988 | 270 | 106 |
| 1989 | 156 | 78 |
| 1990 | 134 | 68 |
| 1991 | 151 | 63 |
| 1992 | 80 | 39 |
| 1993 | 77 | 35 |
| 1994 | 81 | 29 |

**Mr. Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many licence holders were prosecuted by the procurator fiscal at Linlithgow for selling alcoholic liquor to persons who were under age in the last 10 years for which information is available; and in how many cases convictions were obtained. [12131]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The number of persons proceeded against in Linlithgow sheriff court and West Lothian district court where the main offence was under section 68(1) of the Licensing (Scotland) Act is as follows:

| *Year* | *Number proceeded against* | *Charge proved* |
|---|---|---|
| 1985 | 2 | 0 |
| 1986 | 0 | 0 |
| 1987 | 3 | 1 |
| 1988 | 2 | 2 |
| 1989 | 3 | 2 |
| 1990 | 7 | 6 |
| 1991 | 0 | 0 |
| 1992 | 0 | 0 |
| 1993 | 1 | 1 |
| 1994 | 0 | 0 |

**Mr. Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Lord Advocate last issued directions to procurators fiscal with regard to the policy to be adopted in relation to prosecutions for the sale of alcoholic liquor to persons who are under age. [12132]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has not issued directions to procurators fiscal with regard to the prosecution of persons who are alleged to have contravened the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976. General guidelines on the prosecution of all summary offences, and on the use of alternatives to prosecution, were issued to procurators fiscal on 1 December 1995.

**Mr. Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy with regard to the prosecution of *(a)* licence holders who sell alcoholic liquor to persons who are under age and *(b)* persons who are under age who purchase alcoholic liquor. [12133]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The prosecution of persons charged with a contravention of section 68 of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976—prohibition on sale of alcoholic liquor to a person under 18—is a matter for my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate. Procurators fiscal will take court proceedings in cases where there is sufficient evidence and where, having regard to all the circumstances, a prosecution would be in the public interest.

### Labour Statistics

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new jobs were created in Scotland in each year since 1979 to the last date for which figures are available; and if he will list how many in each year were *(a)* part time and *(b)* full time. [12709]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The information requested is not available.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of jobs which have been moved out of Scotland in each of the past 16 years; and if he will indicate how many went to *(a)* the rest of the United Kingdom, *(b)* the rest of the EU and *(c)* the rest of the world. [12710]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The information requested is not available.

### Pre-school Education Initiative

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made with arrangements for the evaluation of the pre-school education initiative as proposed in the invitation to local authorities to submit pilot schemes issued by his Department last month. [13127]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The Scottish Office is today inviting several research institutions to respond to a specification for an implementation evaluation of the pilot. The remit for this evaluation is wide. It demands that the evaluators look at the experience of parents and providers; examine the way vouchers are used and their effects; and look at the patterns of provision that emerge and at the growth in places that is achieved. We are serious about learning from the pilot; and we are demonstrating that in what we do.

### Film Production

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to increase film production in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [13139]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend attaches great importance to the development of the film industry in Scotland. Scottish Office funding for film has risen from £1 million in 1993–94 to almost £1.5 million

in the current financial year. This includes an additional £180,000 for the Scottish Film Council to enable it to commission a CD-ROM, for delivery in April this year, which will give film makers throughout the world access to information about Scotland.

My noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for the arts in Scotland has held a number of discussions with leading figures in the UK and overseas film industry to seek their views on what more can be done to stimulate film production in Scotland. In addition, two studies have been commissioned from Hydra Associates. One is examining measures that might be taken to stimulate the film and television industry in Scotland and the other focuses on the need to improve the present arrangements for funding major film productions. Both studies are due to be completed next month.

### Mental Health (Hospital Transfers)

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the security arrangements at Dykebar hospital, Paisley, with particular reference to an incident involving a patient who had been transferred from Carstairs state hospital. [9370]

**Lord James Douglas Hamilton** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The security arrangements for restricted patients at Dykebar hospital are kept under review by Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust. The level of security and supervision imposed on individual patients will reflect the circumstances of each case and, in particular, considerations of public safety.

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are in place for assessing the security risk of patients who have been transferred from Carstairs state hospital to community-based mental health hospitals and who have subsequently escaped or left such hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [9373]

**Lord James Douglas Hamilton** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* Public safety is the prime consideration when a restricted patient escapes or absconds from a mental health hospital. Any subsequent action to alert the general public and to effect recapture will reflect that priority. The procedures followed when any such incident occurs are set out in the Scottish Office memorandum on procedure, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The circumstances of any escape or absconding are carefully reviewed. Where appropriate, the patient is returned immediately to the state hospital.

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the procedure for transferring an individual committed to Carstairs state hospital to mainstream community hospitals dealing with mental health; what is the range of security measures which can be made available; what restrictions are placed upon the free movement of such patients outwith the curtilage and precincts of the hospital; how *(a)* the risks to the community and *(b)* the needs of the individual are assessed and by which bodies; and if he will make a statement; [9372]

(2) if patients transferred from the Carstairs state hospital who are transferred to community-based hospitals dealing with mental health are, or can be, made subject to security restrictions; what options are available for dealing with such individuals; who determines what arrangements should be put in place; and if he will make a statement; [9369]

(3) what arrangements are in place to ensure the safety of the community in the vicinity of local mental health hospitals, with particular reference to patients transferred from Carstairs state hospital; what assessment is made of the need for security when such a patient is transferred; what reassessment is made when such a patient absents him or herself from the hospital; and if he will make a statement. [9368]

**Lord James Douglas Hamilton** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The transfer of a patient, who is subject to the special restrictions in section 62 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984, from the state hospital, Carstairs, to a local mental health hospital requires my consent, which will be given only when I am satisfied, on the basis of reports from the responsible medical officer, my Department's psychiatric adviser and other relevant information, that the patient no longer requires treatment in the special security of the state hospital and that the arrangements proposed for treatment and supervision in the local hospital are appropriate. Such transfers constitute an important step in the rehabilitation of the patient and are designed to begin a gradual but supervised process towards eventual integration into the community. Treatment plans in each case are geared to individual circumstances and reflect both the health and safety requirements of the patient and public protection considerations.

Movement outwith the hospital is permitted only following careful assessment by the clinical team, in collaboration, where appropriate, with other professional interests, and with the approval of my Department. Initially, the patient will be escorted by hospital staff.

The progress of a restricted patient in a local hospital is carefully monitored and regular reports are submitted to the Scottish Office. In addition, my Department's psychiatric adviser visits each patient annually and will do so more frequently, if required. Should a patient not respond satisfactorily or abscond from the hospital, the treatment plan is completely re-assessed. Where necessary, the patient can be returned immediately to the state hospital.

The procedures to be followed, in cases where transfer or leave of absence of restricted patients fail to be considered, are set out in a Scottish Office memorandum on procedure, a copy of which I have placed in the Library.

### Highway Maintenance Contracts

**Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many contracts for the maintenance of highways in Scotland have been put out to public tender; what proportion of the contracts now let on this basis have been won (i) by private contractors and (ii) by local authority consortia; and if he will make a statement. [11846]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* There have been eight contracts for the maintenance of trunk roads in Scotland that have been put out to public tender by the Scottish Office; three of the contracts have been awarded to local authority consortia; and the remaining five contracts are currently being assessed.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Motability

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the Schroeders merchant bank report on Motability Finance Ltd. [5092]

**Mr. Burt:** The Schroeders merchant bank report was commissioned by the governors of Motability and is confidential to them.

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when his Department expects to agree the National Audit Office report on Motability and its associated financial arms. [5138]

**Mr. Burt:** The NAO study on Motability has been received in draft and we are currently discussing with the National Audit Office a timetable for clearance.

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if Motability controls the moneys in the Motability 10th anniversary fund. [5142]

**Mr. Burt:** No. The Motability Tenth Anniversary Trust is an independent charity and a registered company. Its moneys are controlled by trustees who are appointed by Motability, the Secretary of State for Social Security and by the bankers who fund the Motability scheme.

### Child Support Agency

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the Child Support Agency cases deferred in December 1994 were taken on in *(a)* November 1995 and *(b)* December 1995; and what he estimates to be the month-by-month take-up until the end of the current financial year. [10182]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 29 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the take on of Child Support Agency cases deferred in December 1994.

The special take on of such cases in November and December 1995 was as follows:

November 1995—292

December 1995—178

As you are aware at the time of deferral some 340,000 cases were affected. The Secretary of State set the Agency a milestone target to commence the take on of these cases by the end of 1995. We formally started taking on the remaining cases in November last year, but in practice had already dealt with many of them because the parent with care had either specifically asked us to do so, or had made a repeat claim to a prescribed benefit, and had therefore been treated as a new claim.

I expect the rate of special take on of deferred cases to remain steady for the remainder of the financial year.

I hope this is helpful.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many incoming telephone calls were made to *(a)* the Child Support Agency centres and *(b)* the national inquiry line month by month since September 1994. [11195]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 29 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about telephone calls made to the Child Support Agency.

The numbers of incoming calls made to Child Support Agency Centre Client Help Lines and the National Enquiry Line for the period requested are set out in the attached table.

I hope this is helpful.

*Calls made to client help line and national enquiry line from September 1994*

| *Month* | *Calls made to client help line (a)* | *Calls made to national enquiry line (b)* | *Totals* |
|---|---|---|---|
| September 1994 | 274,722 | 75,952 | 350,674 |
| October 1994 | 324,905 | 65,786 | 390,691 |
| November 1994 | 384,181 | 62,205 | 446,386 |
| December 1994 | 365,813 | 45,393 | 411,206 |
| January 1995 | 316,345 | 69,377 | 385,722 |
| February 1995 | 252,743 | 46,010 | 298,753 |
| March 1995 | 300,610 | 67,148 | 367,758 |
| April 1995 | 848,089 | 76,028 | 924,117 |
| May 1995 | 306,152 | 53,001 | 359,153 |
| June 1995 | 205,732 | 52,229 | 257,961 |
| July 1995 | 203,482 | 56,697 | 260,179 |
| August 1995 | 293,351 | 55,603 | 348,954 |
| September 1995 | 499,104 | 59,639 | 558,743 |
| October 1995 | 318,824 | 55,941 | 374,765 |
| November 1995 | 553,986 | 58,861 | 612,847 |
| December 1995 | 446,909 | 40,327 | 487,236 |
| Totals | 5,894,948 | 940,197 | 6,835,145 |

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes were made on what dates to the arrangements for answering incoming calls at the Child Support Agency between September 1994 and September 1995; and when they were made. [11181]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 29 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about changes made in the arrangements for answering incoming calls received in the Child Support Agency.

To improve customer services, management decided to centralise the National Enquiry Line and to create a section within each Child Support Agency Centre (CSAC) that would deal solely with incoming calls.

The National Enquiry Line based in Liverpool became fully operational on 21 June 1994 and the Central Call Handling sections with Automatic Call Distribution equipment within each CSAC were fully operational on the following dates:-

Belfast: 8 August 1994
Birkenhead: 8 August 1994
Dudley: 11 July 1994

Falkirk: 5 September 1994
Hastings: 1 August 1994
Plymouth: 22 August 1994

I hope this is helpful.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *894*, how the total figures for reduced benefit directives imposed by each Child Support Agency centre were arrived at. [11194]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 29 January 1996:*

I am reply to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how the totals for reduced benefit directions (RBD) imposed by each Child Support Agency Centre were arrived at in Official report, column 894 of 18th December 1995.

I *do* apologise that having looked again at the totals detailed for the RBD section of the tables provided in the above report, I can see that they were wrong. The sum shown at the bottom of these particular columns is not the the total of the individual figures in them.

I have enclosed an updated version of the full tables supplied by way of answer to your Parliamentary Question set out in Official Report, column 894. You will note that the relevant columns do now show their correct totals. I am very sorry I did not spot this error in my previous reply.

I hope this is helpful.

| | *Good cause accepted* | *Absent parent named* | *Good cause not accepted* | *Reduced benefit direction implemented* | *Investigations completed* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Dudley* | | | | | |
| April | 335 | 63 | 580 | 311 | 978 |
| May | 503 | 98 | 617 | 306 | 1,218 |
| June | 450 | 243 | 820 | 389 | 1,513 |
| July | 493 | 354 | 548 | 265 | 1,395 |
| August | 576 | 371 | 749 | 531 | 1,696 |
| September | 541 | 370 | 599 | 464 | 1,510 |
| October | 619 | 391 | 682 | 384 | 1,692 |
| November | 568 | 386 | 595 | 386 | 1,549 |
| Total | 4,085 | 2,276 | 5,190 | 3,036 | 11,551 |
| *Hastings* | | | | | |
| April | 321 | n/a | 522 | 721 | 843 |
| May | 460 | 111 | 790 | 785 | 1,361 |
| June | 469 | 222 | 723 | 631 | 1,414 |
| July | 544 | 219 | 679 | 466 | 1,442 |
| August | 472 | 207 | 687 | 361 | 1,366 |
| September | 495 | 273 | 582 | 532 | 1,350 |
| October | 555 | 300 | 727 | 836 | 1,582 |
| November | 540 | 335 | 716 | 537 | 1,591 |
| Total | 3,856 | 1,667 | 5,426 | 4,869 | 10,949 |
| *Falkirk* | | | | | |
| April | 369 | 94 | 471 | 283 | 934 |
| May | 534 | 161 | 833 | 335 | 1,528 |
| June | 626 | 345 | 944 | 242 | 1,915 |
| July | 589 | 331 | 645 | 219 | 1,565 |
| August | 642 | 408 | 939 | 276 | 1,989 |
| September | 633 | 448 | 862 | 306 | 1,943 |
| October | 572 | 428 | 757 | 394 | 1,757 |
| November | 637 | 463 | 918 | 362 | 2,018 |
| Total | 4,602 | 2,678 | 6,369 | 2,417 | 13,649 |
| *Birkenhead* | | | | | |
| April | 389 | 96 | 470 | 510 | 955 |
| May | 556 | 185 | 615 | 511 | 1,356 |
| June | 592 | 287 | 713 | 445 | 1,592 |
| July | 625 | 361 | 786 | 278 | 1,772 |
| August | 582 | 334 | 637 | 430 | 1,553 |
| September | 678 | 428 | 686 | 455 | 1,792 |
| October | 722 | 536 | 775 | 401 | 2,033 |
| November | 801 | 567 | 951 | 382 | 2,319 |
| Total | 4,945 | 2,794 | 5,633 | 3,412 | 13,372 |
| *Belfast* | | | | | |
| April | 418 | 137 | 540 | 260 | 1,095 |
| May | 599 | 195 | 740 | 473 | 1,534 |
| June | 488 | 271 | 689 | 250 | 1,448 |

| | Good cause accepted | Absent parent named | Good cause not accepted | Reduced benefit direction implemented | Investigations completed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| July | 544 | 427 | 680 | 393 | 1,651 |
| August | 631 | 425 | 744 | 392 | 1,800 |
| September | 668 | 526 | 805 | 336 | 1,999 |
| October | 624 | 561 | 736 | 347 | 1,921 |
| November | 676 | 780 | 789 | 300 | 2,245 |
| Total | 3,348 | 1,981 | 4,198 | 2,751 | 13,693 |
| *Plymouth* | | | | | |
| April | 340 | 100 | 452 | 276 | 892 |
| May | 467 | 112 | 617 | 458 | 1,196 |
| June | 508 | 216 | 684 | 389 | 1,408 |
| July | 494 | 294 | 680 | 392 | 1,468 |
| August | 438 | 259 | 575 | 373 | 1,272 |
| September | 508 | 267 | 490 | 274 | 1,265 |
| October | 450 | 264 | 567 | 474 | 1,281 |
| November | 641 | 364 | 559 | 341 | 1,564 |
| Total | 2,755 | 1,248 | 3,498 | 2,977 | 10,346 |

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what consultations his Department has had with *(a)* the Australian and *(b)* New Zealand Governments on the operation of the Child Support Agency; [11801]

(2) what plans he has to commission research into the workings of the child support agencies of *(a)* Australia, *(b)* New Zealand and *(c)* North America. [11805]

**Mr. Mitchell:** There have been a number of visits by officials from this Department to Australia and New Zealand to examine their schemes. There have also been discussions with officials from those countries at international conferences on child support and when officials from Australia and New Zealand have visited this country.

Building on these contacts, officials regularly exchange information about their schemes, including the results of studies into the workings of the schemes in the different countries.

### Employees (Data-matching Exercise)

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many employees *(a)* were discovered to be involved in breaches of confidence and illegal benefit claims and *(b)* have subsequently faced (i) dismissal and (ii) disciplinary action in the data-matching exercise on employees in his Department in November 1995; and what evaluation his Department will undertake of the exercise. [10834]

**Mr. Burt:** No such data-matching exercise has taken place. The Department has in place effective security measures to reduce the risk of internal fraud, and to identify and deal with it if it occurs.

### Housing Benefit Fraud

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate his Department has made of the level of housing benefit fraud which is organised internally within local authorities; and what guidance, instructions and financial incentives his Department provided to local authorities to minimise organised housing benefit fraud. [10831]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Local authorities, as employers and the bodies responsible for housing benefit administration, must take action against benefit fraud by their own employees. The information requested about such fraud is not collected centrally.

### Medical Tests

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps his Department are taking to monitor the precision with which the all-work tests for incapacity benefit are conducted. [11187]

**Mr. Burt:** We continue to monitor closely all stages of the all-work test to ensure that it is operating as intended.

Medical examinations conducted as part of the all-work test for incapacity benefit are undertaken by fully qualified medical practitioners, recruited and trained by the Benefits Agency to an approved standard. The standard is maintained through continuous quality monitoring supported by sampling exercises, annual review of individual performance and careful monitoring of any complaints and appropriate remedial action where necessary.

The standard of adjudication decisions on incapacity benefit is monitored routinely by the chief adjudication officer and his staff, and a special sampling exercise has been conducted to examine a higher proportion of cases following introduction of the benefit.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals against the all-work medical test for incapacity benefit have resulted in a tribunal decision; and in how many cases the original decision was upheld. [11186]

**Mr. Burt:** Up to 30 November 1995, 993 appeals against the all-work test for incapacity benefit resulted in a tribunal decision. The original decision was upheld in 525 cases.

### Divorce

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to give couples considering *(a)* divorce and *(b)* judicial separation

information about their state earnings-related pension scheme rights. [11633]

**Mr. Heald:** Currently, anyone who thinks that he or she may have SERPS entitlement rights can apply to the Benefit Agency's retirement pension forecasting and advice unit—RPFA—for a forecast of his or her retirement pension position. This will include details of his or her potential SERPS entitlement.

In order to facilitate the operation of the measures in section 166 and section 167 of the Pensions Act 1995, the Department is currently considering the feasibility of the RPFA providing a valuation of SERPS entitlement for the purposes of divorce and judicial separation.

### Disability Living Allowance

**Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have applied for disability living allowance due to the loss of a finger or thumb or the loss of the use of a finger or thumb; and how many have been awarded disability living allowance with this condition. [11724]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information requested is not available.

### Housing Insurance

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what powers local authorities that operate contents insurance schemes for the tenants of their housing stock have to make deductions from housing benefit to cover the premiums of claimants who *(a)* participate and *(b)* are eligible to participate in such schemes; what guidelines he issues to local authorities on such matters; and if he will make a statement. [12221]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Local authorities are required to adjust the rent eligible for housing benefit to reflect the cost of any ineligible services, such as contents insurance, included in the rent. This Department's guidance makes it clear that this duty applies even where the charge is not specified or separately identified. There is no need to adjust housing benefit where people who are eligible to participate in such schemes choose not to do so.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11530]

**Mr. Burt:** The available information on expenditure is in the table. In addition, local offices of the Department's agencies may subscribe to local or specialist publications, details of which are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Expenditure on weekly/daily journals and newspapers recorded centrally by the Department and its agencies is as follows:

| *Year* | *Amount £* |
|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 25,707 |
| 1994–95 | 29,041 |
| 1995–96 (up to end of December 1995) | 23,451 |

Publications currently purchased include:

*Accountancy Age*
*Benchmarking*
*Blesmag*
*Campaign*
*Caterer and Hotel Keeper*
*Certified Accounting*
*Community Care*
*Computer Weekly*
*Consult*
*Customer Service Manager*
*Daily Mail*
*Daily Telegraph*
*Daily Express*
*Daily Mirror*
*Daily Record*
*Daily Star*
*Economist*
*Euromoney*
*European*
*Evening Chronicle*
*Evening Standard*
*Financial Times*
*Gee's Pay Monthly*
*Guardian*
*Handelblatt*
*Health Service Journal*
*Independent*
*Internet*
*Investors Chronicle*
*IR Tax Bulletin*
*Le Monde*
*Mail on Sunday*
*Management Accounting*
*Managing Service Quality*
*Money Marketing*
*Morning Star*
*Nature*
*New Scientist*
*New Statesman*
*New of the World*
*Northern Echo*
*Nursing Times*
*Observer*
*Pay Advice*

*Payroll Managers Review*
*Payroll News*
*Pensions Management*
*PR Weekly*
*Private Eye*
*Scotland on Sunday*
*Spectator*
*Sun*
*Sunday People*
*Sunday Telegraph*
*Sunday Express*
*Sunday Sun*
*Sunday Mirror*
*Tax Journal*
*Taxation Practitioner*
*The Journal*
*The Bullet Point*
*The Big Issue*
*The Herald*
*Times*
*Wall Street Journal*
*Watsons*
*Weekly Guardian*
*West Lancashire Evening Gazette*
*Word Processing*
*Word Perfect*

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11529]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

*Expenditure on all forms of overseas travel for the Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies*

| *Year* | *Cost £* |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 224,884 |
| 1991–92 | 429,013 |
| 1993–94 | 348,152 |
| 1994–95 | 389,610 |
| 1995–96 | 316,617 |

1. Figures for 1979–80 are not available.
2. Figures for 1995–96 are estimated.
3. Detailed spending plans for 1996–97 are yet to be finalised.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979—80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11527]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is in the table:

| *Year* | *Cost £ million* |
|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 837 |
| 1989–90 | 2,765 |
| 1991–92 | 3,470 |
| 1993–94 | 4,176 |
| 1994–95 | 4,223 |
| 1995–96 | 4,225 |
| 1996–97 | 4,207 |

*Source:*
Government's Expenditure Plans 1985–86—1987–88.
Social Security Departmental Report, 1995–96—1997–98.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11526]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table:

| | *1989–90 £* | *1991–92 £* | *1993–94 £* | *1994–95 £* | *[1]1995–96 £* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Department | 25,477 | 54,036 | 38,525 | 40,492 | 19,313 |
| Agencies | 163 | 37,898 | 125,944 | 86,647 | 86,925 |
| Non-departmental public bodies[2] | — | — | — | — | 400 |

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Prior to 1995-96 NDPB figures are subsumed within category *(a)*.
No information is available for 1979-80 and NDPB expenditure is not separately identifiable before 1995–96. However, because DSS NDPBs are on-Vote NDPBs, their expenditure is subsumed within the Departmental figures provided.

### Maxwell Pension Scheme

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guarantees the Maxwell pension scheme has given to him that there will be no pension holidays before the repayment of the state scheme premiums owed to the Exchequer. [12527]

**Mr. Heald:** All Maxwell pension schemes which owe state scheme premiums have commenced winding up and have no active members. The question of pension holidays for these schemes does not therefore arise.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11528]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

In respect of DSS departmental estate, the cost of empty and under-utilised properties is shown in the table.

| *Year* | *Vacant or under-utilised properties* | *Cost £000* |
|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | Minimal | Minimal |
| 1989–90 | Minimal | Minimal |
| 1991–92 | Minimal | Minimal |
| 1993–94 | Minimal | Minimal |
| 1994–95 | 8,830m² | 420 |
| 1995–96 | 8,830m² | 1,682 |
| 1996–97 | 131,593m² | 15,500 |

Providing the information for each executive agency and non-departmental public body could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In response to the information required regarding the current and past financial years in respect of properties on the common user (office) estate, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

## Child Rearing Costs

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *213*, if he will cite the evidence which is available on the relative costs of bringing up children by lone parents and by couples; and if he will place copies of the evidence in the Library. [12457]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** Extensive research has been carried out on the costs of children. A list of the published research findings includes:


Bayley, R. et al (Ed), (1995), Policies for families: work, poverty and resources, London, Family Policy Studies Centre.

Bradshaw J., (1993) Household Budgets and Living Standards, York; Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Bradshaw, J., and Morgan, J., (1987), Budgeting on Benefit: The consumption of families on Social Security, London, Family Policy Studies Centre.

Buck, N. et al, (1994), Changing Households: The British Household Panel Study 1990–1992, ESRC, Colchester.

Dickens, R. et al, (1995), The cost of children and the welfare state, Social Policy Research Findings, December 1995, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Family Policy Studies Centre, (1995), Children in Britain, Family Report 2, London, Family Policy Studies Centre.

Field, F., (1985), What price a child? A historical review of the relative cost of dependants, London, Policy Studies Institute.

Ford, R., Marsh, A. and McKay, S., (1995), Changes in Lone Parenthood 1989 to 1993, DSS Research Series, Report no. 40, London, HMSO.

Marsh, A. and McKay, S., (1993), Families, Work and the Use of Childcare, Employment Gazette, August.

Middleton, S. et al, (1994), Family Fortunes, London, Child Poverty Action Group.

Oldfield, N., and Yu, A., (1993) The Cost of a Child, London, Child Poverty Action Group.

Oppenheim, C., (1990), The Cost of Child, London, Child Poverty Action Group.

Oppenheim C., (1993), Poverty: The Facts, London, Child Poverty Action Group.

Piachaud, D., (1979), The Cost of a Child: A modern minimum, London, Child Poverty Action Group.

Roll, J., (1986), Babies and money: birth trends and costs, London, Family Policy Studies Centre.

Walker, R. et al, (1993), Mostly on the children, Working Paper 218, Centre for Research in Social Policy, University of Loughborough.


All the above are publicly available. Work sponsored by the Government has been placed in the Library.

## Child Care Disregard

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants who have benefited from the child care disregard have child care costs of *(a)* between £40 and £60 per week and *(b)* over £60 per week. [12528]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** As at 30 September 1995, approximately 5,000 families receiving family credit had child care charges of between £40 and £60 a week, and a further 2,000 had child care charges of over £60 per week.

*Source:*

5 per cent. sample of family credit awards as at 30 September 1995.

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants have benefited from the child care disregard in family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit. [12530]

**Mr. Evans:** As at 30 September 1995, approximately 21,000 families were benefiting from help with child care charges in family credit. Information on families receiving help through housing benefit and council tax benefit will not be available until later this year.

*Source:*

5 per cent. sample of family credit awards as at 30 September 1995.

## Housing Benefit Fraud Review

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the statistical basis on which Cardiff was placed in a list of declining industrial towns and cities in the recent housing benefit fraud review. [12571]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The classification of local authorities used in the report of the housing benefit review was defined in terms of a comprehensive set of 37 social and economic variables drawn from the 1991 census to make the places in each of six types similar to each other while making each type clearly distinct from the others. Unfortunately, the description of the group including Cardiff was so abbreviated as to be inappropriate and misleading. The report has been amended to describe that group as "Ex-mining and industrial towns and other cities" and an apology has been sent to Cardiff and the other places affected.

## Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each of his executive agencies

for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2357]

**Mr. Burt** *[pursuant to his reply, 7 December 1995, c. 378]:* The information that I gave regarding the cost of overseas travel within the Department's executive agencies was incorrect. The correct information is as follows:

*Cost of overseas travel*

| *Agency* | *Cost* £ |
|---|---|
| Benefits Agency | 113,266 |
| Child Support Agency | 9,584 |
| Resettlement Agency | nil |
| Contributions Agency | 15,040 |
| War Pensions Agency | 3,975 |
| Information Technology Services Agency | 56,364 |

The principal countries visited were:

Republic of Ireland
Belgium
France
Germany
USA
The Netherlands
Luxembourg
Italy
Australia
Switzerland.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Delegated Legislation

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the number of statutory instruments considered by the House in each parliamentary Session from 1974 to date. [10768]

**Mr. Newton:** The figures for the numbers of statutory instruments considered by the House, in Standing Committee and on the Floor of the House, for each Session since 1974 are as follows:

| | *Standing Committee* | *Floor of the House* |
|---|---|---|
| 1994–95 | 126 | 81 |
| 1993–94 | 69 | 88 |
| 1992–93 | 199 | 82 |
| 1991–92 | 60 | 42 |
| 1990–91 | 139 | 48 |
| 1989–90 | 114 | 56 |
| 1988–89 | 117 | 68 |
| 1987–88 | 156 | 99 |
| 1986–87 | 69 | 68 |
| 1985–86 | 97 | 83 |
| 1984–85 | 100 | 106 |
| 1983–84 | 96 | 147 |
| 1982–83 | 70 | 53 |
| 1981–82 | 80 | 99 |
| 1980–81 | 62 | 109 |
| 1979–80 | 131 | 126 |
| 1978–79 | 70 | 48 |
| 1977–78 | 138 | 65 |
| 1976–77 | 126 | 72 |
| 1975–76 | 96 | 92 |
| 1974–75 | 101 | 67 |
| 1974 | 38 | 33 |

# Written Answers to Questions

*Wednesday 31 January 1996*

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Inquest (North Wales)

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what operation and when it was carried out on patient C, the subject of an inquest in north Wales; who was the coroner at the inquest; what factors underlay the decisions *(a)* not to name the patient and *(b)* not to publish the date of the inquest; and what evidence was given by public officials during the proceedings on the case. [11927]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to the above Question about the recent legal proceedings concerning Patient C. In doing so I have consulted with the Home Office and Welsh Office on the issues that are within their jurisdiction.

Patient C entered hospital on 26 February 1991 for elective extraction of wisdom teeth. I understand that the death was reported to the coroner for East Clwyd, Mr. Jones, and that a date for the inquest has yet to be fixed. Patient C was the subject of an application to the Family Division of the High Court for a declaration that life-sustaining treatment and medical support be discontinued. In that application, Mr. Justice Johnson made an order under section 11 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 that Patient C and other connected individuals should not be named. Two further applications came before Sir Stephen Brown, the President of the Family Division. So far as the evidence given by public officials is concerned, I have arranged for copies of the three judgments in this matter to be made available in the library of the House.

### Maxwell Fraud Trial

**Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the estimated cost to the legal aid fund of the Maxwell fraud trial. [11717]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** It would not be appropriate for me to speculate at this stage about the final cost of this case.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### CCTA

**Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are his plans for the CCTA, the Government centre for information systems. [13228]

**Mr. Freeman:** The CCTA, currently an operational division of the Office of Public Service will, from 1 April 1996, operate as a next steps executive agency within OPS, and will remain based in Norwich. This will ensure that Government Departments continue to have available to them a range of expert specialist services in information technology and telecommunications which are independent and are valued by Departments.

As an agency, CCTA will operate on a full cost recovery basis. It will therefore need to develop a stronger customer focus and undergo major restructuring and efficiency measures. It will work in close co-operation with the new central information technology unit which is being established in the OPS to provide a strategic approach to the use of information technology in government.

### F16 Aircraft

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has had from the United Kingdom defence industry concerning the proposed leasing of American F16 aircraft. [12127]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have received a number of representations from the UK defence industry concerning the Ministry of Defence's evaluation of a proposal to upgrade the Tornado F3's weapons systems.

Those representations have been passed on to the Ministry of Defence in the normal way.

### Photocopiers

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many new photocopiers his Department has *(a)* purchased and *(b)* leased since July 1995; and at what cost. [4291]

**Mr. Willets** *[pursuant to his reply, 6 December 1995, Official Report, c 256]:* I regret that the figure given as the rental cost per annum of the 14 leased photocopiers to replace existing machines is incorrect. The correct information is as follows.

Since 1 July 1995, the Cabinet Office and its agencies have purchased one additional photocopier at a cost of £895 and leased 18 photocopiers, 11 of which replaced existing machines, at a rental cost of £50,799 per annum.

In the same period, HMSO and the Central Office of Information purchased four photocopiers, two of which replaced existing machines, at a cost of £17,817 and leased 14 to replace existing machines at a rental cost of £23,366 per annum.

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column 121, what factors led his Department to accept photocopiers on variable contracts of three, four and five years over and above the leasing costs; and what is the minimum contractual cost of using and maintaining *(a)* the 18 photocopiers on three-year contracts, *(b)* the three photocopiers on four-year contracts and *(c)* the four photocopiers on five-year contracts. [8920]

**Mr. Willetts** *[pursuant to his reply, 15 January 1996, Official Report, c 335]:* I regret that the figure given as the minimum total cost of leasing the 18 photocopiers on three-year contracts is incorrect. The correct information is as follows.

The minimum total cost of leasing *(a)* the 18 photocopiers on three-year contracts is £36,905 per annum, *(b)* the three photocopiers on four-year contracts is £15,969 per annum and *(c)* the four photocopiers on five-year contracts is £3,315 per annum.

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *335*, on costs of photocopiers, what was the estimated number of copies projected in respect of each contract and at what cost per copy. [10277]

**Mr. Willetts** *[pursuant to his reply, 22 January 1996, Official Report, c.42]:* I regret that the figure of 0.3p given as the cost per copy for the machine with the projected usage of 5 million copies is incorrect. The correct figure is 0.4p. The entire table with the corrected figure is as follows:

*Estimated number of copies projected in respect of each contract and cost per copy for the 25 photocopiers*

| *Copies projected for contract period* | *Cost per copy (p)* |
|---|---|
| 24,000,000 | 0.32 |
| 24,000,000 | 0.32 |
| 1,800,000 | 0.71 |
| 1,800,000 | 0.79 |
| 1,800,000 | 0.79 |
| 900,000 | 0.65 |
| 360,000 | 0.85 |
| 324,000 | 0.90 |
| 270,000 | 0.91 |
| 252,000 | 0.91 |
| 252,000 | 0.84 |
| 240,000 | 0.91 |
| 240,000 | 0.91 |
| 240,000 | 0.91 |
| 240,000 | 0.91 |
| 180,000 | 0.97 |
| 180,000 | 0.97 |
| 144,000 | 0.91 |
| 108,000 | 0.91 |
| 108,000 | 0.95 |
| 72,000 | 0.95 |
| 60,000 | 0.97 |
| 48,000 | 0.97 |
| 1,620,000 | 0.81 per first 90,000 per annum<br>0.63 thereafter |
| 5,000,000 | First 1.2 million per annum included in contract price,<br>next 200,000 at 0.5 per copy<br>thereafter 0.4 per copy |

## Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for 1995–96. [11373]

**Mr. Willetts:** The table below gives the available absenteeism figures for the central Cabinet Office including No. 10 and the executive agencies for which I am responsible. Figures for previous years and 1995–96 are not available.

| | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|
| Central Department | 8.48 | 8.45 |
| COI | 7.76 | 9.67 |
| CS College | 7.00 | 6.40 |
| HMSO | 9.86 | 7.03 |
| OHSA | 8.82 | 14.52 |
| RAS | 8.58 | 12.99 |
| Chessington | 9.00 | 10.37 |
| SAFE | 4.34 | 11.05 |
| TBA | 9.97 | 8.70 |
| Total | 8.35 | 8.61 |

Absence rates represent total days absent divided by total number of staff.

## Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [11505]

**Mr. Willetts:** Details of running costs and administrative spending by the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's Office, and the Office of Public Service for the years 1989–90 through to 1997–98 are contained in tables 7.5 and 7.6 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2820, copies of which are available in the Members' Library. This year's report, due to be published at the end of March, will reflect the Cabinet Office's new responsibilities, following the machinery of government and other changes.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines for 1995–96 to date; and if he will list the publications purchased. [11508]

**Mr. Willetts:** This information, and similar information for earlier years, can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

# TREASURY

## Unemployment

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of person days lost through unemployment since May 1979. [12316]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** There is no means of assessing such a figure because no central records are kept of the numbers of hours unemployed people worked prior to becoming unemployed, nor of the number of hours they now wish to work.

## North Sea Oil and Gas

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income the Government have received from North sea *(a)* oil and *(b)* gas exploitation for each year since 1979. [12480]

**Mr. Jack:** Tax revenues from oil and gas production were given in answer to the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on 12 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1053–54*. Separate figures for revenues from oil and gas are not available because the main taxes concerned, corporation tax and petroleum revenue tax, are charged on aggregate company and field profits respectively. Royalties are also levied on each field's aggregate production. Many companies have interests in both oil and gas extraction and, in many fields, both products are extracted.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible, if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11992]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol is one of the action points in the Department's action plan on disability introduced last year.

Of the Treasury's four agencies, one—the Royal Mint—currently uses the symbol for external recruitment. The Central Statistical Office, Paymaster and the Valuation Office agency are considering whether to become symbol users.

### Bills (Late Payment)

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with other Government Departments following the publication of the figures showing percentages of bills paid late in 1994–95. [12223]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* The Treasury has an ongoing dialogue with other Government Departments and commercial organisations on a range of procurement-related topics, including bill payment. Lessons learnt during these discussions can result in the adoption of more efficient methods of working for all concerned.

The Treasury is a signatory to the Confederation of British Industry code of payment.

### Retail Prices Index

**Sir Timothy Sainsbury:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will instruct the retail prices index advisory committee to assess whether the retail prices index takes sufficient account of *(a)* quality change new versions of products, *(b)* totally new products and *(c)* a formula bias arising from overweighting of items entering the index at temporarily low prices; [12692]

(2) if he will instruct the retail prices index advisory committee to assess whether *(a)* the retail prices index takes proper account of the number of discount stores and *(b)* there is an outlet bias; [12693]

(3) if he will instruct the retail prices index advisory committee to assess whether the index takes sufficient account of the incidence of special offers. [12698]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** I have no plans at present to convene the retail prices index advisory committee. However, a recent report by Nicholas Oulton of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, commissioned by the Treasury, looked at many of these issues in detail. This report, "Treasury Working Paper 68: Reliability and Accuracy in UK Price Indices", which was published in March 1995, is available in the House of Commons Library.

### Disabled People (VAT)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what factors have led to the imposition of VAT on disabled individuals purchasing computer equipment; [12691]

(2) if he will *(a)* place in the Library and *(b)* publish the Customs and Excise directive concerning the levying of VAT on purchases of computer equipment for disabled people; [12689]

(3) which bodies representing the rights of the disabled were consulted in relation to the re-interpretation of the VAT legislation on the purchasing of computer equipment. [12690]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** There have been no changes in the application of VAT to computer equipment for disabled people. Such equipment, when designed solely for disabled people's use, is zero rated. General purpose equipment is, and always has been, liable at the standard rate. There has been no need to consult because there has been no re-interpretation of the law.

No directives on the liability of computer equipment have been issued by Customs and Excise. A copy of customs notice 701/7/94, "VAT reliefs for people with disabilities", has already been placed in the Library of the House.

### Gross Domestic Product

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual rate of growth of Britain's gross domestic product *(a)* since the first quarter of 1990 and *(b)* since the first quarter of 1979. [12596]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The average annual rate of growth of Britain's real GDP—gross domestic product at constant factor cost—between the first quarter of 1990 and the fourth quarter of 1995 was 1.1 per cent. Between the first quarter of 1979 and the fourth quarter of 1995, the average annual rate of growth was 2 per cent.

### Employment Statistics (Lancashire)

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of *(a)* manual and *(b)* non-manual (i) male and (ii) female part-time workers work less than (1) eight hours, (2) 16 hours and (3) 24 hours in each borough in Lancashire. [12839]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** It is not possible to provide data for county boroughs.

Information showing hours worked by part-time men and women in Lancashire is given in the table.

*New Earnings survey 1995*

*Part-time employees in Lancashire—weekly hours*

| | *Percentage working less than:* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Excluding overtime* | | | *Including overtime* | | |
| | *8 hours* | *16 hours* | *24 hours* | *8 hours* | *16 hours* | *24 hours* |
| *Manual* | | | | | | |
| Male | 18.9 | 41.5 | 71.7 | 17.0 | 37.7 | 66.0 |
| Female | 7.5 | 35.0 | 70.6 | 7.5 | 32.5 | 65.6 |
| Total | 10.3 | 36.6 | 70.9 | 9.9 | 33.8 | 65.7 |
| *Non-Manual* | | | | | | |
| Male | 33.3 | 51.3 | 69.2 | 30.8 | 51.3 | 69.2 |
| Female | 10.8 | 29.7 | 70.3 | 10.3 | 27.7 | 66.9 |
| Total | 12.8 | 31.7 | 70.2 | 12.1 | 29.8 | 67.1 |
| *All* | | | | | | |
| Male | 25.0 | 45.7 | 70.7 | 22.8 | 43.5 | 67.4 |
| Female | 9.8 | 31.3 | 70.4 | 9.5 | 29.1 | 66.5 |
| Total | 12.0 | 33.3 | 70.4 | 11.4 | 31.2 | 66.7 |

### Debt

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount of debt per household for every £100 of disposable income at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [12024]

**Mr. Angela Knight:** There are no official estimates of the financial assets and liabilities of the household sector. Estimates for the personal sector—which includes households, individuals, private trusts, unincorporated businesses and non profit-making bodies serving persons—are published by the Central Statistical Office in table 12.2 of the "UK National Accounts", known as the "Blue Book", which is available in the Library of the House. At the end of 1994, the personal sector had financial liabilities worth £524 billion, financial assets worth £1,656 billion, and non-financial assets worth £1,419 billion, implying total net wealth of £2,551 billion. Personal disposable income in 1994 was £473 billion. So, for every £100 of disposable income, the personal sector held £111 of financial liabilities and had total net wealth of £539 at the end of 1994.

## DEFENCE

### Land Mines

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mechanisms exist to ensure public notification occurs in respect of changes in the moratorium on the export of land mines. [12761]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Any change to the UK's moratorium on the export of anti-personnel mines would be notified to Parliament, as was the change announced on 15 March 1995 by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, *Official Report*, columns *860-63*.

### Annualised Average Temperatures

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the annualised average temperature for mainland Britain for each of the years 1990 to 1995; and what recent estimates he has made of the historic average mean temperature since records began. [11238]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** This is a matter for the chief executive of the Meteorological Office. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Alan W. Williams, dated 31 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about temperatures in mainland Britain as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office.

The annualised average temperatures for mainland Britain (i.e. United Kingdom excluding Northern Ireland) 1990–1995 are:

1990: 10.0°C
1991: 9.2°C
1992: 9.3°C
1993: 8.9°C
1994: 9.5°C
1995: 9.8°C

The last 4 decades 1956–1965, 1966–1975, 1976–1985, 1986–1995 show values of 8.9, 9.0, 8.9. 9.3 respectively.

The natural climate variability of the UK area is such that this apparent warming has little statistical significance. As a perspective a diagram illustrating annual values over the period back to 1659 is attached. The diagram does not refer to the whole UK as reliable data for Scotland is not available before 1851.

The attached reports give a full background should you wish to be more aware of the position and issues.

I hope you find the information helpful.

### Former Yugoslavia

**Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on military deployment to the former Yugoslavia. [13420]

**Mr. Portillo:** The deployment of British armed forces to the NATO-led peace implementation force, IFOR, in Bosnia is now complete.

By carefully matching the manpower required to the tasks which have emerged, we have been able to deploy a smaller number of troops than the estimate of over 13,000 reported in my statement to the House of 12 December

1995, *Official Report*, column *835*. The actual figure is some 11,500. The United Kingdom's contribution remains, by a substantial margin, second only to that of the United States.

I shall keep the force level under review as planning develops for the reduction of IFOR numbers and the completion of its task. NATO is also reviewing the maritime and air forces required to support operations in the Adriatic theatre. Force levels can in any case be expected to fluctuate.

### Type 23 Frigates

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the order for the next batch of type 23 frigates. [12858]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** An announcement will be made as soon as the decision has been taken.

### Chemical Weapons Stocks

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the total amounts of chemical weapons and precursor stocks, by location, held by his Department. [12861]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** No. The UK has not had an offensive chemical weapons capability since the 1950s. Items dating from the 1950s and before are discovered from time to time and taken to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment for safe destruction. Small quantities of scheduled chemicals are held for purposes permitted by the chemical weapons convention; on security grounds, information about their quantity and location is safeguarded.

### Mr. David Hart

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Mr. David Hart has a role in his Department's postings and personnel selections. [12862]

**Mr. Portillo:** No.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Prisoners (Hospital Visits)

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners who attended hospital for confinement in each of the past 10 years (1) have *(a)* succeeded in escaping and *(b)* attempted to escape, (i) one hour before, (ii) two hours before, (iii) three hours before, (iv) four hours before and (v) five hours before their delivery and (2) have *(a)* succeeded in escaping and *(b)* attempted to escape (i) one hour after, (ii) two hours after, (iii) three hours after, (iv) four hours after and (v) five hours after their delivery. [8547]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about prisoners who have escaped or attempted to escape having attended hospital for confinement in the past 10 years.

Since 1988, when a data-base of escapes was first set up, the Prison Service has recorded no incidents of any woman escaping during the last stages of labour or during childbirth. One woman prisoner is recorded as having escaped more than five hours after the birth of her child. The child was abandoned at the hospital. There are no recorded incidents of attempted escape during or after confinement.

### Women Prisoners (Hospital Treatment)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions his Department has had with the Whittington Hospital NHS trust in respect of its concerns over the practice of handcuffing and chaining women prisoners; [9493]

(2) when his Department learnt that the Whittington Hospital NHS trust had expressed concern at the practice of handcuffing and chaining pregnant women prisoners. [9494]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* This matter was first raised with the Prison Service on 31 August 1995, when the chief executive of the Whittington hospital wrote to the governor of Holloway prison. There has been further correspondence since then.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish all correspondence between the Whittington hospital and HMP Holloway concerning the handcuffing of women prisoners during visits to the hospital; and if he will make a statement. [11642]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The temporary Director General of the Prison Service has reviewed the policy on the application of physical restraints to prisoners attending hospital, particularly pregnant prisoners and my right hon. and learned Friend announced this policy to the House on 18 January, *Official Report*, columns 893-94.

Copies of correspondence between the Whittington hospital and Holloway prison about this subject will be placed in the Library.

### Alton Manning (Death)

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the death of Alton Manning on 8 December in Blakenhurst prison. [12094]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Chris Mullin, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the death of Mr. Alton Manning on 8 December 1995 in Blakenhurst prison.

All deaths in custody are investigated by the Coroner whose inquest is a full and public inquiry. The Coroner is currently conducting the investigation into Mr. Manning's death and a date for the inquest is yet to be fixed. I am unable at this stage to comment on the detailed circumstances of the case.

### Voluntary School Helpers

**Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice has been issued to police forces by the Home Office recommending that the carrying out of police checks on voluntary school helpers be discontinued; and if he will make a statement. [12302]

**Mr. Maclean:** No such advice has been issued. The relevant guidance on the criteria which justify carrying out a criminal record check on people working in schools, whether as paid employees or as volunteers, is currently set out in Home Office circular 47/93. This states that, in order for a person to be subject to a police check, the post for which he or she is applying

"should entail a substantial level of access to children which may also be unsupervised, and will be regular or sustained."

These criteria were first agreed with the Association of Chief Police Officers in 1986 and have not changed.

### Private Prisons

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give in respect of each private prison *(a)* the contractor, *(b)* the date the contract commenced, *(c)* the length of the contract, *(d)* the original contract price and *(e)* the projected cost of the contract including start-up costs and all other costs incurred by the Prison Service. [12768]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the contracts at each of the contractually managed prisons.

The information about the projected cost of the contracts is not readily available in the form requested and I will write to you separately on this.

The other information you requested is set out in the attached table.

| | *Contractor* | *Contract started* | *Length of contract* | *Original contract price* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wolds | Group 4 | 1 April 1992 | 5 years | £29.87 million: estimate over 5 years when contract awarded |
| Blakenhurst | UKDS | 26 May 1993 | 5 years | £57 million |
| Doncaster | PPS | 20 June 1994 | 5 years | £66 million |
| Buckley Hall | Group 4 | 14 December 1994 | 5 years | £33 million |

### Women's Prisons

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the estimated outstanding repair and maintenance bill of each women's prison for each year since 1985; and what was the actual spending on maintenance and repair at each prison in each of those years. [11493]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Tessa Jowell, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the estimated outstanding repair and maintenance bill for each women's prison for each year since 1985 and the actual spending at each prison in each of those years.

Records are not kept centrally of outstanding repair and maintenance bills for individual establishments.

The attached table shows the actual annual spending on repairs and maintenance in the twelve establishments holding female prisoners in each of the financial years since 1991–92, including the predicted spend for this year. The figures include both work which has been funded centrally and that funded locally with delegated authority. Figures for actual expenditure on maintenance for the years 1985–86 to 1990–91 are not readily available.

For the three establishments which currently house both male and female prisoners, it has not been possible to separate the costs for repair and maintenance of the female wings from the male wings.

Much maintenance work is covered during modernisation and redevelopment. In 1994–95 such schemes helped take the investment in improvements alone to the prison estate to £178 million. Of this around £14 million was devoted to the female estate.

We are in the process of re-surveying every establishment to produce a forward maintenance register which will be kept up to date and will help us predict future finance needed for maintenance.

*Maintenance and repair expenditure at female establishments 1991–92 to 1995–96*

*£000s*

| | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *[1]1995–96* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Askham Grange | 91 | 157 | 113 | 821 | 120 | 1,302 |
| Bullwood Hall | 439 | 204 | 181 | 211 | 283 | 1,318 |
| Cookham Wood | 37 | 56 | 55 | 341 | 51 | 540 |
| Drake Hall | 255 | 130 | 115 | 206 | 110 | 816 |
| Durham[2] | 46 | 857 | 1,198 | 166 | 66 | 2,333 |
| East Sutton Park | 29 | 39 | 70 | 68 | 77 | 283 |
| Holloway | 350 | 534 | 784 | 665 | 715 | 3,048 |
| Low Newton[2] | 62 | 28 | 45 | 155 | 40 | 330 |

*Maintenance and repair expenditure at female establishments 1991–92 to 1995–96*

£000s

| | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | [1]1995–96 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New Hall | 106 | 90 | 111 | 153 | 182 | 642 |
| Pucklechurch[3] | 26 | 17 | 58 | 31 | 20 | 152 |
| Risley[2] | 218 | 262 | 312 | 947 | 465 | 2,204 |
| Styal | 297 | 560 | 849 | 326 | 139 | 2,171 |
| Total | 1,956 | 2,934 | 3,891 | 4,090 | 2,268 | 15,139 |

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Establishments holding prisoners of both sexes. The costs relating to these establishments include an element for locally let maintenance and repair work for the entire prison, a figure which, unfortunately, cannot be easily apportioned between the female and male estate.
1. Eastwood Park is scheduled to re-open during 1996 as a female establishment following a 2 year modernisation programme.
2. Brockhill and Winchester have newly opened wings for female prisoners. These were modernised and will not yet have attracted significant spending on repair and maintenance.
3. Pucklechurch is scheduled for closure during 1996 following the re-opening of Eastwood Park.

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women were admitted to prison in each year since 1979; and what was *(a)* the total budget for women's prisons in each of those years and *(b)* the actual amount spent per prisoner. [11496]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Alan Walker to Ms Tessa Jowell, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of women admitted to prison in each year since 1979, the total budget for women's prisons in each of those years and the actual amount spent per prisoner.

Information on female receptions into Prison Service establishments in 1979–1993 is published in successive volumes of "Prison statistics, England and Wales" (tables 1.14 of the 1989 edition (Cm 1221) for years 1979–1989 and table 1.11 of the 1993 edition (Cm 2893) for the remaining years). Information for 1994 and 1995 is given in table 1.

The only information readily available on the cost of women's prisons over the period requested is for total net operating costs and average annual net operating cost per inmate. The figures are set out in table 2. These figures cover only establishments exclusively for female inmates; costs for female are not available separately for establishments holding both males and females.

*Table 1: Female receptions[1] into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales by type of custody, 1994 and 1995*

| | Year | |
|---|---|---|
| *Type of custody* | *1994* | *[2]1995* |
| *Remand* | | |
| Untried | 2,922 | 2,940 |
| Convicted unsentenced | 1,812 | 1,689 |
| *Sentenced* | | |
| Immediate custody | 2,952 | 3,467 |
| Fine defaulters | 1,454 | 1,352 |
| Non-criminals | 290 | 195 |

[1] Total receptions cannot be calculated by adding together receptions in each category because there is double counting. A person received in more than one type of custody is counted each time.
[2] Provisional figures.

*Table 2: Costs of female establishments*

| *Financial year* | *Net operating cost* | *Average cost per inmate per year* |
|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | [1]10,266 | [1]8,569 |
| 1980–81 | [1]13,796 | [1]11,207 |
| 1981–82 | [1]15,871 | [1]13,753 |
| 1982–83 | [1]17,659 | [1]16,054 |
| 1983–84 | 20,742 | 17,228 |
| 1984–85 | 22,664 | 18,902 |
| 1985–86 | 23,056 | 17,942 |
| 1986–87 | 23,706 | 17,891 |
| 1987–88 | 29,684 | 20,003 |
| 1988–89 | 31,310 | 20,763 |
| 1989–90 | 33,963 | 22,567 |
| 1990–91 | 41,272 | 29,250 |
| 1991–92 | 47,460 | 32,708 |
| 1992–93 | 47,000 | 34,207 |
| 1993–94 | [2]41,100 | [2]28,151 |
| 1994–95 | 44,200 | [2]26,675 |

[1] The figures for 1979–80 to 1982–83 are not strictly comparable with subsequent years due to changes in accounting policies.
[2] The figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95 are on a different basis to the preceding years which include some notional costs.

## Domestic Violence

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount spent by police force area on awareness campaigns on domestic violence for each year since 1990. [11495]

**Mr. Maclean:** This information is not collated centrally. Spending on domestic violence issues is an operational matter for chief officers of police.

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of reported incidents of domestic violence by police force area for each year since 1990; and how many resulted in *(a)* prosecution and *(b)* conviction. [11497]

**Mr. Maclean:** Information is not available on the number of domestic violence incidents resulting in prosecution or conviction. Available statistics on the number of domestic violence incidents by police force area relate to the calendar year 1993 and the financial year 1994–95 and were provided in a reply I gave to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 7 November 1995, columns *823–24*. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary is in the process of collecting more reliable data.

### Prisons (Running Costs)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the recent report by LEK consultants, comparing the costs of running private prisons with public sector prisons. [12765]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the report by the LEK Partnership comparing the costs of running private prisons with public sector prisons.

The study was carried out in 1994 and results presented to the Prison Service at the end of 1994. I cannot publish the study itself because it contains commercially confidential information. However, the attached table summarises the main findings.

*The LEK Partnership's study used data from 1993–94 and is summarised in the table below*

| *Private prison* | *Public comparator group* | *Cost[1] per CNA lower by (per cent.)* |
|---|---|---|
| Blakenhurst | Bullingdon<br>Holme House<br>Elmley | 14 |
| Doncaster[2] | Bullingdon<br>Holme House<br>Elmley | 14 |
| Buckley Hall[2] | Everthorpe<br>Haverigg<br>Ranby | 26 |

[1] Cost is after adjustments to exclude non comparable costs from both the private sector bid prices and public sector costs.

[2] Results for Doncaster and Buckley Hall should be treated with caution because neither prison was open during the period the comparisons covered.

[3] The analysis excluded Wolds because in 1993–94 there was no comparable public sector remand prison.

### Police Custody (Deaths)

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many deaths in police custody in each year an inquest verdict has been brought in of *(a)* natural causes, *(b)* misadventure or accident, *(c)* drug addiction or alcoholism, *(d)* suicide, *(e)* unlawful killing and *(f)* open verdict; and in how many cases no inquest was held. [11931]

**Mr. Maclean:** The available information is published in the annual Home Office statistical bulletin entitled "Police Complaints and Discipline, England and Wales" and, for the Metropolitan police district, in the annual report of the Commissioner of Police. Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have died in police custody *(a)* in total and *(b)* by police force area in each year since 1990. [11487]

**Mr. Maclean:** This information is published in the annual Home Office statistical bulletin entitled "Police Complaints and Discipline, England and Wales" and, for the Metropolitan police district, in the annual report of the Commissioner of Police. Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the ethnic origin of each prisoner who has died in police custody since 1990. [11488]

**Mr. Maclean:** This information is not at present collected centrally but the present procedures are being amended as from April 1996. It will thereafter be published annually in the Home Office statistical bulletin entitled "Police Complaints and Discipline, England and Wales" and, for the Metropolitan police district, in the annual report of the Commissioner of Police.

### Control and Restraint Procedures

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to police forces in the use of control and restraint procedures. [11489]

**Mr. Maclean:** Home Office circular—number 62/1992—deals with the use of handcuffs by police officers. The Association of Chief Police Officers issues guidance on self-defence and restraint.

### Holloway Prison

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department will take to improve conditions at Holloway prison; and what extra resources will be made available for this. [11514]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Tessa Jowell, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Holloway prison.

A new governor has recently been appointed at Holloway prison and tasked with improving conditions there. As part of the improvement process, a new health care manager has been appointed, who is carrying out a full review of health care services at Holloway. Sixteen additional prison officers have also been drafted into Holloway from other prisons on a temporary basis.

An additional £300,000 was provided to Holloway last October to recruit and train 25 additional new staff who will take up post in January and February this year, which will enable a fuller regime to operate in the prison.

An external contractor, with expertise in pest control, is now working in Holloway and has made progress in eradicating rats and other vermin.

### Holloway Prison

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the maximum number of inmates permitted at Her Majesty's prison Holloway and *(b)* the highest prison population for each year since 1990. [12266]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Holloway prison.

The maximum numbers of prisoners (the operational capacity) and the highest prison population for each year since 1990 is given in the attached table.

| *Year* | *Operational capacity* | *Highest population* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990 | 517 | 493 |
| 1991 | 517 | 494 |
| 1992 | 517 | 495 |
| 1993 | 532 | 476 |
| 1994 | 532 | 507 |
| 1995 | 532 | 527 |

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what allocation of funds for education at Her Majesty's prison Holloway he expects to make in 1996–97. [12268]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the allocation of funds for education at Holloway prison in 1996–97.

No decision has yet been made by the governor about how much of the 1996–97 budget should be allocation to education.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received covering the provision of education in Her Majesty's prison Holloway; and if he will make a statement. [12271]

**Miss Widdecombe:** My right hon. and learned Friend and I have received representations from the board of visitors at Holloway on this matter. Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons also raised his concerns with me and with the temporary Director General of the Prison Service following his unannounced visit to Holloway in December 1995.

### Crime Prevention

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all programmes which his Department funds that are aimed at deterring under 16-year-olds from committing crimes; and if he will make a statement. [12723]

**Mr. Maclean:** The bulk of the Home Office funding in this area was transferred to the single regeneration budget at the Department of the Environment in April 1994. This budget supports many crime prevention activities with a youth focus. The Home Office programme development unit funded a small group of experimental projects on reducing criminality in 1992; final reports are expected shortly.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Former Yugoslavia

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on licensing arms exports to the states of the former Yugoslavia. [11993]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* UN Security Council resolution 1021 established a timetable for phased lifting of the arms embargo on former Yugoslavia. Light weapons can be imported 90 days after signature of the peace agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina—that is, from 13 March—and the embargo will be lifted completely 180 days after signature and after submission of a report from the UN Secretary General on the arms control negotiations called for in the peace agreement—that is from 11 June. The Government have decided that, taking into account the overall situation in the states of the former Yugoslavia and the paramount importance of ensuring the safety of British and other troops deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, applications for arms export licences will be dealt with on the following basis:

(a) for Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, applications for licences to export military equipment listed in group 1 of part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 and dual-use goods will be considered on a case by case basis;

(b) for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia our policy is not to allow the export of military equipment listed in group 1 of part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order of 1994 during the period of the NATO-led implementation force's deployment. Against the background, applications for export licences will continue to be considered on a case by case basis, as will applications for export of dual-use goods.

The Government will encourage our EU and other partners to take a similar approach, and keep this policy under review, particularly in the light of progress in implementing the peace agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### Laser Weapons Protocol

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the advantage of extending the scope of the laser weapons protocol to include civil war conflicts; what measures he proposes to improve the transparency and verification arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [12757]

**Mr. David Davis:** In common with other western countries, we support the extension of the scope of the 1981 UN weaponry convention protocols on both laser blinding weapons and land mines so that they apply also during non-international armed conflict. We also support the inclusion of effective transparency, compliance and verification arrangements. We shall pursue these questions at the concluding session of the weaponry convention review conference in Geneva from 22 April to 3 May.

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with his Indian counterparts their policy towards the laser weapon protocol, with particular reference to its extension to cover civil war conflict; and if he will make a statement. [12758]

**Mr. Davis:** We intend to hold discussions with a number of countries before the final session of the 1981 UN weaponry convention review conference in Geneva from 22 April to 3 May with a view to securing the extension of the scope of the convention's protocols on land mines and laser building weapons to non-international armed conflict.

### Police Officers (Training)

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will name the Guatemalan police officers who have been trained in Britain since 1985, specifying each officer's rank and the date of commencement and of completion of the training; [12517]

(2) if he will name the Guatemalan police officers who have undergone study tours to the United Kingdom since 1985, in each case specifying the officer's rank and the date of commencement and of completion of the training. [12518]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 429. We have no record of any Guatemalan police officers being trained or attending study tours in the United Kingdom since 1985. However, we have offered a place for one police officer to attend the overseas command course at Bramshill in 1996.

### Test Ban Treaty

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals have been put by the United Kingdom to the negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. [12860]

**Mr. David Davis:** We continue to negotiate actively for the earliest possible conclusion of an effective comprehensive test ban treaty. We have made it clear that in our view such a treaty should prohibit all nuclear weapon test explosions involving any release of nuclear energy.

### Burundi

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Burundi; and what steps he has taken with the international community to prevent a further escalation of ethnic violence in Burundi and to support the legitimate Government. [12233]

**Mr. Hanley:** We are seriously concerned about the deterioration of the political and security situation in Burundi. We continue to support efforts by the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity and leaders in the region to promote political dialogue, reduce violence and ensure humanitarian assistance reaches those in need.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Bankruptcy Orders

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many bankruptcy orders were made in each region in the last 10 years. [9267]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information is given in the table.

*Individual insolvencies in the United Kingdom*

| Year | England and Wales | | Scotland | Northern Ireland | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Bankruptcy orders[1] | Total[2] individual insolvencies | Sequestrations[3] | Bankruptcies[4] | Total personal insolvency orders[5] |
| 1985 | 6,730 | 6,778 | 298 | 150 | 150 |
| 1986 | 7,093 | 7,155 | 437 | 193 | 193 |
| 1987 | 6,994 | 7,427 | 808 | 134 | 134 |
| 1988 | 7,717 | 8,507 | 1,401 | 164 | 164 |
| 1989 | 8,138 | 9,365 | 2,301 | 238 | 238 |
| 1990 | 12,058 | 13,987 | 4,350 | 286 | 286 |
| 1991 | 22,632 | 25,640 | 7,665 | 367 | 369 |
| 1992 | 32,106 | 36,794 | 10,845 | 406 | 448 |
| 1993 | 31,016 | 36,703 | 6,828 | 474 | 541 |
| 1994 | 25,634 | 30,739 | 2,182 | 428 | 512 |
| 1995[6]: Q1–Q3[7] | 16,726 | 20,044 | 1,749 | 306 | 358 |

*Notes:*

[1] Figures for bankruptcy orders include administration orders, which are bankruptcy orders relating to the estate of a deceased debtor.

[2] Total Individual Insolvencies in England and Wales comprise Bankruptcy orders, Individual voluntary arrangements and Deeds of arrangement.

[3] Insolvent individuals in Scotland are subject to *sequestration* under the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985. The Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1993 amending the 1985 Act came into force on 1 April 1993 and will have affected the number of sequestrations in the Scottish Courts.

[4] NI Bankruptcies comprise Bankruptcy adjudication orders, Arrangement protection orders and Orders for the administration of estates of deceased insolvents.

[5] NI Total comprises Bankruptcies[4] and Individual voluntary arrangements.

[6] Data for 1995 will be published (for England and Wales, and Scotland) on 2 February 1996.

[7] Provisional.

*Sources:*

DTI and Northern Ireland Insolvency Service.

The Insolvency Act 1986 introduced a number of changes which streamlined overall procedures. For individuals, the terms under which one can seek bankruptcy were made more lenient and many discharges were made automatic after three years. The total number of insolvencies must be considered in the context of about 3.6 million UK businesses in total and a start-up rate of about 400,000 new businesses per year. Since 1986, the number of UK enterprises has increased by over 12 per cent. and the number of self-employed by 21 per cent., concentrated mainly in the earlier years.

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to publish the Scott inquiry report; and if he will make a statement. [11643]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* I expect the report to be published within the next few weeks.

### Jordan (Export Credits)

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total principal value of payments made by the Export Credits Guarantee Department to the Midland bank since 1980 in respect of trade with Jordan by *(a)* Astra Holdings and its subsidiaries, *(b)* British Aerospace and its subsidiaries, *(c)* Royal Ordnance and its subsidiaries, *(d)* Vickers and its subsidiaries, *(e)* Racal and its subsidiaries, *(f)* Plessey and its subsidiaries and *(g)* Thorn EMI and it subsidiaries. [11307]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 24 January 1996]:* The ECGD has no record of payments to Midland bank since 1980 in respect of capital goods and project business with Jordan by any of the named companies. The ECGD has, however, paid £11.2 million claims to Midland bank in respect of business by Airbus Industrie, to which British Aerospace is a supplier. In the case of its now-privatised short-term business the ECGD maintains no record of the supplier in cases where it has paid claims to banks.

### Trade Missions (Burma and Nigeria)

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the trade missions to *(a)* Burma and *(b)* Nigeria over the last five years which have been sponsored by his Department and organised in conjunction with his Department; how many are planned; and if he will list the companies involved. [12238]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** *(a)* There have been no Department of Trade and Industry-supported trade missions to Burma in the last five years. The Department is supporting two missions in 1996:

(1) an Asia Pacific Advisory Group trade mission, 26 February–1 March 1996,

and

(2) a British Electrochemical and Allied Manufacturers' Association (BEAMA) trade mission to Thailand and Burma, 24 June–3 July 1996.

*(b)* Since 1991, there have been 15 Department of Trade and Industry-supported trade missions to Nigeria:

(1) April 1991—Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(2) August 1991—Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(3) October 1991—London Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(4) March 1992—Energy Industries Council

(5) May 1992—Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(6) September 1992—Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(7) October 1992—British Electrochemical and Allied Manufacturers' Association (BEAMA)

(8) April 1993—Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(9) June 1993—Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(10) January 1994—London Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(11) September 1994—Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(12) January 1995—British Electrochemical and Allied Manufacturers' Association (BEAMA)

(13) May 1995—Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(14) May 1995—DTI Nigeria desk-organised water trade mission

(15) September 1995—Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Several of these missions also visited Ghana.

The Department of Trade and Industry has undertaken to support two missions in 1996:

(1) a London Chamber of Commerce mission to Nigeria and Ghana, 25 February–15 March, and

(2) a Kent Chamber of Commerce mission to Nigeria and Ghana, 17–30 November.

### Nuclear Powers

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value to the British nuclear generation industry in 1995 prices of the price support mechanism for the sale of electricity generated from nuclear power in each year from 1980 to 1990. [12475]

**Mr. Eggar:** Before 1990, the Central Electricity Generating Board and the South of Scotland Electricity Board were responsible for most nuclear generation in the UK. The accounts of those companies did not separately identify detailed financial information on nuclear generation.

### Nuclear Levy

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money in 1995 prices it is expected will be raised from the nuclear levy from the present day until the removal of the levy. [12478]

**Mr. Eggar:** The element of the fossil fuel levy that is attributable to Nuclear Electric will end at the time of privatisation, subject to the recovery of outstanding moneys due. It is not possible at this time to estimate the amount of money that will be raised in respect of this element from the present day, as this will depend on a number of factors that are still uncertain.

### British Coal Pensions

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes have occurred in the respect of British Coal pensions funding arrangements between the

publication of his Department's paper on proposals for British Coal pensions after privatisation and his answer of 24 October, *Official Report*, column *553*. [12736]

**Mr. Page:** Following the publication in September 1993 of the Government's proposals for British Coal pensions after privatisation, a number of changes took place to the arrangements governing the mineworkers pension scheme and the British Coal staff superannuation scheme. The modified arrangements took effect from 31 October 1994 and were described in some detail by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Industry and Energy, in his answer of 27 April 1994, *Official Report*, column *168*. My answer of 24 October 1995 concerned the unrelated issue of British Coal's industrial death and retirement scheme.

### Characterr Ceramics, Falmouth

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inquiries his Department undertook into the background of the directors of Character Ceramics, Falmouth, before making them a grant. [10111]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* No inquiries were made. The Department considers making checks where the circumstances suggest that it would be appropriate to do so.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11925]

**The Attorney-General:** All the Law Officers' Departments seek to ensure that there is no unfair discrimination on the basis of disability. Although those Departments do not at present use the positive about disabled people symbol, the Crown Prosecution Service proposes to apply shortly for use of the symbol in relation to both *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. The Government property lawyers have undertaken preparatory work with a view to applying for use of the symbol in the near future, and the Treasury Solicitor's Department is also considering its use.

### "Despatches" Programme

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Attorney-General if the inquiries by the Ministry of Defence police and Strathclyde police into allegations made in the "Despatches" programme are complete. [12729]

**The Attorney-General:** The Crown Prosecution Service has received a report from the Ministry of Defence police and is awaiting the outcome of further investigations being carried out by Strathclyde police. The conduct and progress of those investigations are matters for my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Absenteeism

**Mr Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11365]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, on Tuesday 30 January.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11457]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* For this purpose, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 30 January by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11454]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* For this purpose, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 30 January, by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service. Figures for 1979–80 are not available on a comparable basis.

### Nuclear Testing (India)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Prime Minister what action he is taking in respect of the Indian Government's plans to resume nuclear testing; and if he will make a statement. [12873]

**The Prime Minister:** The Indian Minister for External Affairs confirmed in Delhi on 19 December that India was not planning to conduct a nuclear test. We have welcomed this assurance.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Joint Funding Scheme

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes are proposed for the criteria for joint funding scheme project selection; and if he will make a statement. [12256]

**Mr. Hanley:** Any changes to the criteria for the selection of projects under the joint funding scheme will be considered in the context of a forthcoming general

review by the ODA of our relationships with non-governmental organisations. At this point, we do not envisage any substantial change, particularly to the primary objective of the scheme, which is to bring lasting benefits to the poorest people in developing countries. NGOs will be fully consulted in our review of these arrangements.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Agricultural Incomes

**Sir John Cope:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on agricultural and farm incomes. [13226]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** Total income from farming is estimated to have risen by 22 per cent. in real terms in 1995 compared with 1994. This increase is partly due to agrimonetary developments and to unusual weather conditions which, on balance, had a favourable effect on agricultural incomes. However, the Government's success in creating the right conditions for growth also played an important part. Detailed estimates of the income, output and productivity of United Kingdom agriculture in 1995 were published this morning and have been placed in the Library of the House.

### Fish Farming

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fish farms throughout Northern Ireland have been granted exemption permits; what are the conditions of exemptions; and on what dates they were signed. [10669]

**Mr. Ancram:** I have been asked to reply.

A total of six fish farms in Northern Ireland have been granted permits exempting them from the obligations imposed by section 59 of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, as amended. Conditions vary on each exemption issued and are site specific, but the underlying principle is that exemptions are issued subject to conditions which result in no diminution of the level of protection afforded to fish stocks. The dates of issue of the permits were 12 September 1994, 3 April 1995, 2 May 1995, 16 May 1995—two—and 1 August 1995.

**Mr. Robinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fish farms in Northern Ireland were identified by the Fisheries Conservatory Board as not complying with the provisions contained in the Fisheries Act in each of the past two years. [10670]

**Mr. Ancram:** I have been asked to reply.

The information is as follows:

1994: 8

1995: 2

### Abattoirs

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many abattoirs continue to operate either as *(a)* fully EC approved and *(b)* under temporary derogation; and by how much the overall total differs from December 1995. [10420]

**Mrs. Browning:** The information for red meat abattoirs in England is set out in the table:

| *Licence status* | *Number of premises 1 December 1995* | *Number of premises 19 January 1996* |
|---|---|---|
| EC approved | 101 | 113 |
| *National market only* | | |
| Permanently derogated low throughput (no more than 20 livestock units per week) | 119 | 140 |
| Temporary derogated full throughput (more than 20 livestock units per week) | 122 | 107 |
| Temporary derogated low throughput (no more than 20 livestock units per week) | 60 | 41 |
| Total | 402 | 401 |

### Departmental Chauffeur-driven Cars

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5854]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** Expenditure by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in respect of chauffeur-driven cars for the financial years 1990–91 to 1994–95 is set out in the list.

1990–91: £234,430.21

1991–92: £289,972.83

1992–93: £294,921.47

1993–94: £264,662.21

1994–95: £223,697.49

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Ministry and his Ministry's agencies and non-ministerial public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11415]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Before 1 April 1990, the civil estate was managed by the Property Services Agency.

The annual costs incurred by the Ministry and its agencies in respect of empty properties are as follows:

1991–92: £320,000

1992–93: £944,000

1993–94: £1,803,000

1994–95: £4,471,000

1995–96: £4,258,000

1996–97: £2,744,000

Information on the costs of the Ministry's under-utilised properties and on the costs of empty and under-utilised properties held by non-departmental public bodies could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

A significant proportion of each of the above figures relates to opportunity cost rents which are not a charge on the Exchequer.

The Ministry follows Treasury policy and makes every effort to dispose of vacant properties within three years of their becoming redundant.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of his Ministry's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11417]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's estimated expenditure over the past three years on newspapers and magazines, defined as scientific, technical and other highly specialised and general periodicals, is as follows:

1993–94: £624,000

1994–95: £623,000

1995–96: £481,000

The Ministry subscribes centrally to over 3,500 titles, and other records are maintained at a number of different locations. To provide a central list of publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available could be done only at disproportionate cost.

### EU Funding

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds by standard region and in total is allocated to the United Kingdom from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund under the present structural funds agreement. [11655]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* The UK's allocation by objective and region in *(a)* ecu and *(b)* pounds sterling from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund under the present structural funds agreement—1994 to 1999—is shown in the table:

| *Region* | *Ecus* | *Pounds sterling* |
|---|---|---|
| *Objective 1* | | |
| Merseyside | 3 | 3 |
| Highlands and Islands | 56 | 47 |
| Northern Ireland | 187 | 158 |
| Total UK | 246 | 205 |
| *Objective 5a* | | |
| UK | 361 | 301 |
| *Objective 5b* | | |
| South-West | 41 | 34 |
| The Marches | 7 | 6 |
| Midlands Uplands | 2 | 2 |
| Northern Uplands | 23 | 19 |
| Lincolnshire | 9 | 8 |
| East Anglia | 11 | 9 |
| Rural Wales | 36 | 30 |
| Borders of Scotland | 4 | 3 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 6 | 5 |
| Central Scotland/Tayside | 3 | 3 |
| Grampian | 5 | 4 |
| Total UK | 147 | 123 |

1. All figures are at 1994 prices, are given in millions and have been rounded to the nearest million.
2. The exchange rate used is £1 = 1.20 ecu.

### Cattle

**Dr. Strang:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the size of the herd of each breed of cattle in the United Kingdom, for each year since 1985. [12178]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** The Ministry does not hold the information requested.

### Live Animal Exports

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what requirements are made of vehicles seeking exemption licences to carry animals in more than one tier on roll-on, roll-off ferries; [11980]

(2) how many vehicles have been approved for the transport of animals on the open decks of ferries in the last 12 months. [11982]

**Mrs. Browning:** The issue of exemption licences for vehicles carried on roll-on, roll-off ferries ceased as from 1 January 1993. There are no provisions requiring approval of vehicles carried on the open deck of ferries.

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the orders and regulations governing the suitability of *(a)* vessels and *(b)* vehicles for the transport of livestock. [11981]

**Mrs. Browning:** The following orders, made or deemed to have been made, under the Animal Health Act 1981, contain provisions governing the suitability of *(a)* vessels and *(b)* vehicles:

| *Statutory Instrument* | *Reference* |
|---|---|
| The Transit of Animals Order 1927 (as amended by the Transit of Animals (Amendment) Orders 1927 and 1939, the Transit of Animals (Road and Rail) Order 1975) and the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992) | S.R. and O. 1927/289(S.R. and O. 1927/399, 1939/501,S.I. 1975/1025S.I. 1992/3304) |
| The Animals (Sea Transport) Order 1930 (as amended by the Animals (Sea Transport) (Amendment) Order 1932 and the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992) | S.R. and O. 1930/923(S.R. and O. 1932/248S.I. 1992/3304) |
| The Horses (Sea Transport) Order 1952 (as amended by the Horses (Sea Transport) Amendment Order 1958 and the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992) | S.I. 1952/1291(S.I. 1958/1272S.I. 1992/3304) |

| *Statutory Instrument* | *Reference* |
|---|---|
| The Transit of Animals (General) Order 1973 (as amended by the Transit of Animals (Amendment) Order 1988 and the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992) | S.I. 1973/1377(S.I. 1988/815S.I. 1992/3304) |
| The Transit of Animals (Road and Rail) Order 1975 (as amended by the Transit of Animals (Road and Rail) (Amendment) Order 1979, the Transit of Animals (Amendment) Order 1988) and the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992) | S.I. 1975/1024(S.I. 1979)1013)(S.I. 1988/815S.I. 1992/3304) |
| The Welfare of Poultry Order 1988 (as amended by the Welfare of Poultry (Transport) (Amendment) Order 1989 and the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992) | S.I. 1988/851(S.I. 1989/52S.I. 1992/3304) |
| The Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994 (as amended by the Welfare of Animals during Transport (Amendment) Order 1995)S.I. 1994/3249(1995/131) | |

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of his Department's budgetary provision for the financial year 1996–97 to allow for his officials to be able to monitor at Dover docks each vehicle exporting livestock which intends to embark on specialist livestock ferries sailing from Dover; and if he will make a statement. [12165]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* Monitoring the conditions under which livestock are exported will continue to be a priority task for the Department.

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on internal procedures which have been put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations in his Department; and how, when and by whom these procedures will be activated; [12260]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to the new internal procedures for *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [12263]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The Ministry's firm policy is not to gold plate EC directives when implementing them in the UK by the addition of unnecessary burdens. Detailed and comprehensive procedures have been devised to help our close scrutiny of proposals to implement new EU directives to ensure these ends. We do not feel it appropriate to publish this internal departmental guidance. There is also close consultation with other Departments on the further development of means to satisfy ourselves that no gold plating is taking place.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1134*, in what circumstances overwhelming policy reasons have amplified minimum regulatory standards when translating European directives into United Kingdom law; and if he will make a statement. [12261]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The cost of analysing all past statutory instruments, in order to identify those which may have amplified minimum regulatory standards, would be disproportionate.

### Milk Quotas

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the benefits of granting compensation for purchasers of milk quotas in the event of the discontinuance of the scheme. [12488]

**Mr. Baldry:** Current EC legislation provides for milk quotas until 31 March 2000. The future of the milk quota system will be reviewed in Brussels before then and the Government will be assessing the options for reforming the present arrangements in the context of that review.

### Equidae (Registration)

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many equidae within the meaning of directive 90/426/EEC have been registered in Britain by organisations which have been formally recognised under the terms of that directive to register equidae. [12638]

**Mrs. Browning:** I regret that registration records are not held by this Department. Information may be available from the 37 societies that have so far been recognised, as referred to in my reply, *Official Report*, columns *627–28*, on 17 January 1996.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Selective Education

**Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what data her Department has assessed in respect of the percentage of adults who favour a return to fully selective education. [12737]

**Mrs. Gillan:** A recent survey commissioned by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers found that 54 per cent. of parents were in favour of a return to a fully selective education system.

### Further Education Funding Council

**Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what amount of funding allocated by the Further Education Council is spent on subsidising employer training broken down by further education institution. [12756]

**Mr. Paice:** The information is not collected centrally.

**Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many applications have been received by the Further Education Funding Council from private training institutions applying to register as further education colleges; and if she will list them. [12754]

**Mr. Paice:** There is no provision for the registration of private training institutions as further education colleges. The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 makes provision for my right hon. Friend to establish further education corporations to conduct existing educational institutions. She would normally expect to do so only in response to a proposal made by the Further Education Funding Council for England. To date, the council has not received any requests to make such proposals to my right hon. Friend.

The Act also includes provision for institutions which are inside the further education sector to sponsor for funding from the council applications from institutions which are outside the sector. In 1994–95 the FEFC received 41 applications for such funding from external institutions. Of these 18 were private providers and 11 of these received funding. In 1995–96, nine applications were received, five from private providers, and one of these received funding. At this stage, the indications for 1996–97 are: seven received, five from private providers; funding has yet to be allocated. I will ask the chief executive of the council to write with a list of the institutions concerned.

### Grant-maintained Schools

**Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the schools in England which have balloted parents on the question of grant-maintained status since 1 July 1995 voted in favour of staying with their local education authority. [12595]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Twenty-four primary and secondary schools in England have voted not to seek grant-maintained status between 1 July 1995 and 26 January 1996.

### Ofsted Inspections (Costs)

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate she has made of the cost of a full Ofsted inspection in a London borough; [12866]

(2) what is the estimated total cost of the Ofsted inspection and report in respect of Waltham Forest. [12857]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

### School Inspections (Bradford)

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* the names of schools in the Manningham area of Bradford which are to be inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, *(b)* the dates during which inspections are to be made, *(c)* the dates on which inspection contracts were approved and *(d)* the date by when Ofsted will report the outcome of the inspections; and if she will make a statement. [12881]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

### Teachers

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each local education authority the number of full-time equivalent teachers employed in *(a)* January 1991 and *(b)* January 1995 excluding sixth form colleges. [12882]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table shows the full-time equivalent number of teachers employed in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector in England for January for 1991 and 1995.

*Full-time equivalent teachers employed by local education authorities and grant-maintained schools in the nursery, primary and secondary sector*[1]

*January each year*

| *Local education authority area* | *1991 All schools* | *1995 All schools* |
|---|---|---|
| Corporation of London | 14 | 16 |
| Camden | 1,196 | 1,346 |
| Greenwich | 2,196 | 1,939 |
| Hackney | 1,715 | 1,429 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 1,045 | 941 |
| Islington | 1,310 | 1,360 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 663 | 674 |
| Lambeth | 1,453 | 1,680 |
| Lewisham | 1,818 | 1,863 |
| Southwark | 1,714 | 1,687 |
| Tower Hamlets | 2,115 | 2,250 |
| Wandsworth | 1,667 | 1,561 |
| Westminster | 1,154 | 1,121 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 1,267 | 1,446 |
| Barnet | 2,366 | 2,638 |
| Bexley | 1,745 | 1,836 |
| Brent | 2,023 | 1,971 |
| Bromley | 1,958 | 2,181 |
| Croydon | 2,424 | 2,409 |
| Ealing | 2,202 | 2,097 |
| Enfield | 2,264 | 2,358 |
| Haringey | 1,553 | 1,730 |
| Harrow | 1,414 | 1,576 |
| Havering | 2,011 | 1,891 |
| Hillingdon | 1,754 | 1,870 |
| Hounslow | 1,928 | 1,890 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 1,035 | 1,057 |
| Merton | 1,275 | 1,269 |
| Newham | 2,070 | 1,968 |
| Redbridge | 1,698 | 1,937 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 1,016 | 1,052 |
| Sutton | 1,345 | 1,354 |
| Waltham Forest | 1,809 | 1,706 |
| Birmingham | 8,885 | 9,366 |
| Coventry | 2,745 | 2,657 |
| Dudley | 2,656 | 2,576 |
| Sandwell | 2,865 | 2,689 |
| Solihull | 1,757 | 1,845 |
| Walsall | 2,744 | 2,560 |
| Wolverhampton | 2,582 | 2,377 |
| Knowsley | 1,481 | 1,446 |
| Liverpool | 4,470 | 4,194 |
| St. Helens | 1,658 | 1,635 |
| Sefton | 2,391 | 2,546 |
| Wirral | 3,038 | 2,927 |
| Bolton | 2,463 | 2,467 |

*Full-time equivalent teachers employed by local education authorities and grant-maintained schools in the nursery, primary and secondary sector*[1]

*January each year*

| *Local education authority area* | *1991 All schools* | *1995 All schools* |
|---|---|---|
| Bury | 1,441 | 1,420 |
| Manchester | 4,004 | 3,587 |
| Oldham | 2,196 | 2,202 |
| Rochdale | 1,934 | 1,819 |
| Salford | 2,002 | 1,821 |
| Stockport | 2,159 | 2,185 |
| Tameside | 1,929 | 1,842 |
| Trafford | 1,763 | 1,694 |
| Wigan | 2,835 | 2,754 |
| Barnsley | 1,760 | 1,704 |
| Doncaster | 2,753 | 2,703 |
| Rotherham | 2,469 | 2,440 |
| Sheffield | 4,043 | 3,719 |
| Bradford | 5,012 | 4,779 |
| Calderdale | 1,791 | 1,769 |
| Kirklees | 3,580 | 3,373 |
| Leeds | 6,275 | 5,759 |
| Wakefield | 2,865 | 2,704 |
| Gateshead | 1,750 | 1,715 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 2,346 | 2,104 |
| North Tyneside | 1,776 | 1,639 |
| South Tyneside | 1,410 | 1,340 |
| Sunderland | 2,681 | 2,728 |
| Isles of Scilly | 29 | 26 |
| Avon | 7,334 | 7,677 |
| Bedfordshire | 4,799 | 5,008 |
| Berkshire | 5,892 | 6,171 |
| Buckinghamshire | 5,136 | 5,310 |
| Cambridge | 5,244 | 5,573 |
| Cheshire | 7,800 | 8,013 |
| Cleveland | 5,180 | 5,189 |
| Cornwall | 3,711 | 3,675 |
| Cumbria | 4,147 | 4,016 |
| Derbyshire | 8,490 | 7,555 |
| Devon | 7,133 | 7,437 |
| Dorset | 4,476 | 4,393 |
| Durham | 4,783 | 5,117 |
| East Sussex | 4,321 | 4,899 |
| Essex | 11,985 | 11,771 |
| Gloucestershire | 4,349 | 4,258 |
| Hampshire | 10,680 | 11,871 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 5,311 | 5,329 |
| Hertfordshire | 8,248 | 8,725 |
| Humberside | 7,470 | 7,394 |
| Isle of Wight | 1,008 | 999 |
| Kent | 11,674 | 12,552 |
| Lancashire | 11,590 | 12,088 |
| Leicestershire | 7,536 | 7,810 |
| Lincolnshire | 4,869 | 4,877 |
| Norfolk | 5,497 | 5,898 |
| North Yorkshire | 5,537 | 5,774 |
| Northamptonshire | 5,337 | 5,624 |
| Northumberland | 2,736 | 2,672 |
| Nottinghamshire | 8,246 | 8,354 |
| Oxfordshire | 4,042 | 4,426 |
| Shropshire | 3,477 | 3,384 |
| Somerset | 3,533 | 3,665 |
| Staffordshire | 8,758 | 8,245 |
| Suffolk | 4,949 | 5,466 |
| Surrey | 6,265 | 6,529 |
| Warwickshire | 3,943 | 4,027 |
| West Sussex | 4,663 | 5,230 |
| Wiltshire | 4,513 | 4,698 |
| England | 388,414 | 392,910 |

## ENVIRONMENT

### Housing Stock (London)

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the current housing stock in each London borough in the *(a)* private rented, *(b)* council owned and *(c)* housing association categories. [10888]

**Mr. Clappison:** The number of local authority and housing association dwellings in each London borough on 1 April 1995 reported by local authorities on their 1995 housing investment programme—HIP1—returns, were as follows.

| | *Local authority (1)* | *Housing association* |
|---|---|---|
| Barking and Dagenham | 26,648 | 596 |
| Barnet | 13,242 | 4,100 |
| Bexley | 8,673 | 2,890 |
| Brent | 16,673 | 9,076 |
| Bromley | 80 | 17,849 |
| Camden | 29,789 | 6,520 |
| City of London | 2,256 | 195 |
| Croydon | 16,393 | 6,655 |
| Ealing | 16,204 | 6,517 |
| Enfield | 15,558 | 2,857 |
| Greenwich | 32,297 | 5,443 |
| Hackney | 39,560 | 10,552 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 16,417 | 8,977 |
| Harringey | 20,842 | 7,687 |
| Harrow | 6,551 | 1,533 |
| Havering | 13,302 | 1,332 |
| Hillingdon | 12,881 | 4,151 |
| Hounslow | 16,476 | 4,044 |
| Islington | 37,045 | 8,363 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 7,958 | 11,007 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 5,548 | 1,254 |
| Lambeth | 43,068 | 11,275 |
| Lewisham | 35,095 | 7,500 |
| Merton | 9,458 | 2,500 |
| Newham | 25,818 | 7,730 |
| Redbridge | 6,761 | 2,131 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 7,703 | 2,786 |
| Southwark | 54,266 | 9,801 |
| Sutton | 10,038 | 2,538 |
| Tower Hamlets | 37,578 | 7,200 |
| Waltham Forest | 16,179 | 4,166 |
| Wandsworth | 21,522 | 9,139 |
| Westminster | 15,701 | 12,143 |
| London total | 637,580 | 200,507 |

(1) Includes any dwelling owned by the authority outside its own area.

Corresponding figures for private rented stock are not available; data are collected from local authorities on total private sector stock, but this is not split between owner-occupied and rented dwellings.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in England for each year from 1991 to 1996–97 in cash and real terms the amount of (i) revenue support grant and (ii) capital expenditure. [11597]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** A list of revenue support grant and capital expenditure for each local authority in England has been placed in the Library of the House.

**Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the outcome of consultation on the local government finance settlement, and if he will make a statement. [12731]

**Sir Paul Beresford** *[pursuant to his reply, 29 January 1996, c. 576]:* I regret that certain sub-totals were incorrect on the first page of the table, "1996–97 Standard Spending Assessments, Business Rates, Revenue Support Grant and Special Grant Entitlements", copies of which were placed in the Library and the Vote Office on 29 January. The line "Total England" in the table, and the figures for individual local authorities, are unchanged.

A revised table has now been placed in the Library. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the proposed or actual total external support in 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 for each of the districts in Somerset and Devon, with an explanation of any significant changes of function affecting grant. [11828]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The information is given in the following table.

Under the system in operation in 1992–93, total external support for principal authorities in both tiers of local government was paid to district councils: counties precepted on districts for their share. From 1993–94, each principal authority has been paid its share of TES direct.

*Total external support (revenue support grant + income from non-domestic rates + damping grants)*

*£ million*

| *Local authority* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| East Devon | 57.665 | 6.227 | 6.826 | 6.718 | 6.648 |
| Exeter | 50.506 | 8.253 | 8.601 | 8.425 | 8.353 |
| North Devon | 43.102 | 6.307 | 6.531 | 6.627 | 6.668 |
| Plymouth | 130.640 | 24.443 | 24.514 | 24.012 | 22.604 |
| South Hams | 38.536 | 4.613 | 4.864 | 4.764 | 4.471 |
| Teignbridge | 53.749 | 6.595 | 7.250 | 7.254 | 7.169 |
| Mid Devon | 31.387 | 4.340 | 4.388 | 4.363 | 4.230 |
| Torbay | 60.739 | 8.740 | 9.165 | 9.117 | 10.386 |
| Torridge | 26.114 | 3.763 | 3.945 | 4.008 | 4.161 |
| West Devon | 22.149 | 2.936 | 3.149 | 3.133 | 3.072 |
| Mendip | 46.734 | 5.739 | 6.163 | 6.108 | 6.028 |
| Sedgemoor | 50.003 | 6.269 | 6.931 | 6.789 | 6.721 |
| Tauton Deane | 47.125 | 5.714 | 7.045 | 6.978 | 6.770 |
| West Somerset | 17.425 | 2.425 | 2.600 | 2.563 | 2.591 |
| South Somerset | 71.162 | 8.278 | 8.939 | 9.193 | 9.140 |

## Great Crested Newt

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many licences have been applied for in respect of the great crested newt since 1981; how many of these have been approved; how many of these have been refused; what conditions have been attached to them; and what monitoring has been undertaken to assess their level of success or failure. [11866]

**Mr. Clappison:** English Nature is the licensing authority for a wide range of activities relating to great crested newts and my Department is the appropriate authority for safe licensing of this species.

The information to answer the question is not readily available. However, in addition to licences issued for other purposes, a recent review of the five-year period 1990–1995 has shown that 141 licences were issued to permit the translocation of great crested newts. Subsequent monitoring of projects has shown that in 92 per cent. of cases adults were found in subsequent years and in 61 per cent. of cases breeding was confirmed.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria will be used to judge whether the receptor sites, within the Orton brick pits site of special scientific interest, are mature enough to support translocated newts; and if he will ensure that newts will not be translocated to the receptor sites before these criteria are fulfilled. [11865]

**Mr. Clappison:** A view of the suitability of the habitat for receiving translocated newts will be made by appropriate specialists. English Nature will not grant licences to translocate great crested newts until they are satisfied that the receptor sites appear suitable to receive the likely number of animals that will be captured during the translocation from any area of the Orton brick pit site.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation procedures will take place before a licence is issued for the translocation of great crested newts from any part of the Orton brick pits site of special scientific interest. [11863]

**Mr. Clappison:** The normal procedure for evaluating licence applications is that they are considered by English Nature, and a decision is made following consultation with their specialist and local team staff. This procedure will be followed before licences are issued for the translocation of great crested newts from any part of the Orton brick pits area.

To allow open discussion of methods, English Nature has convened a liaison group with non-governmental organisations. That group will meet for the first time on 16 February.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conditions are attached to any applications for a licence to translocate great crested newts from any part of the Orton brick pits site of special scientific interest. [11864]

**Mr. Clappison:** The conditions that would apply to any applications for a licence to translocate newts from any part of this site are as follows: that the existing site must have been given planning consent and the notification of the site as an SSSI was taken into account; that the receptor site is suitable for the number of animals that is intended to move; that the translocation is of conservation benefit to the animals concerned; and that anyone carrying out the translocation is sufficiently qualified and able to do the work. Subsequent to any translocation of animals, the receptor site must be monitored to determine the level of occupation of the newts at the site.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what applications for licences English Nature has received, and what licences they have issued for the translocation of great crested newts from any part of the Orton brick pits site of special scientific interest, Peterborough, since the statement of intent was signed

between English Nature and Peterborough Southern Township Ltd. [11862]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Government's statutory scientific advisers, English Nature, advise that no applications have been received and no licences issued since the statement of intent was signed on 15 July 1995.

### Cemfuel Burning (Health Effects)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what communication he has had with Lancashire county council concerning the health effects experienced by staff of the National Physical Laboratory when monitoring air quality at Moorland school and Waddington and West Bradford primary school in connection with the burning of cemfuel by Castle Cement. [12211]

**Mr. Clappison:** Lancashire county council has been sent a copy of the full report from the National Physical Laboratory. I have received no comments.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many National Physical Laboratory staff experienced *(a)* unpleasant odours, *(b)* respiratory effects and *(c)* eye or throat irritation during the air monitoring exercise at Castle Cement's Ribblesdale works between 7 August and 1 September 1995. [12213]

**Mr. Clappison:** Odour was detected by NPL staff on 10 occasions even though the measured sulphur dioxide levels were far below the generally accepted odour threshold. Respiratory effects and eye or throat irritation were each recorded on three occasions. On two of the occasions, respiratory effects were reported by one individual who is an asthma sufferer.

The threshold guide value for sulphur dioxide, published by the expert panel on air quality standards, at which the health of some people could be affected, was never breached during the four weeks of monitoring.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when authorisation was given for the burning of cemfuel by Castle Cement at Clitheroe; what account was taken of potential problems arising from plume grounding in granting authorisation, and what technical solutions have been identified. [12013]

**Mr. Clappison:** Castle Cement, Clitheroe had started burning cemfuel in 1992 under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. In 1993, cement manufacture came under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Clitheroe authorisation was continued. Plume grounding had not been identified as a problem at that time.

A variation to Castle Cement's authorisation, issued on 23 January 1996 requires Castle Cement to have agreed, with Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution proposals for resolution of the plume grounding problem by 30 April 1996.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what caused the odour detected by staff of the National Physical Laboratory during the air quality monitoring at Castle Cement's Ribblesdale works at Clitheroe during the period 7 August to 1 September 1995. [12214]

**Mr. Clappison:** The detection of odour by the staff from the National Physical Laboratory was correlated with concentrations of sulphur dioxide above 50ppb. However, this is significantly below the generally recognised odour detection threshold. It was not possible to identify any one compound responsible for the odour.

### Housing Bill

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what additional resources he will make available to local authorities in order to implement the proposals on *(a)* homelessness, *(b)* housing allocations and *(c)* advice contained in the Housing Bill; [12141]

(2) what additional resources he will make available to enable local authorities to provide housing advice services where they are not currently available to fulfil the duties set out in the Housing Bill. [12142]

**Mr. Clappison:** The provisions redefining the duty owed by local authorities to persons accepted as homeless and the accompanying reform of the allocation of social housing should not have a significant effect on central or local government expenditure. The effect will depend in part on the nature of the allocation schemes which local authorities establish in the light of principles to be prescribed by the Secretary of State in regulations. Expenditure on advisory services, where these do not already exist in a satisfactory form, should be fully offset.

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of additional demands for assistance under the provisions of the Children Act 1989 which may arise from homeless families refused assistance under the proposed homelessness legislation contained in the Housing Bill. [12146]

**Mr. Clappison:** There is no reason why there should be any such demand; the relevant provisions in the Housing Bill make no changes to the groups which have a priority need for accommodation.

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment he has made of the change in the rate of use of properties in the private rented sector by local authorities under the provisions of the Housing Bill; [12147]

(2) what assessment he has made of the future availability to homeless households of properties in the private rented sector. [12148]

**Mr. Clappison:** We expect the private rented sector to continue to develop and to make an important contribution to meeting the housing needs of a wide range of households.

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* commissioned into the likely housing benefit costs (i) to central Government funds and (ii) to local authorities of the provisions of the Housing Bill. [12143]

**Mr. Clappison:** We have given careful consideration to the financial effects, including those relating to the cost of housing benefit, of the provisions in parts VI and VII of the Housing Bill. The Government consider that the provisions should not have a significant effect on central

or local government expenditure. This will depend in part on the nature of the allocation schemes which local authorities establish in the light of principles to be prescribed by the Secretary of State in regulations. We will monitor local authorities' implementation of the provisions.

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether alternative accommodation in the private sector will be deemed suitable if rent exceeds the local reference rent under the provisions contained in the Housing Bill. [12149]

**Mr. Clappison:** Suitable alternative accommodation for the purposes of part VII of the Housing Bill would need to be affordable within the resources available to the applicant, including housing benefit where applicable.

### Environmentally Hazardous Projects

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the implications for the rights of United Kingdom citizens to challenge potentially environmentally hazardous projects, endorsed by the European Commission, of the two decisions of the European court of first instance, case T-585/93 on 9 August 1995 and case T-219/95 on 22 December 1995. [11985]

**Mr. Clappison:** Citizens of the European Union, including UK citizens, who seek to institute proceedings against a Commission decision must show that the decision is of direct and individual concern to them, as required by article 173 of the treaty establishing the European Community and article 146 of the Euratom treaty.

In both of the cases referred to, T-219/95 and T-585/93, the European court of first instance found that the applicants did not meet the above requirements. In the case of T-585/93, that ruling is now the subject of an appeal in the European Court of Justice.

### Water Authorities

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many people served on the boards of the *(a)* Anglian water authority, *(b)* Welsh water authority, *(c)* Northumbrian water authority, *(d)* North West water authority, *(e)* Severn Trent water authority, *(f)* Southern water authority, *(g)* South West water authority, *(h)* Thames water authority, *(i)* Wessex water authority, and *(j)* Yorkshire water authority, in the final year before each was privatised; [12186]

(2) how much was paid to people serving on boards of *(a)* Anglian water authority, *(b)* Welsh water authority, *(c)* Northumbrian water authority, *(d)* North West water authority, *(e)* Severn Trent water authority, *(f)* Southern water authority, *(g)* South West water authority, *(h)* Thames water authority, *(i)* Wessex water authority, and *(j)* Yorkshire water authority, in the final year before each was privatised. [12188]

**Mr. Clappison:** Information about the number and remuneration of water authority board members in the year prior to privatisation is given in "Public Bodies 1989", issued by the Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service and Science). A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

**Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were employed by *(a)* Anglian water authority, *(b)* Welsh water authority, *(c)* Northumbrian water authority, *(d)* North West water authority, *(e)* Severn Trent water authority, *(f)* Southern water authority, *(g)* South West water authority, *(h)* Thames water authority, *(i)* Wessex water authority, and *(j)* Yorkshire water authority, in the final year before each was privatised. [12190]

**Mr. Clappison:** Manpower information for the water industry in the final year before privatisation is given in "Waterfacts 1989", published by the Water Services Association. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

### Burnley and Pendle Transport

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *8*, what are the implications of the refusal to grant a dispensation to vote for councillor Jill Gilhespy for her chairing the council meeting which will consider a report on the sale of Pendle's stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport. [12229]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The decision to decline Councillor Gill Gilhespy's application for a dispensation to vote need have no implications for her chairing the meeting which will consider a report on the sale of Pendle's stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport, except that the chairman's casting vote will not be available to her.

### Wildlife Habitats

**Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what protection for ponds as wildlife habitats is offered by existing planning legislation. [12311]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Section 38 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to include in their development plans policies in respect of the natural beauty and amenity of the land. Regulation 37 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats and etc.) Regulations 1994 provides for such policies to include policies encouraging the management of landscape features which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna, such as ponds.

**Mr. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what *(a)* grants and *(b)* other financial assistance his Department makes available for the construction, conservation and management of ponds as wildlife habitats. [12288]

**Mr. Clappison:** My Department supports grant assistance for the creation or management of ponds under the countryside stewardship scheme, and SSI management agreements. In the light of stewardship's successful pilot phase, and in advance of its transfer to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 1 April 1996, my right hon. Friend the Minister announced in November that an extra £5 million will be available for new management agreements under countryside stewardship for each of the years 1996–97 and 1997–98. This is in addition to the existing £11.625 million already available under the scheme.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food also provides support for work on ponds under the environmentally sensitive areas scheme, and the Government fund conservation advice provided by ADAS and the farming and wildlife advisory group, including advice on ponds.

### Domestic Gas Appliances

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the number of households that are at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning from gas appliances. [12439]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** None. Every household containing a gas appliance may be potentially at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning. The best means of prevention is to ensure that gas appliances are correctly installed and regularly maintained by gas installers who are registered with the Council for Registered Gas Installers.

### Repossessions

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many repossessions there have been in each region since 1992. [12569]

**Mr. Clappison:** Data are not held centrally on the number of repossessions in each region.

### British Gas (Contaminated Land)

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount of land officially designated as contaminated land which is owned by British Gas plc; and if he will list all such land. [12616]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* At present, there is no statutory system in force for designating contaminated land. When section 57 of the Environment Act 1995 is implemented, it will provide a statutory definition of contaminated land and procedures for its identification.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount of money has been notified to his Department as having been spent by British Gas plc in the decontamination of land within its ownership in each financial year since privatisation. [12614]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* British Gas plc has not notified the Department how much it has spent in the decontamination of land within its ownership since privatisation.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total spending contribution towards the decontamination of land within British Gas plc's ownership by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* the Department of the Environment, *(c)* English Partnerships *(d)* the European Union and *(e)* other public bodies in each financial year since privatisation. [12615]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* When the Department of the Environment contributes to the costs of decontamination of land, this is normally only one element of a wider package of support for individual reclamation or redevelopment projects. Central records do not exist of the amounts of the various different cost elements.

English Partnerships has not spent any money on decontamination of land within British Gas plc's ownership since its privatisation.

The Department does not systematically collect information on spending on decontamination of land by local authorities, the European Union or other public bodies.

### Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he will take to ensure that the current number and value of grants paid to householders receiving funding for the home energy efficiency scheme will be maintained. [10800]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** We expect the number and value of home energy efficiency scheme grants paid to low-income households to be at least maintained. We intend that better-off elderly householders will have to contribute to the cost after 1 April 1996, and we expect many will take advantage of the substantial discount that the scheme will offer them on the cost of installing basic insulation. Their contributions will supplement the £73 million allocated to the scheme for 1996–97, and we anticipate that considerably more than 400,000 grants will be paid next year. Local authorities will, following implementation of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, have a key responsibility to identify appropriate ways of improving the energy efficiency of homes in their areas.

### Homelessness

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the average number of homeless people in England and Wales for each of the years *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 1992, *(e)* 1993, *(f)* 1994 and *(g)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [12458]

**Mr. Clappison:** The numbers of households for which local authorities in England accepted responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985 in the years requested were as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1980[1] | 60,400 |
| 1985 | 91,010 |
| 1990 | 140,350 |
| 1992 | 142,890 |
| 1993 | 132,380 |
| 1994 | 122,660 |
| 1995 (January-September only) | 92,650 |

*Note:*

[1] This figure is not strictly comparable with those for the later years because of changes to reporting arrangements made in 1980 (for non-metropolitan districts) and 1982 (for London boroughs and metropolitan districts).

*Source:*

Quarterly P1(E) returns.

For information in relation to Wales, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

### Sustainable Development

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to implement paragraph 46 of the report of the Government's panel on sustainable development, published on 25 January. [12684]

**Mr. Clappison:** We intend to publish a considered response to the recommendations made in the panel's second report, including that in paragraph 46, at the end of March 1996.

### Building Research Establishment

**Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes have been made to the membership of the advisory group overseeing the study into options for privatisation of the Building Research Establishment. [13224]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** Mr. Roger Courtney, chief executive of the Building Research Establishment invited the Department in mid-January to consider his position as a member of the advisory group which would shortly be asked for their guidance once consultants had completed their study of privatisation options. He indicated that he would wish to be able to participate in future management arrangements for BRE; this could include being involved in any proposal for a management and employee buy-out if Ministers, in the light of the consultants' report, decided that this was an option to be pursued. In those circumstances, he and the Department judged that he should not be privy to those parts of the consultants' report which contained commercial assessments as this could place him in an advantageous position compared with any other potential purchasers. Mr. Neil Milbank, deputy chief executive of BRE, who will retire during 1996 and will therefore not be involved in the future management of the establishment, has taken Mr. Courtney's place on the advisory group.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11916]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The Northern Ireland civil service and Norther Ireland Office do not use the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol. The NICS's arrangements in respect of the recruitment and management of disabled staff are set out in the code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities in the Northern Ireland civil service. The principles and guidance applying to the recruitment and management of the home civil service staff group in the Northern Ireland Office are set out in the programme for action to achieve equality of opportunity in "The Civil Service and Disabled People" published by the Office of Public Service and Science, now the Office of Public Service.

### Honours Recommendations

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy in respect of consultation with the Eire Government in respect of recommendations for honours; and if he will make a statement. [11684]

**Sir John Wheeler:** There is no consultation with the Irish Government regarding the recommendation of individuals for honours.

### Unemployment

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the overall percentage and proportionate rates of unemployment of Catholics, Protestants and others, the numbers involved and those figures broken down by gender with sources; [11685]

(2) what is the overall percentage and proportionate rates of unemployment of Catholics, Protestants and others, the numbers involved and those figures broken by male and female, with sources; and if he will give his Department's views as to the reasons for the differentials. [11689]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The information in the table is based on those for whom a religion was recorded in the 1991 census of population.

| | *Male* | | *Female* | | *Both Sexes* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Protestant and others* | *Roman catholic* | *Protestant and other* | *Roman Catholic* | *Protestant and others* | *Roman Catholic* |
| Economically Active | 212,574 | 143,234 | 148,998 | 95,490 | 361,572 | 238,724 |
| Unemployed | 26,895 | 40,647 | 11,943 | 13,863 | 38,838 | 54,410 |
| Unemployment Rate | 12.7 | 28.4 | 8.0 | 14.5 | 10.7 | 22.8 |

A very small proportion of the "Protestant and others" category—approximately 0.5 per cent.—were members of non-Christian religions.

The difference in unemployment rates between Catholics and Protestants is due to the interaction over time of a complex range of factors which has been the subject of academic debate since the 1970s. This is one of the issues to be addressed in the employment equality review currently being undertaken by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

### Coinage

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *107*, if he subjected his decision to agree to the Royal Mint's proposal for a Celtic torc and a Celtic cross to be the symbols representing

Northern Ireland on the new £1 coin to his Department's policy appraisal and fair treatment guidelines. [11686]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** No.

### Donna Maguire

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange for the costs of Donna Maguire's criminal activities to be deducted from her award for ankle injuries. [11687]

**Mr. Moss:** An appeal against the award is under consideration. It would be inappropriate to comment further on the case in these circumstances.

### Housing (Residency Requirements)

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many years residency are required before a United Kingdom citizen not born in Northern Ireland becomes eligible under the standard rules to be housed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and if he will detail some comparable rules in England and Scotland. [11688]

**Mr. Moss:** As I confirmed to the hon. Gentleman in my letter of 14 November 1995, the housing selection scheme operated by the Housing Executive and approved by the Department of the Environment provides that, before they can be considered for public housing, applicants—other than those with an entitlement to be housed on a priority basis—must:

(a) have been born in Northern Ireland; or

(b) have been resident in Northern Ireland for the past seven years; or

(c) have accepted an offer of employment or be currently employed in Northern Ireland; or

(d) would have been resident in Northern Ireland for the past seven years but for employment in the Crown elsewhere.

In England and Wales, local authorities are responsible for allocating housing within the framework laid down in sections 22 and 23 of the Housing Act 1985. A survey carried out by the Department of the Environment in London shows that around 90 per cent. of local authorities in England operate a residency condition. Details of the length of time that each authority requires an applicant to reside in their area is not held centrally.

Sections 9 to 21 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 set out the framework for allocating and managing housing in Scotland. Scottish authorities are required not to take account of an applicant's length of residence. Details of the individual schemes and the authorities' observance of this requirement are not held centrally.

### Development Grants

**Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what economic development grants Northern Ireland has received in each of the last five years from *(a)* the EU and *(b)* other sources; and what is the total value of these. [9625]

**Mr. Ancram** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The following table shows what has been drawn down in each of the last five years in respect of economic development grants from the European Union.

| *Year* | *£000* |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 58,135 |
| 1992 | 96,035 |
| 1993 | 120,116 |
| 1994 | 30,213 |
| 1995 | 14,003 |
| Total | 318,502 |

With regard to funding from other sources, the international fund for Ireland provides financial contributions which support economic development in Northern Ireland. Information about the financial support provided by this independent international organisation is contained in its published annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

### Telecommunications Masts

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many planning applications he has received from Millennium Communications, Stockport, for the erection of telecommunications relay station masts in Northern Ireland; what are the exact locations of each of these masts; and what steps he intends to take to apply planning controls to such structures. [12150]

**Mr. Moss:** No planning applications have been received. The erection of telecommunications relay station masts by licenced public telecommunications code system operators is, subject to certain criteria, permitted development by virtue of article 3 of the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993.

### Fisheries

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies have been undertaken by the Department of Agriculture to establish catch figures for fisheries on the Rivers Maine and Kells water system. [12083]

**Mr. Ancram:** None. There is no statutory requirement for anglers to make catch returns.

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the need for counters to be employed on the River Maine system to enable the fishery division to compile accurate figures on the health of the migratory stocks. [12084]

**Mr. Ancram:** None. The provision of fish counters on watercourses is a matter for fishery owners. Funds are currently available to assist such projects.

### Balmoral-Malone Traffic Scheme

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the cost benefit analysis check sensitivity test for induced traffic effects on the Balmoral-Malone roads traffic scheme; what estimate he has made of the time savings in pounds sterling for each of the 30 years' assumed life of the scheme from the COBA output; if he will indicate the total *(a)* vehicle kilometres and *(b)* number of predicated accidents by category for (i) the do nothing and (ii) do

something options for (1) the opening year and (2) the design year (year 15); and if he will list the value accident savings in pounds sterling for each of the 30 year life discounted as for time savings. [11932]

**Mr. Moss:** The cost benefit analysis check sensitive test for induced traffic effects on the Malone road/Balmoral avenue traffic scheme shows that no induced traffic is expected as a result of this scheme.

The time savings, in sterling, for each of the 30 years' assumed life of the scheme based on low traffic growth and high traffic growth are as follows:

*Savings £'000*

| *Year* | *Low Traffic Growth* | *High Traffic Growth* |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | 326 | 366 |
| 2. | 315 | 348 |
| 3. | 304 | 330 |
| 4. | 286 | 316 |
| 5. | 269 | 302 |
| 6. | 254 | 283 |
| 7. | 238 | 273 |
| 8. | 224 | 272 |
| 9. | 211 | 268 |
| 10. | 200 | 265 |
| 11. | 188 | 264 |
| 12. | 176 | 255 |
| 13. | 163 | 245 |
| 14. | 156 | 252 |
| 15. | 151 | 272 |
| 16. | 146 | 313 |
| 17. | 141 | 375 |
| 18. | 135 | 535 |
| 19. | 130 | 707 |
| 20. | 126 | 684 |
| 21. | 122 | 661 |
| 22. | 117 | 637 |
| 23. | 110 | 612 |
| 24. | 102 | 587 |
| 25. | 99 | 562 |
| 26. | 98 | 537 |
| 27. | 98 | 512 |
| 28. | 100 | 487 |
| 29. | 104 | 460 |
| 30. | 111 | 429 |
| Total | 5,202 | 12,408 |

The total vehicle kilometres and number of predicted accidents based on low and high traffic growth are as follows:

| | *Low Traffic Growth* | | *High Traffic Growth* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Do nothing* | *Do something* | *Do nothing* | *Do something* |
| *Vehicle kilometres in millions* | | | | |
| 1 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| 15 | 19 | 19 | 22 | 22 |
| *Number of accidents* | | | | |
| 1 | 7.4 | 4.4 | 8.1 | 4.5 |
| 15 | 8.2 | 4.8 | 9.3 | 5.2 |

The value accident savings, in sterling, for each of the 30 year life of the scheme, based on the low and high traffic growth, are as in the table.

*Value of savings £000*

| *Year* | *Low traffic growth* | *High traffic growth* |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | 40 | 49 |
| 2. | 38 | 48 |
| 3. | 36 | 46 |
| 4. | 34 | 44 |
| 5. | 32 | 43 |
| 6. | 30 | 41 |
| 7. | 29 | 39 |
| 8. | 27 | 38 |
| 9. | 26 | 37 |
| 10. | 24 | 35 |
| 11. | 23 | 34 |
| 12. | 22 | 33 |
| 13. | 21 | 32 |
| 14. | 20 | 30 |
| 15. | 19 | 29 |
| 16. | 18 | 28 |
| 17. | 17 | 27 |
| 18. | 16 | 26 |
| 19. | 15 | 25 |
| 20. | 14 | 24 |
| 21. | 14 | 23 |
| 22. | 13 | 22 |
| 23. | 12 | 21 |
| 24. | 12 | 21 |
| 25. | 11 | 20 |
| 26. | 10 | 19 |
| 27. | 10 | 18 |
| 28. | 9 | 18 |
| 29. | 9 | 17 |
| 30. | 8 | 16 |
| Total | 608 | 902 |

## Council Grants

**Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the rates of general grant, showing the breakdown between the derating and resources elements, for each district council in Northern Ireland for each year since 1994–95. [12535]

**Mr. Moss:** The information requested is set out in the table. The figures for 1994–95 include final adjustments for the two previous years and the 1995–96 figures include final adjustments which will be paid before the end of this financial year, subject to certification of district council accounts by the local government auditor.

*1994–95*

| *District* | *Derating* £ | *Resources* £ | *Total* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Antrim | 309,908 | –112,747 | 197,161 |
| Ards | 711,920 | 1,062,141 | 1,774,061 |
| Armagh | 275,135 | 1,593,741 | 1,868,876 |
| Ballymena | 718,403 | — | 718,403 |
| Ballymoney | 220,629 | 525,118 | 745,747 |
| Banbridge | 229,073 | 892,883 | 1,121,956 |
| Belfast | 5,846,365 | — | 5,846,365 |
| Carrickfergus | 307,680 | 437,875 | 745,555 |
| Castlereagh | 512,526 | 298,125 | 810,651 |
| Coleraine | 409,317 | — | 409,317 |
| Cookstown | 238,106 | 692,119 | 930,225 |
| Craigavon | 1,637,293 | 89,477 | 1,726,770 |
| Derry | 1,145,041 | 1,792,497 | 2,937,538 |
| Down | 299,345 | 1,812,686 | 2,112,031 |
| Dungannon | 367,827 | 1,058,923 | 1,426,750 |

*1994–95*

| *District* | *Derating* £ | *Resources* £ | *Total* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fermanagh | 553,940 | 1,167,882 | 1,721,822 |
| Larne | 217,165 | 664,012 | 881,177 |
| Limavady | 170,154 | 898,466 | 1,068,620 |
| Lisburn | 1,033,272 | 589,820 | 1,623,092 |
| Magherafelt | 377,623 | 1,039,557 | 1,417,180 |
| Moyle | 108,330 | 410,627 | 518,957 |
| Newry/Mourne | 577,501 | 2,556,116 | 3,133,617 |
| Newtonabbey | 1,276,963 | — | 1,276,963 |
| North Down | 414,552 | 699,579 | 1,114,131 |
| Omagh | 190,938 | 1,435,142 | 1,626,080 |
| Strabane | 322,605 | 1,339,038 | 1,661,643 |
| Totals | 18,471,611 | 20,943,077 | 39,414,688 |

*1995–96*

| *District* | *Derating* £ | *Resources* £ | *Total* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Antrim | 360,755 | — | 360,755 |
| Ards | 811,407 | 984,791 | 1,796,198 |
| Armagh | 376,981 | 1,681,329 | 2,058,310 |
| Ballymena | 798,564 | — | 798,564 |
| Ballymoney | 318,699 | 478,469 | 797,168 |
| Banbridge | 254,772 | 988,424 | 1,243,196 |
| Belfast | 6,373,997 | — | 6,373,997 |
| Carrickfergus | 295,355 | 590,166 | 885,521 |
| Castlereagh | 862,060 | 393,044 | 1,255,104 |
| Coleraine | 437,738 | 32,901 | 470,639 |
| Cookstown | 350,159 | 674,808 | 1,024,967 |
| Craigavon | 2,029,539 | 459,519 | 2,489,058 |
| Derry | 1,228,371 | 1,675,867 | 2,904,238 |
| Down | 394,345 | 2,184,455 | 2,578,800 |
| Dungannon | 572,831 | 1,085,219 | 1,658,050 |
| Fermanagh | 454,810 | 1,100,110 | 1,554,920 |
| Larne | 492,766 | 216,179 | 708,945 |
| Limavady | 148,651 | 800,255 | 948,906 |
| Lisburn | 1,243,600 | 215,243 | 1,458,843 |
| Magherafelt | 381,273 | 995,842 | 1,377,115 |
| Moyle | 97,957 | 415,396 | 513,353 |
| Newry/Mourne | 722,768 | 2,495,036 | 3,217,804 |
| Newtonabbey | 1,421,220 | — | 1,421,220 |
| North Down | 512,785 | 141,488 | 654,273 |
| Omagh | 372,428 | 1,610,166 | 1,982,594 |
| Strabane | 324,914 | 1,368,550 | 1,693,462 |
| Totals | 21,638,743 | 20,587,257 | 42,226,000 |

## SCOTLAND

### Crime

15. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is pursuing to reduce crime. [10802]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend and I are determined to fight crime and have provided for the deployment of 500 additional operational police officers, backed up by improved technology, and a £4 million challenge competition to help fund more closed-circuit television schemes.

28. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to combat crime. [10815]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The Scottish Office is pursuing a number of measures to reduce crime, including the provision of funds for the deployment of 500 additional operational police officers, backed up by improved technology and a £4 million challenge competition to help fund more CCTV schemes.

### Beef Industry

16. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what priority he attaches to the beef industry in Scotland. [10803]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** My noble Friend the Minister with responsibility and I attach great priority to a sector which represents approximately 30 per cent. of Scottish agricultural output, and has an international reputation for the highest quality.

### Scottish Enterprise

17. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to discuss his budget. [10804]

**Mr. Kynoch:** My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of Scottish Enterprise on 15 November 1995 to discuss a wide range of issues, including the Scottish Enterprise budget.

### Central European Time

18. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about central European time in respect of the construction and agriculture industries in Scotland. [10805.]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Of the letters received in the Scottish Office recently about the proposed change to central European time, two expressed opposition to the measure solely on account of its impact on the agricultural and construction industries; many of the rest alluded, among other things, to the adverse effects on these industries.

### Local Government Finance

19. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his financial allocations to the new councils for 1996–97. [10806]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Capital allocations to all authorities will be announced in February or March.

36. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government finance. [10824]

**Mr. Kynoch:** On 26 January.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet representatives of the new unitary councils to discuss the financial settlement for 1996–97. [10792]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I did so last Friday 26 January 1996.

### Councils (Housing Expenditure)

20. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department approved the balance of spending by councils on capital housing projects and the repayment of debt in previous years. [10807]

**Mr. Kynoch:** No; within the resources made available to them, local authorities decided the balance between spending and level of debt repayment.

### Lockerbie

21. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the consequences of the lapse of time since the Lockerbie crime for the prosecution of, and case against, two Libyans accused of the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [10808]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend remains concerned that, more than seven years after the commission of the crime and four years after the Libyan Government were called on to surrender the two accused, they have yet to comply with our demands, which have been endorsed by the United Nations Security Council.

### Residential Care Homes

22. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the report of the Scottish Office working group on residential care home registration procedures; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [10809]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** The range of issues considered by the working group was more complex than originally anticipated, and I now expect to receive the report before the end of March. I will make arrangements for a copy to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

### Scottish Economic Council

23. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet the Scottish Economic Council to discuss public funding. [10810]

**Mr. Kynoch:** My right hon. Friend hopes to arrange the first meeting of the new Scottish Economic Council very soon and looks forward to receiving the council's views on a wide range of matters affecting the Scottish economy, including priorities for public expenditure.

### Independence (Public Finances)

24. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the effect on public finances of Scottish independence. [10811]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I am fully aware of the concerns most Scots have over the prospect of Scottish independence and how it would endanger the funding advantage that Scotland derives from the Union.

### Local Authorities (Severe Weather)

25. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much additional financial help he has given to local authorities to deal with the problems caused by the recent severe weather. [10812]

**Mr. Kynoch:** We have made it clear that we are prepared to consider sympathetically claims both for Bellwin scheme assistance and for additional capital consents. My officials are already working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to gather detailed information on revenue costs. We have received, very recently, a number of initial requests for capital consent, but further information will be required before we can consider these. As soon as detailed claims are received, they will be considered as a matter of urgency.

### School Buildings

26. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the standard of school buildings; and if he will make a statement. [10813]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** It is the responsibility of individual education authorities to maintain relevant information about their buildings.

### Industrial Development

27. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the prospects for *(a)* industrial investment and *(b)* employment levels in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [10814]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The prospects for industrial investment and employment in Scotland remain excellent. Recent business survey evidence in Scotland confirms this. The Government's economic policies are providing the necessary conditions for investment and job creation—low interest rates, low taxation and low inflation within a climate of sound public finances.

### Tree Diseases

29. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what Government grants are available for research into tree diseases; and what was the total expenditure on such grants in 1994–95. [10816]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Several Government Departments undertake or commission research into tree diseases, notably the Forestry Commission, and we also fund some projects by universities and other bodies. However, we do not offer grants specifically for forestry research. Our expenditure on research into tree diseases in 1994–95 amounted to £1.3 million.

### Scottish Parliament

30. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the costs of a Scottish Parliament. [10817]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I have been made aware on numerous occasions of the deep-rooted apprehension felt by Scots about the costs that a Scottish Parliament would place upon them.

### Angling

31. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet representatives of the hotel and tourist industry to discuss projects to improve angling in Scotland. [10818]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** I recognise fully the importance of angling to the Scottish hotel and tourist industry but have no plans at present to meet the industry to discuss angling.

### Housing (Edinburgh)

32. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet the Edinburgh Tenants Federation to discuss housing needs in Edinburgh. [10819]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** My right hon. Friend and I have no plans for such a meeting. Meeting housing needs in Edinburgh is a matter for Edinburgh district council in the first instance. However, the federation has been offered a meeting with officials of my Department, if it wishes.

### Fire Services (Strathclyde)

33. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chief firemaster of Strathclyde regional council to discuss operational matters; and if he will make a statement. [10820]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend last met the firemaster of Strathclyde fire brigade, in his capacity as chairman of the Scottish district of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association, on 25 September 1995. A number of operational and other matters were discussed.

### Private Finance Initiative

34. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what policies he is pursuing to expand PFI activities in Scotland. [10822]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Private sector alternatives must be fully considered for all capital spending for which the Scottish Office is responsible before public finance is made available. I have recently strengthened the private finance unit in the Scottish Office in order to help local authorities, in particular, take full advantage of the PFI.

### Rutherglen Maternity Hospital

35. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recommendation he has had from Greater Glasgow health board about the future of Rutherglen maternity hospital. [10823]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Greater Glasgow health board has recommended that Rutherglen maternity hospital should close once replacement maternity services are available from a purpose-built maternity unit at Glasgow royal infirmary.

The recommendation is being considered along with others in the acute and maternity services strategy, submitted by Greater Glasgow health board to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, on 20 December 1995.

### Lothian Electric Machines, Haddington

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many redundancies have been notified by Lothian Electric Machines of Haddington for the eight months to the end of March 1996; what discussions he has had with IBM about the decision to transfer the manufacture of computer keyboards from Scotland to the far east; and if he will make a statement. [10838]

**Mr. Kynoch:** During the period in question, Lothian Electric Machines of Haddington notified the Department of Employment of 273 redundancies. Decisions by IBM about the sourcing of its purchases are of course a matter for the company, but the hon. Gentleman should be aware that Scottish Enterprise works closely with indigenous companies and major original equipment manufacturers—OEMs—across a range of industrial sectors to improve the competitiveness of local suppliers and, as a result, increase overall the proportion of purchases made by these OEMs from Scottish companies. These sourcing and business development activities have proved highly successful. Scottish Enterprise's manufacturing services group is available to discuss with Lemac what assistance can be made available.

### Unemployment (East Lothian)

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current level of unemployment in east Lothian; what will be the impact of redundancies notified by Lemac of Haddington; and if he will consult the East Lothian council and Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd. about action to create jobs in east Lothian. [10837]

**Mr. Kynoch:** In December 1995, there were 844 people—5.8 per cent. of the work force—in the Haddington travel-to-work area who were registered as unemployed or claiming benefit. If the redundancies notified by Lemac take place, there will be a further 73 indirect and induced job losses in the Haddington travel-to-work area. Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd. has arranged an early meeting with the company to discuss the retraining of staff who are made redundant, and to discuss the scope for assisting towards product development by the company. I understand that those affected by these redundancies will be eligible for immediate entry for training for work support.

### Public Authority Dwellings (Sales)

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each district and island council, for each of the years between 1979–80 and 1994–95 the number of sales of public authority dwellings which were not owned by new towns, Scottish Homes or fell within district and islands councils' housing revenue account; and if he will indicate for each year and each district or island area to which public organisation the dwellings belonged. [10854]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson** *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* Since the available information—which covers dwellings owned by district, islands and regional authorities, but not Government Departments—is rather lengthy, I have arranged for it to be sent to the hon. Member. A copy is also being placed in the Library.

### Interdicts

**Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many interdicts are currently in force to prevent a parent in Scotland from approaching his or her children. [12395]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** This information is not collected centrally.

### North Lanarkshire Council

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the report of the inquiry into the appointment procedures of North Lanarkshire council. [13419]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I received Mr. MacLeod's report on 25 January. I am grateful to him for a comprehensive report which has been completed within a very short period. I am placing copies in the House Library today.

Mr. MacLeod's report concludes that the North Lanarkshire council has not failed to comply with the requirements of section 7 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to appoint staff solely on merit and no further action is required by me.

## TRANSPORT

### Marchioness Inquest

**Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement of his Department's conclusions in respect of the recommendations of the Marchioness inquest jury. [13418]

**Mr. Norris:** My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping has arranged for a paper setting out the Department's views on the recommendations of the Marchioness inquest jury to be placed in the Library of the House.

The Department agrees with the majority of the jury's 12 recommendations. In many cases, existing rules and guidelines already meet the jury's proposals. In those cases where recommendations are aimed at other agencies, the Department is pursuing the recommendations with the agencies in question.

The jury endorsed the earlier recommendations of the marine accident investigation branch report into the Marchioness sinking, together with the recommendations of the report of the inquiry into river safety by Mr. John Hayes. All of the recommendations in the MAIB's report have since been implemented. Action has also been taken on the recommendations of the Hayes report and an updated statement of the position is included in the paper published today.

### Central Railways plc

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *36*, if he will provide a schedule of the applications by Central Railways plc for partial, conditional or absolute waiver from compliance with certain application requirements under the Transport and Works Act 1992 that he is considering. [12537]

**Mr. Watts:** Central Railway plc has withdrawn the waiver applications previously before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I understand that it intends to re-apply for waivers in a modified form. It would not be appropriate in the circumstances to reveal details of the withdrawn waiver applications but copies of any subsequent such applications will be placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *36*, when he reached the conclusion that the applications by Central Railways plc were of national importance under the Transport and Works Act 1992. [12536]

**Mr. Watts:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has reached no such conclusion. My answer, like the hon. Member's question, dealt with what would happen in the event of such a conclusion being reached. From what we know of the proposal, this conclusion seems very likely, but it cannot be reached unless and until a formal application is made under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *36*, if he will make a statement on the consultations with local planning authorities and other bodies which Central Railways plc is required to make under the Transport and Works Act 1992 rules; and what monitoring he has carried out as to whether the consultations have been carried out to the satisfaction of the local authorities concerned. [12538]

**Mr. Watts:** Rule 3 of the Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure) Rules 1992 (SI 1992 No. 2902) sets out the pre-application consultation and notification requirements. The applicant must provide with the TWA application copies of all statements of views obtained from local planning authorities under rule 3(1) and evidence by affidavit of compliance with the notification requirements under rule 3(2) and 3(3).

### Driving Instructors

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the policy of the Driving Standards Agency concerning driving instructors with criminal convictions. [12414]

**Mr. Norris:** Under part V of the Road Traffic Act 1988, the registrar of approved driving instructors, who is responsible for the administration of the ADI register, has to be satisfied that an instructor is a "fit and proper person". Any instructor who is aggrieved by the registrar's decision to remove his name from the register can appeal to the Secretary of State, which appeal is heard by an independent appeal board. That strikes a reasonable balance between the rights of the individual and the protection of the learning public.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the proposed deregulation of the Driving Standards Agency and its future monitoring of driving instructors. [12415]

**Mr. Norris:** There are no plans to deregulate the Driving Standards Agency and it will continue to be responsible for the statutory register of approved driving instructors and for the conduct of driving tests.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to ensure that persons convicted of offences of indecency are not permitted to work as driving instructors; and if he will make a statement. [12413]

**Mr. Norris:** Under part V of the Road Traffic Act 1988, the registrar of approved driving instructors, who is responsible for the administration of the ADI register, has to be satisfied that an instructor is a "fit and proper person". If, for example, following the criminal conviction of an instructor, the registrar is no longer satisfied on this score, he can remove that person's name from the register.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to restrict persons convicted of indecency from setting up driving schools to teach driving practice or theory; and if he will make a statement. [12416]

**Mr. Norris:** In the environment in which ordinary driving instruction takes place, it is sensible that the instructor should be subject to vetting as to previous convictions, and so on. However, there is no obvious need for a special conduct regime for classroom tuition services since the isolated and relatively vulnerable circumstances of one-to-one in a car do not arise.

### Channel Tunnel Rail Link

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the total cost to public funds of the high speed rail link between London and the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement. [12170]

**Mr. Watts:** The amount of public sector support which the Government will make available for this project will depend on the outcome of the competition currently under way to select a private sector promoter. We anticipate that the contribution will be substantial. We hope to announce the winner of the competition shortly.

### Driving Licence Fraud

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to combat driving licence fraud; and if he will make a statement. [12169]

**Mr. Norris:** Photographs are to be added to driving licences. This will help eliminate misuse of licences and impersonation at driving tests.

### Railway Line Repairs (Dawlish)

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the cost of repairs required to the railway line at Dawlish. [12524]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* None. However, Railtrack informs me that £500,000 per year is spent on maintenance of the Dawlish sea wall, with a further £200,000 this year for repairs necessitated by the poor weather conditions in January.

### Public Service Vehicle Licences

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many public service vehicle operators' licences have been *(a)* applied for, *(b)* issued, *(c)* objected to by (i) the police, (ii) the public and (iii) others, *(d)* issued and *(e)* withdrawn by the authorities in the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on the trends in each category in the last five years. [12869]

**Mr. Norris:** The information on applications, issues of licences, and withdrawals for 1994–95, the latest figures which are available, is contained in annexes 1 and 2 of the annual reports of the traffic commissioners 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995, copies of which are available in the Library. In that year, there were five objections to licence applications, of which two came from the police, none from the public, and three from others.

Over the last five years, the number of applications and the number of licences issued have shown a slow but steady growth, punctuated, in both categories, by a sharp reduction in 1994–95. The number of objections received has remained roughly constant.

As for the number of withdrawals, 1990–91 showed a high, and the subsequent four years have produced lower, broadly similar figures.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for transport what computer links exist between his Department, the police, the traffic commissioners and others to cross check public service vehicle operators' applications in order to detect unsuitable applicants, with particular reference to those with a criminal record of offences against children; and if he will make a statement. [12874]

**Mr. Norris:** There are no computer links between the traffic area offices and the police. All applications for public service vehicle operators' licences are published in advance of the grant of a licence and circulated to the police, who have a statutory right of objection to a licence being granted on the grounds that the requirement of good repute has not been satisfied.

The applicant must declare on his application form any relevant convictions that he or any of his employees has had in the last five years. Any person who knowingly makes a false statement for the purpose of obtaining a licence is liable to a fine and the revocation or suspension of the licence.

### Rail Tickets (Inter-availability)

**Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of state for Transport what instructions he has given to the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising regarding the inter-availability of tickets between destinations where more than one route is available and services on these routes are provided by different train operating companies. [12844]

**Mr. Watts:** Paragraphs 29 of the objectives, instructions and guidance to the franchising director instruct the franchising director that:

"Where a railway passenger journey could be made using services operated by different franchisees you are to require the franchisees to offer tickets which are inter-available between their services where you believe the benefits of doing so will outweigh the likely benefits of price competition and service diversity".

The franchising director will require inter-available tickets between the different operators on most routes, thereby essentially safeguarding the existing inter-availability of tickets for British Rail services on permitted routes. He will lift the requirement only if this would be in the interests of price competition and service diversity. While inter-availability is required, operators will be permitted to offer additional, non-inter-available tickets which trade flexibility for a cheaper price.

### Heavy Goods Vehicle Drivers

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the regulation of HGV drivers employed by HGV driver agencies; if he will consult on proposals to regulate HGV driver agencies; and if he will make a statement. [12437]

**Mr. Norris:** I have received one letter on this issue. Employment agencies for HGV drivers are already regulated. They are subject to the standards of conduct in the Employment Agencies Act 1973 and the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 1976, which are enforced by the employment agency standards office of the Department of Trade and Industry.

### West Coast Main Line

**Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the transmission-based signalling system proposed for the west coast main line will be compatible with the proposed European train control system. [12282]

**Mr. Watts:** The final form of the European train control system will depend on the outcome of the current development work. However, the transmission-based signalling system proposed for the west coast main line is expected to be compatible with ETCS principles.

**Mr. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when it is expected that a proven European train control system will be ready for production; and when the transmission-based signalling system proposed for the west coast main line will be ready for installation. [12281]

**Mr. Watts:** The availability of a proven European train control system will depend on the outcome of research trials currently being undertaken within the EC's fourth framework programme for research and development. The trials are not due to be completed until around the year 2000. Railtrack will let the development contract for the transmission-based signalling system for the west coast main line during the first quarter of this year. Railtrack expects that a reliable signalling system can be developed within the time necessary for the modernisation works.

### Marine Pollution (Penalties)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance is given to magistrates on the appropriate level of fines under the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution) Regulations 1983. [12154]

**Mr. Norris:** None.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many convictions there have been made under the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution) Regulations 1983 in each of the years for which figures are available; and what was the average fine each year. [12153]

**Mr. Norris:** Precise information on individual fines imposed is not held centrally. Estimates are, however, available from the advisory committee on pollution of the sea.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to bring into force proposals authorised in the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution) (Law of the Sea Convention) Order 1995. [12191]

**Mr. Norris:** Subject to approval of the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution) (Law of the Sea Convention) Order 1995 by the Privy Council, we would hope to bring into force regulations extending jurisdiction over oil pollution before the end of March. Regulations on pollution by garbage and noxious liquid substances should follow shortly afterwards.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the maximum fine for illegal dumping at sea; and how many times it has been levied since 1983. [12152]

**Mr. Norris:** There is no maximum fine for convictions secured in the crown court. For convictions in magistrates courts, the maxima are £50,000 for illegal discharges of oil, and £5,000 for other discharge offences. Precise information on individual fines imposed is not available. My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping announced on 24 January the Government's intention to seek a five-fold increase in these maxima to £250,000 and £25,000 respectively.

### Marine Safety Agency

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what safeguards exist to ensure staff on short-term contracts with the Marine Safety Agency do not have a conflict of interests with their other employment. [12195]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from R.M. Bradley to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to respond to your Question about staff on short term contracts.

The people employed by the Marine Safety Agency on casual or short fixed term contracts do not have other employment so there is no conflict of interests.

### Road Taxes

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on different road taxes for road use in different conditions. [12012]

**Mr. Norris:** Road tax decisions are primarily matters for the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

### British Bus

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received concerning payments by the chief executive of British Bus to Ray McEnhill, National Express; and if he will make a statement. [12138]

**Mr. Norris:** I have seen press reports, and have no comment to make.

### Trunk Roads, London

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what allocation has been made for maintenance of the trunk road network within the Greater London area for the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98; [11244]

(2) what is the current maintenance backlog on the trunk road network in Greater London. [11225]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Glenda Jackson, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the allocation of maintenance funds for trunk roads within the Greater London area and the current backlog of maintenance on the network.

This financial year (95/96) my Agency is forecasting to spend £51.4m (approx) on the maintenance of London's trunk road network. We are currently working on the allocation of next year's funds, in the light of last November's PES settlement. I will advise you on next year's funding when those allocations have been made. It is too early to forecast how much will be spent in the year 97/98.

There is an on-going programme of maintenance for London's trunk road network. Work is brought forward in order of priority against an on-going programme of condition assessment and as such there is no significant backlog of highway maintenance.

### A102M

**Ms Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the original estimated cost of the current works at Cotton street/Brunswick road/A102M improvements; what is the current estimated cost of the works; what factors underlie the current overrun by the contractors; if the contractors will be subject to penalty clauses; and if these will be implemented; [12231]

(2) what advantages in traffic flows the Highways Agency estimates will occur on completion of the contract for the works at Cotton street/Brunswick road/A102M improvements; what assessment has been made of the advantages for local residents from the scheme; if the contract for works at Cotton street/Brunswick road/A102M improvement is being completed to its original specification; what is its estimated finish date; and what on site works have been carried out that relate to a third river crossing at Blackwall. [12232]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Mildred Gordon, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the Cotton Street/Brunswick Road/A102M improvement scheme.

The tender sum for the contract was £5.1m, the current estimated cost of the works exceeds that but for commercial reasons I cannot yet say what that figure will be.

The original completion date was 12 November 1995, with the likely completion date now being June 1996. There are a number of reasons for this delay including uncharted underground services, works carried out by the statutory undertakers running late, unforeseen ground conditions and piling obstructions.

We have carefully considered and agreed to a 12 week extension of time on the contract. The decision on whether to implement penalty clauses on the contractor will depend on the actual completion date and on whether or not any further extensions of time are agreed.

On completion of the contract, traffic will re-route from Abbott Road because there will be the provision of a right hand turn into St. Leonard's Road. There will be increased capacity on the road north of the junction and Docklands via Cotton Street.

Local people will benefit from a reduction in levels of congestion. A13 westbound traffic wishing to travel north on the A102 will now be able to do so thus relieving Abbott Road, a residential road with a poor record of traffic accidents. There will be a new traffic signals system at the junction between the A13, A102 and Cotton Street with integrated pedestrian crossing facilities and widened central refuge islands. At various locations there will be a segregation of the footway from traffic with environmental screens, pedestrian barriers and landscaping and at crossings, we will provide specialised pavings to assist visually impaired people. Environmental screens will be provided between the A102 and adjacent residential properties and between the A102 and Culloden Primary School. The A13 subway will be reopened and existing subways will be refurbished. Safety is of course a prime concern and the scheme will reduce road traffic accidents over the next 30 years by nearly 200.

The improvement scheme is being completed to its original specification.

This scheme is a stand alone improvement and no works have been carried out that relate to a third river crossing.

## HEALTH

### GP Budgets

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the accumulated gross savings of general practitioner fundholders in each region as at 31 March 1995. [10935]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not yet available.

### Pain Research Institute, Liverpool

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received about the proposed closure of the Pain Research Institute associated with Walton hospital, Liverpool; [12314]

(2) what assessment he has made of the value of the work carried out by the Pain Research Institute in Liverpool, with particular reference to the links between the institute and the pain clinic at Walton hospital; [12313]

(3) what action he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take in order to assist in re-siting the Pain Research Institute to the Fazakerley hospital site in conjunction with the re-siting of Walton hospital there. [12315]

**Mr. Horam:** Ministers have received five letters on this subject. The Department recognises the importance of the Pain Research Institute and its close ties with the Walton Neurosciences trust. Representatives of the National Health Service executive, Walton Neurosciences trust and Aintree Hospitals NHS trust met on 26 January to discuss the institute's accommodation requirements and options for financing the relocation.

### MRSA Bacteria

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department has issued to general practitioners and NHS hospitals regarding the methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus bacterium. [12399]

**Mr. Horam:** Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus is a problem largely confined to hospitals. Guidance on the control of MRSA in hospitals was circulated to the national health service in September 1994 under cover of EL(94)74, entitled "Improving the Effectiveness of the NHS". New advice on the surveillance of MRSA was included in guidance on

"Hospital Infection Control", published in March 1995 under cover of HSG(95)10. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to undertake further research into MRSA bacteria. [12336]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) on 22 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *15–16*.

### Powered Wheelchairs

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the criteria for qualifying for a publicly funded indoor/outdoor powered wheelchair in the United Kingdom; [12079]

(2) what funding arrangements exist for indoor/outdoor powered wheelchair provision in the United Kingdom. [12078]

**Mr. Bowis:** It is for the national health service locally to decide which type of wheelchair is appropriate depending on local and personal circumstances. Responsibility for wheelchair provision in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, respectively.

### Noise Levels (Hearing Damage)

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into permanent hearing impairment caused by excessive noise levels faced by young people in places of public entertainment; and what plans his Department has to fund research into the level of hearing impairment amongst young people and the causes of such impairment. [12069]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Department has not commissioned any specific research into the effects of excessive noise levels in places of public entertainment, and has at present no plans to fund research into the level and causes of hearing impairment in young people.

The health and safety of people attending places of public entertainment are subject to the general requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Etc Act 1974. This includes the risk of damage to people's hearing.

### Patients (Consent to Treatment)

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines medical professionals work to in securing the informed consent of patients to undergo surgery or similar treatment, with particular reference to information provided on success rates for the relevant treatment; and if the guidelines indicate whether the success rate figures they give should be *(a)* national, *(b)* local to the hospital or unit or *(c)* individual to the surgeon or professional and *(d)* any combination of these. [12499]

**Mr. Horam:** Medical professionals use guidance issued by the medical royal colleges as the basis for obtaining a patient's consent to treatment. The General Medical Council has also issued guidance to all doctors on the basis for obtaining a patient's consent to treatment in its publication, "Duties of a doctor". This emphasises the need to respect the right of patients to be fully involved in decisions about their care.

Such guidance contains no information about success rates for treatment.

### General Osteopathic Council

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is yet in a position to announce the membership of the first General Osteopathic Council. [13369]

**Mr. Dorrell:** I am pleased to announce the membership designate of the first General Osteopathic Council is as follows:

*Chairman (lay member):* Mr. Simon Fielding OBE: Current Chairman of the General Council and Register of Osteopaths

*Osteopathic members (all practising osteopaths)*

Dr. John G. Armitstead, MA, MRCP (UK) DO

Mr. John B. Barkworth, DO

Miss Susan Farwell, DO

Mr. Gerry Gajadharsingh DO

Mr. Maurice Hills DO

Mrs. Jane Langer DO

Mr. John Lant DO

Mr. Graham Mason DO

Mrs. Susan Pawsey MSc DO

Mr. John Roberts MSc DO

Mr. Philip Tanswell DO

Mr. Nicholas Woodhead DO

*Education members*

Mr. Jonathan Hobbs DO

Mr. Gregory Sharp DO

Miss Sarah Wallace DO

Dr. Brian Jolly BSc, MA(Ed), PhD

*Lay members*

Mr. T. Nigel Clarke BA(Hons): Director, GLW Government Relations, and Chairman Notiondouble Ltd.

Mr. Alan Kershaw BA(Hons) MA: Assistant Registrar, General Medical Council

Mrs. Rita Lewis MSc(Econs): Health Policy Consultant/Lecturer, Member of UKCC

Mr. David Phillips OBE, BDS: Dental Director and Secretary, The Medical Protection Society Ltd.

Mrs. Elizabeth Southey: National Chairman of the National Federation of Women's Institutes

Mrs. Deborah Todman LLB(Hons) MRAD: Barrister

Mr. Alan Lettin BSc., MS, FRCS: Vice President, Royal College of Surgeons (England)

Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon.

The chairman and membership will meet shortly to begin the preliminary work of drawing up a business plan for the new GOsC and the outline of the necessary structures for the administration of the statutory registration scheme for osteopaths. As soon as this preliminary work is complete, the first of the commencement orders will be made to bring the essential elements of the Osteopaths Act into force—including the formal appointment of the GOsC by the Privy Council.

### Operations (Women)

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of women by health authority waiting for *(a)* a hysterectomy operation, *(b)* a mastectomy operation and *(c)* a hip replacement operation; and how many have been waiting longer than (i) three months, (ii) six months, (iii) nine months and (iv) 12 months. [11491]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

### Cystic Fibrosis

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* infants and (b) people in total were recorded as suffering from cystic fibrosis in each standard region in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [12777]

**Mr. Horam:** Information about the prevalence of cystic fibrosis is not available centrally. Available information about national health service treatment, differentiating between those aged under one year and others, is shown in the table.

*Finished consultant episodes (ordinary admissions and day cases combined) in NHS hospitals in England—main diagnosis cystic fibrosis*

| *1991–92* | *0–1 year* | *Over 1 year* | *All ages* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Northern | 35 | 410 | 445 |
| Yorkshire | 67 | 435 | 502 |
| Trent | 41 | 478 | 519 |
| East Anglian | 24 | 218 | 242 |
| North west Thames | 28 | 137 | 165 |
| North east Thames | 26 | 82 | 108 |
| South east Thames | 23 | 154 | 177 |
| South west Thames | 17 | 238 | 255 |
| Wessex | 17 | 225 | 242 |
| Oxford | 21 | 171 | 191 |
| South Western | 44 | 196 | 240 |
| West Midlands | 66 | 585 | 651 |
| Mersey | 30 | 402 | 432 |
| North Western | 32 | 727 | 760 |
| SHAs | 283 | 876 | 1,158 |
| England | 753 | 5,333 | 6,087 |
| *1992–93* | | | |
| Northern | 21 | 344 | 365 |
| Yorkshire | 85 | 448 | 533 |
| Trent | 42 | 428 | 470 |
| East Anglian | 20 | 248 | 268 |
| North west Thames | 5 | 97 | 102 |
| North east Thames | 13 | 98 | 111 |
| South east Thames | 45 | 175 | 220 |
| South west Thames | 13 | 244 | 256 |
| Wessex | 28 | 335 | 364 |
| Oxford | 32 | 164 | 196 |
| South Western | 28 | 252 | 280 |
| West Midlands | 90 | 728 | 817 |
| Mersey | 34 | 305 | 339 |
| North western | 66 | 651 | 717 |
| SHAs | 60 | 2,169 | 2,229 |
| England | 581 | 6,687 | 7,268 |
| *1993–94* | | | |
| Northern | 13 | 204 | 216 |
| Yorkshire | 62 | 1,129 | 1,191 |
| Trent | 71 | 449 | 520 |
| East Anglian | 16 | 200 | 216 |
| North west Thames | 0 | 82 | 82 |
| North east Thames | 26 | 86 | 112 |
| South east Thames | 28 | 230 | 259 |
| South west Thames | 13 | 276 | 288 |
| Wessex | 25 | 358 | 383 |
| Oxford | 8 | 260 | 268 |
| South Western | 8 | 275 | 283 |
| West Midlands | 71 | 753 | 824 |
| Mersey | 49 | 367 | 416 |
| North western | 20 | 465 | 486 |
| SHAs | 48 | 1,428 | 1,476 |
| England | 458 | 6,562 | 7,020 |

*Note*
Figures may not total due to rounding.
*Source*
Hospital Episode Statistics.

## WALES

### Health Authorities (Resources)

**Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what decisions he has reached about the allocation of resources to the new health authorities in Wales for 1996–97. [13343]

**Mr. Hague:** I announced on 13 December that I had decided to provide an additional £84 million for the NHS in Wales for 1996–97. This brings total NHS spending to £2,274 million. Within this sum, I propose to allocate £1,587 million to hospital, community and the cash-limited element of the family health services. Subject to approval of the relevant supply estimate, this amount will be distributed as follows:

The new health authorities will receive £1,491.6 million for revenue purposes. This is an increase of £55 million or 3.85 per cent. over 1995–96 plans, and 1.1 per cent. in real terms. In addition, authorities and trusts will be expected to generate efficiency savings of at least 3 per cent. This amounts to £40 million including a further £3.25 million savings in managements costs. These savings, together with the £55 million cash increase, will be available to meet inflationary and other pressures and enable further investment to be made in patient care.

Health authorities and NHS trusts will also receive £95.8 million for capital investment. They are also expected to receive additional receipts from sales of surplus land. These additional resources will be available for reinvestment in capital development. In additional to

public sector capital spending, I expect the NHS in Wales to benefit significantly next year from private sector capital investment under the private finance initiative.

I want the NHS in Wales to see PFI as the main source of funding for capital investment. It offers a unique opportunity to bring forward capital projects which are additional to existing public expenditure plans.

Details of the planned allocations to the new health authorities, which come into being on 1 April 1996 and the provisional external financing limits for NHS trusts is contained in a statement which has been placed in the Library of the House.

### Valuation Office, Bangor

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received against the possible transfer of work from the valuation office in Bangor to offices outside Gwynedd; and if he will make a statement. [12100]

**Mr. Angela Knight:** I have been asked to reply.

To date, representations have been received from members of staff of the valuation office in Bangor and a constituency Member of Parliament.

Consultation has recently commenced with members of staff and their trades unions and will also be conducted with national representatives of the valuation profession and other bodies with an interest in the future of the valuation office review.

Consultation is expected to be completed by summer 1996 and the outcome announced in due course.

### Hospitals

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general hospitals there were in Wales in 1980, 1990 and 1995; and if he will make a statement. [10744]

**Mr. Richards:** The information requested is contained in volumes 12 and 20 of "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics Wales" and in "Health Statistics Wales 1995", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

### Dentists

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many dentistry practices there were undertaking NHS treatment in 1993 and 1994 in Gwynedd; [10758]

(2) how many dentistry practices there were in Gwynedd in 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995; and how many there are currently. [10757]

**Mr. Richards:** Information on the number of dentistry practices is not available centrally. However, the number of principal dental practitioners treating some NHS patients is given in the following list, a principal dental practitioner would be the head of a practice, although two or more may practise together. The list includes only principals who carry out the majority of their work in Gwynedd. There may also be other principals who carry out some work in Gwynedd.

Number of principal dental practitioners, treating some NHS patients, in Gwynedd

30 September 1992: 63

30 September 1993: 65

30 September 1994: 65

30 September 1995: 62 (latest available)

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many dentistry practices undertook NHS treatment in Clwyd in (i) 1991, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1993; and if he will make a statement; [10674]

(2) how many dentistry practices there are in Clwyd who undertake NHS treatment; and if he will make a statement. [10759]

**Mr. Richards:** Information on the number of dentistry practices is not available centrally. However the number of principal dental practitioners treating some NHS patients is given in the following list, a principal dental practitioner would be the head of a practice, although two or more may practise together. The list includes only principals who carry out the majority of their work in Clwyd. There may also be other principals who carry out some work in Clwyd.

Number of principals dental practitioners, treating some NHS patients, in Clwyd:

30 September 1991: 99

30 September 1992: 95

30 September 1993: 107

30 September 1994: 108

30 September 1995: 115

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists in Gwynedd are currently providing NHS dental service; and what was the figure before the introduction of his initiative. [11964]

**Mr. Hague:** At 30 September 1995, there were 65 dentists—62 of whom were principals—providing a NHS dental service in Gwynedd. Only those dentists who carry out the majority of their work in Gwynedd have been included in the figures. More recent figures are not yet available.

### Llanelli (Development)

**Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of the Millennium Commission's grant towards the development of the Llanelli coastal park on the joint venture agreement between the Welsh Development Agency and Llanelli borough council. [11830]

**Mr. Hague:** I welcome the Millennium Commission's decision to support the development of Llanelli coastal park. It is for the Llanelli joint venture partners to take account of the decision in their future plans.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11917]

**Mr. Richards:** The Welsh Office and Cadw use the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for external recruitment and work to its principles for internal promotions and recruitment.

### Education Authority Budgets

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the budgets of education authorities, in Wales is allocated to *(a)* schools and *(b)* non-school expenditure; and how much money this represents per school pupil in each case. [10922]

**Mr. Richards:** Information on county councils' budgeted expenditure for 1995–96 on education services is given in the following table.

*1995–96 Budgeted expenditure on education*[1]

| | *Schools expenditure*[2] *As a percentage of total eduction expenditure* | *£ per pupil*[3] | *Non-schools expenditure As a percentage of total education expenditure* | *£ per pupil*[3] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *County council* | | | | |
| Clwyd | 95 | 2,189 | 4 | 101 |
| Dyfed | 93 | 2,386 | 7 | 177 |
| Gwent | 91 | 2,161 | 9 | 211 |
| Gwynedd | 92 | 2,351 | 7 | 172 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 92 | 2,245 | 8 | 197 |
| Powys | 91 | 2,480 | 9 | 233 |
| South Glamorgan | 89 | 1,998 | 11 | 238 |
| West Glamorgan | 93 | 2,271 | 7 | 172 |
| Wales | 92 | 2,227 | 8 | 186 |

*Source:*
Local authority returns.
*Notes:*
[1] Excludes expenditure on grant maintained schools and mandatory student awards that are 100 per cent. funded by central government.
[2] Includes expenditure on management and support services allocated by authorities to schools. Incudes home teaching and individual teaching at other establishments e.g. hospitals and special units. Excludes expenditure on school catering which is included under non-schools expenditure.
[3] Based on provisional full-time equivalent pupil numbers as at January 1995.

### Teachers' Pay

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average salary of a class teacher in Wales in the *(a)* nursery, *(b)* infant, *(c)* primary and *(d)* secondary sectors. [11708]

**Mr. Richards:** The average salaries for full-time classroom teachers in maintained—including grant-maintained—nursery, primary and secondary schools in Wales as at 31 March 1994 are as follows:

| *Nursery* £ | *Infants* £ | *Other primary* £ | *Secondary (excluding sixth-form colleges)* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 19,100 | 18,700 | 18,700 | 20,600 |

### Nurses

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to increase the recruitment of nurses. [12007]

**Mr. Richards:** It is a matter for NHS trusts and other employers to recruit the number of nurses they require to provide services.

### Hospital Closures

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospitals were closed in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995 giving in each case their location. [12005]

**Mr. Richards:** The information is given in the following table. However since 1992 one hospital has also opened, in Clwyd.

| *Hospital* | *Location* |
|---|---|
| *Closed in 1992:* | |
| Catherine Gladstone | Clwyd |
| Talgarn | Mid Glamorgan |
| Children's ENT | South Glamorgan |
| *Closed in 1993:* | |
| Druid | Gwynedd |
| Garth Angharad | Gwynedd |
| Llwyn View | Gwynedd |
| Pontypool and District | Gwent |
| Energlyn | Mid Glamorgan |
| Coed Du | Clwyd |
| *Closed in 1994:* | |
| St. David's | Powys |
| Mount Pleasant | West Glamorgan |
| Parc | Mid Glamorgan |
| St. Lawrence | Gwent |
| Port Talbot | West Glamorgan |
| Allt yr yn | Gwent |
| St. David's | Gwynedd |
| Broughton | Clwyd |
| *Closed in 1995:* | |
| Stanley Sailors | Gwynedd |
| Pen y Fai | Mid Glamorgan |
| North Wales | Clwyd |

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many wards were closed in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995. [12004]

**Mr. Richards:** The information requested is not available centrally.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* hospital beds and *(b)* acute hospital beds were closed in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995. [12003]

**Mr. Richards:** Information relating to the actual number of beds closed is not collected centrally. However, the average daily number of available beds in each of the last four years is given in the following table.

| | *All hospital beds* | *Acute hospital beds* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 18,640 | 8,799 |
| 1992–93 | 18,078 | 8,651 |
| 1993–94 | 17,475 | 8,441 |
| 1994–95 | 16,834 | 8,479 |

## Welsh Language

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make an order under section 6(1)(o) to extend the provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1993 to those bodies identified by the Welsh Language Board as appropriate to the purposes of the Act but not currently within its ambit. [11974]

**Mr. Hague:** I intend to make an order under section 6 of the Act later this year. Which bodies are to be designated as public bodies under the terms of the Act is a matter still under consideration.

## Anaesthetics and Psychiatry Posts

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of *(a)* anaesthetics and *(b)* psychiatry posts are currently unfilled; and if he will make a statement. [12008]

**Mr. Richards:** Information on medical staff in the NHS in Wales is collected by means of an annual census of staff in post at 30 September. The latest available information, which relates to whole-time equivalent numbers at 30 September 1994, is given in the following table.

*Percentage of posts not occupied by a permanent holder*

| | *Filled by a locum* | *Not filled by a locum* |
|---|---|---|
| Anaesthetics | 0.6 | 1.8 |
| Psychiatry[1] | 0.7 | 0.7 |

[1] Includes the specialties of mental handicap, mental illness, child and adolescent psychiatry, forensic psychiatry, psychotherapy and old age psychiatry.

## Private Hospitals and Clinics

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many private hospitals and clinics there are currently *(a)* in Wales, and *(b)* in each of the health districts. [12006]

**Mr. Richards:** The latest available information, which relates to 31 March 1995, is given in the following table.

| *Health district* | *Private hospitals* | *Private clinics* |
|---|---|---|
| Clwyd | 1 | 1 |
| East Dyfed | 1 | 1 |
| Gwent | 2 | 1 |
| Gwynedd | 1 | 1 |
| Mid Glamorgan | — | — |
| Pembrokeshire | — | — |
| Powys | — | — |
| South Glamorgan | 1 | 2 |
| West Glamorgan | 1 | — |
| Wales | 7 | 7 |

## Training for Work Programmes

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column 780, how many trainees *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each training and enterprise council area for whom a first stage payment is made are still in employment eight weeks later. [12460]

**Mr. Hague:** Information on individual trainees is not collected in the format requested and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. However aggregated information is available on the claims made by TECs for first and second stage job outcome payments and this has been provided in the following table. To take account of the time lag in claiming second stage payments, information has been provided on the first stage payments to the end of the second quarter, 10 September 1995, and the second stage job outcome payments to the end of the third quarter, 31 December 1995. The earliest opportunity for claiming the latter payments is eight weeks after the payment of first stage job outcomes.

*Training for work job outcome payments made 27 March 1995 to 31 December 1995*

| *TEC* | *First stage payment* | *Second stage payment* |
|---|---|---|
| Gwent | 484 | 434 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 905 | 615 |
| North East Wales | 310 | 66 |
| Powys | 152 | 92 |
| South Glamorgan | 467 | 340 |
| Targed | 231 | 165 |
| West Wales | 736 | 493 |
| Total | 3,285 | 2,205 |

*Source:*

TEC claims: first stage payments to 10 September 1995 second stage to 31 December 1995.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *780*, if he will publish by individual TEC areas a breakdown of the NVQ levels attained by trainees undertaking training for work programmes. [12459]

**Mr. Hague:** The information requested is contained in the following table.

*Training for work NVQ achievement by level 27 March 1995 to 3 December 1995*

| NVQ's | Gwent | Mid Glamorgan | North-east Wales | Powys | South Glamorgan | Targed | West Wales | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sub Level 1 | 123 | 101 | 2 | 4 | 52 | 22 | 7 | 311 |
| Level 1 | 336 | 248 | 60 | 23 | 206 | 121 | 431 | 1,425 |
| Level 2 | 294 | 415 | 123 | 52 | 371 | 229 | 523 | 2,007 |
| Level 3 | 71 | 48 | 28 | 50 | 36 | 109 | 45 | 387 |
| Level 4 | 10 | 30 | 0 | 3 | 44 | 43 | 2 | 132 |
| Level 4+ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 834 | 842 | 213 | 133 | 709 | 526 | 1,008 | 4,265 |

TEC management information statistics.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *780*, what percentage the long-term unemployed represent of *(a)* entrants to training for work, *(b)* those for whom a first stage payment is made and *(c)* those still in employment eight weeks later (i) in total and (ii) by individual TEC areas. [12461]

**Mr. Hague:** The information requested is not available in the form requested.

### Llay Park Infants School

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of state for Wales if he will make extra moneys available to Clwyd local education authority to enable Llay Park infants school to be rebuilt. [12426]

**Mr. Richards:** My right hon. Friend is making available more than £508 million for local authority capital spending in 1996–97. It is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources that are made available are allocated between services, including education, in the light of their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities.

### Traditional Geographical Counties

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about maintaining the identity of the 13 traditional counties of Wales; and what response he has made. [12464]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend and I have received three representations, all from Mr. Peter Boyce of the Association of British Counties about promoting "the use of the 13 traditional counties as the main geographical areas in common parlance in Wales".

I have written to Mr. Boyce, expressing our view that the new structure of 22 unitary authorities is that which best meets the needs of local government in Wales, but that it is for other institutions and organisations to consider what structure meets their needs.

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what considerations he has given to reinstituting the 13 geographical counties as the standard geographical framework for Wales; and if he will make a statement. [12419]

**Mr. Hague:** None. I am not aware that there is such a thing as a standard geographical framework. The structure of 22 unitary authorities was decided upon by Parliament with regard to what is best for local government in Wales. It is for other institutions and organisations to consider whether that structure meets their needs and those of their users, customers or associates.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future role of the 13 traditional geographical counties in Wales. [12417]

**Mr. Hague:** The Government acknowledge the continuing strength of the affection which many people in Wales have for the traditional 13 counties, which is expressed, for example, in the organisation of many sporting, social, voluntary and cultural societies on the basis of the traditional counties' boundaries. I see no reason why such arrangements should not continue.

### Cystic Fibrosis

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* infants and *(b)* adults were recorded as suffering from cystic fibrosis in each health authority, and for Wales as a whole for each of the last available three years; and if he will make a statement. [12776]

**Mr. Richards:** At present, information on the prevalence of cystic fibrosis in Wales is not held centrally. Information on the levels of cystic fibrosis reported by respondents to the Welsh health survey is being processed. Results from the survey are scheduled for publication in March 1996.

### Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the written representations that he has received in favour of the proposed nursery voucher scheme. [12859]

**Mr. Hague:** Since my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State's reply to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *379-80*, we have received correspondence in support of the scheme from a parent expressing concern that the views of working mothers are being represented. The voucher scheme aims to provide choice of provision to such parents.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome

**Mr. Dicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the recommendations of the Industrial Injuries Advisory

Council regarding hand arm vibration syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [12912]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given careful consideration to the recommendations in the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's report "Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (Vascular and Neurological Components Involving the Fingers and Thumb)", Cm 2844. The Government are not persuaded that the additional benefits to individuals would be sufficient to warrant the high administrative costs of implementing the council's recommendations. I am especially concerned about the costs associated with developing a usable, repeatable and acceptable test for diagnosing the condition and assessing a person's disability. I am confident that the council will continue its thorough work in monitoring the scientific advances and literature on this condition, as well as developments in diagnostic and assessment techniques. I will give careful consideration to any further advice it may provide.

### Burdens on Business

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reduce burdens on business. [13225]

**Mr. Heald:** We plan to make two changes which, although in themselves small, will nevertheless contribute to our aim of reducing burdens on business.

First, we have today published a consultation document, "Reducing Burdens on Business: Proposed Changes for Directors' National Insurance Contributions". Subject to the responses, we will consider the best way of making the necessary legislative change, including an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. Today's document therefore constitutes formal consultation under section 3(1) of the Act. Responses to the document must be received no later than Friday 29 March 1996 when the consultation period will end.

The document has been sent to 38 organisations in Great Britain—and a further 12 in Northern Ireland—seeking their views about proposals to modify the present rules under which directors and their employers pay national insurance contributions. The annual amount they are liable to pay will not change.

Secondly, we propose to bring the regulations governing national insurance contributions into greater alignment with the PAYE tax system. As one of a number of similar changes from April 1996 we propose to adopt the Inland Revenue definition of a company in the regulation dealing with the treatment of payments made to certain professional advisor and nominee directors.

Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Library.

### Social Security Committee Report

**Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish his reply to the Social Security Committee's fifth report of Session 1995–96 "The Work of the Department of Social Security and its Agencies", HC 382. [13227]

**Mr. Lilley:** A Government response to the Social Security Committee's report "The Work of the Department of Social Security and its Agencies" has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

### Income Support

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women aged 60 years and over receiving preserved rights to income support in *(a)* elderly people, *(b)* very dependent elderly, *(c)* mental illness, *(d)* mental handicap, *(e)* drug and alcohol dependence, *(f)* physical disability over pension age and *(g)* any other condition category had weekly charges above the income support limit by (i) 1p to £13.10, (ii) £13.11 to £15, (iii) £15.01 to £25, (iv) £25.01 to £35, (v) £35.01 to £45, (vi) £45.01 to £55, (vii) £55.01 to £65, (viii) £65.01 to £75, (ix) £75.01 to £85, (x) £85.01 to £95, (xi) £95.01 to £105 and (xii) over £105.01 for (1) Greater London and (2) by English region, excluding Greater London, (3) England and (4) Great Britain. [7729]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

*Income support preserved rights cases with weekly accommodation charge above income support limits: women aged 60 and over in residential care homes*

*A. By standard region and type of care*

| | *Great Britain* | *Wales* | *Scotland* | *England* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All residential care | 34,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 31,000 |
| *Type of care* | | | | |
| Elderly People | 15,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 14,000 |
| Very dependent elderly | 15,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 14,000 |
| Mental illness | 1,000 | — | — | 1,000 |
| Mental handicap | — | — | — | — |
| Drug or alcohol dependence | 1,000 | — | — | 1,000 |
| Physical disability above pension age | 1,000 | — | — | 1,000 |
| Any other category | — | — | — | — |

*A. By standard region and type of care*

*England*

| | *Greater London* | *South-east* | *North* | *Yorkshire and Humberside* | *East Midlands* | *East Anglia* | *South-west* | *West Midlands* | *North-west* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All residential care | 2,000 | 8,000 | 2,000 | 4,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 4,000 | 3,000 | 4,000 |
| *Type of care* | | | | | | | | | |
| Elderly people | 1,000 | 4,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 |
| Very dependent elderly | 1,000 | 3,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 |
| Mental illness | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Mental handicap | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Drug or alcohol dependence | — | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Physical disability above pension age | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Any other category | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some totals may not tally.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Regions are Government Standard Statistical Regions.
5. Regional figures quoted exclude cases with the Greater London Extension.

*B. By range of charge and type of care*

| | *All residential care* | *Elderly people* | *Very dependent elderly* | *Mental illness* | *Mental handicap* | *Drug or alcohol dependence* | *Physical disability above pension age* | *Any other category* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Cases with charges:* | | | | | | | | |
| Above weekly Income Support limit | 34,000 | 15,000 | 15,000 | 1,000 | — | 1,000 | 1,000 | — |
| *of which above weekly Income Support limit by:* | | | | | | | | |
| £0.01 to £13.10 | 17,000 | 6,000 | 10,000 | — | — | — | — | — |
| £13.10 to £15.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £15.01 to £25.00 | 4,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | — | — | — | — | — |
| £25.01 to £35.00 | 5,000 | 3,000 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — |
| £35.01 to £45.00 | 2,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — |
| £45.01 to £55.00 | 2,000 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £55.01 to £65.00 | 1,000 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £65.01 to £75.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £75.01 to £85.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £85.01 to £95.01 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £95.01 to £105.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £105.01 and over | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some totals may not tally.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Regions are Government Standard Statistical Regions.
5. Regional figures quoted exclude cases with the Greater London Extension.

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many men in residential homes aged 65 years and over receiving preserved rights to income support in the *(a)* elderly people, *(b)* very dependent elderly, *(c)* mental illness, *(d)* mental handicap, *(e)* drug and alcohol dependent, *(f)* physical disability over pension age and *(g)* any other condition category had weekly charges above the income support limit by (i) £0.01 to £13.10, (ii) £13.11 to £15, (iii) £15.01 to £25, (iv) £25.01 to £35, (v) £35.01 to £45, (vi) £45.01 to £55, (vii) £55.01 to £65, (viii) £65.01 to £75, (ix) £75.01 to £85, (x) £85.01 to £95, (xi) £95.01 to £105 and (xii) £105.01 over; and if he will give this information for Greater London, by English region excluding Greater London, England as a whole and Great Britain. [7737]

**Mr. Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

*Income support preserved rights cases with weekly accommodation charge above income support limits: men aged 65 and over in residential care homes*

*A. By standard region and type of care*

| | *Great Britain* | *Wales* | *Scotland* | *England* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All residential care | 9,000 | — | 1,000 | 8,000 |
| *Type of care* | | | | |
| Elderly People | 4,000 | — | — | 4,000 |
| Very dependent elderly | 3,000 | — | — | 2,000 |
| Mental illness | 1,000 | — | — | 1,000 |
| Mental handicap | — | — | — | — |
| Drug or alcohol dependence | 1,000 | — | — | 1,000 |
| Physical disability above pension age | — | — | — | 1,000 |
| Any other category | — | — | — | — |

*A. By standard region and type of care*

| | | | | | | | | | *England* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Greater London* | *South-east* | *North* | *Yorkshire and Humberside* | *East Midlands* | *East Anglia* | *South-west* | *West Midlands* | *North-west* |
| All residential care | 1,000 | 2,000 | — | 1,000 | 1,000 | — | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| *Type of care* | | | | | | | | | |
| Elderly people | — | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | 1,000 | — | 1,000 |
| Very dependent elderly | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Mental illness | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Mental handicap | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Drug or alcohol dependence | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Physical disability above pension age | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Any other category | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some totals may not tally.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Regions are Government Standard Statistical Regions.
5. Regional figures quoted exclude cases with the Greater London Extension.

*B. By range of charge and type of care*

| | *All residential care* | *Elderly people* | *Very dependent elderly* | *Mental illness* | *Mental handicap* | *Drug or alcohol dependence* | *Physical disability above pension age* | *Any other category* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Cases with charges:* | | | | | | | | |
| Above weekly Income Support limit | 9,000 | 4,000 | 3,000 | 1,000 | — | 1,000 | — | — |
| *of which above weekly Income Support limit by:* | | | | | | | | |
| £0.01 to £13.10 | 4,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 | — | — | — | — | — |
| £13.10 to £15.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £15.01 to £25.00 | 2,000 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £25.01 to £35.00 | 1,000 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £35.01 to £45.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £45.01 to £55.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £55.01 to £65.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £65.01 to £75.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £75.01 to £85.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £85.01 to £95.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |

*B. By range of charge and type of care*

| | All residential care | Elderly people | Very dependent elderly | Mental illness | Mental handicap | Drug or alcohol dependence | Physical disability above pension age | Any other category |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| £95.01 to £105.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £105.01 and over | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some totals may not tally.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Regions are Government Standard Statistical Regions.
5. Regional figures quoted exclude cases with the Greater London Extension.

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many men in nursing homes aged 65 years and over receiving preserved rights to income support in *(a)* terminal illness, *(b)* physical disability over pension age, *(c)* drug and alcohol dependence, *(d)* mental handicap, *(e)* mental illness and *(f)* any other category had weekly charges above the income support limit by (i) £00.1 to £13.10, (ii) £13.11 to £15, (iii) £15.01 to £25, (iv) £25.01 to £35, (v) £35.01 to £45, (vi) £45.01 to £55, (vii) £55.01 to £65, (viii) £65.01 to £75, (ix) £75.01 to £85, (x) £85.01 to £95, (xi) £95.01 to £105 and (xii) over £105.01 for (1) Greater London and (2) by English region, excluding Greater London, (3) England and (4) Great Britain. [7728]

**Mr. Evans:** Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set at in the table.

*Income support preserved rights cases with weekly accommodation charge above income support limits: men aged 65 and over in nursing homes*

*A. By standard region and type of care*

| | Great Britain | Wales | Scotland | England |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All nursing homes | 9,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 8,000 |
| *Type of care* | | | | |
| Mental illness | — | — | — | — |
| Drug or alcohol dependence | — | — | — | — |
| Mental handicap | — | — | — | — |
| Terminal illness | 3,000 | — | — | 3,000 |
| Physical disability above pension age | 1,000 | — | — | 1,000 |
| Any other category | 4,000 | — | — | 4,000 |

*A. By standard region and type of care* — *England*

| | Greater London | South-east | North | Yorkshire and Humberside | East Midlands | East Anglia | South-west | West Midlands | North-west |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All nursing homes | — | 1,000 | — | 1,000 | 1,000 | — | 1,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 |
| *Type of care* | | | | | | | | | |
| Mental illness | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Drug or alcohol dependence | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Mental handicap | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Terminal illness | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1,000 |
| Physical disability above pension age | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Any other category | — | — | — | 1,000 | 1,000 | — | — | — | 1,000 |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some totals may not tally.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Regions are Government Standard Statistical Regions.
5. Regional figures quoted exclude cases with the Greater London Extension.

*B. By range of charge and type of care*

| | All nursing homes | Mental illness | Drug or alcohol dependence | Mental handicap | Terminal illness | Physical disability above pension age | Any other category |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Cases with charges:* | | | | | | | |
| Above weekly I. S. Limit | 9,000 | — | — | — | 3,000 | 1,000 | 4,000 |
| *Of which above weekly is limit by:* | | | | | | | |
| £0.01 to £13.10 | 4,000 | — | — | — | 2,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 |
| £13.10 to £15.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £15.01 to £25.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | 1,000 |
| £25.01 to £35.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | 1,000 | — | — |
| £35.01 to £45.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £45.01 to £55.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £55.01 to £65.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £65.01 to £75.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £75.01 to £85.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £85.01 to £95.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £95.01 to £105.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £105.01 and over | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some totals may not tally.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Regions are Government Standard Statistical Regions.
5. Regional figures quoted exclude cases with the Greater London Extension.

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women in nursing homes aged 60 years and over receiving preserved rights to income support in *(a)* terminal illness, *(b)* physical disability over pension age, *(c)* drug and alcohol dependence, *(d)* mental handicap, *(e)* mental illness and *(f)* any other category by (i) £00.1 to £13.10, (ii) £13.11 to £15, (iii) £15.01 to £25, (iv) £25.01 to £35, (v) £35.01 to £45, (vi) £45.01 to £55, (vii) £55.01 to £65, (viii) £65.01 to £75, (ix) £75.01 to £85, (x) £85.01 to £95, (xi) £95.01 to £105 and (xii) over £105.01 for (1) Greater London and (2) by English region, excluding Greater London, (3) England and (4) Great Britain. [7730]

**Mr. Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

*Income support preserved rights cases with weekly accommodation charge above income support limits: women aged 60 and over in nursing homes*

*A. By standard region and type of care*

| | Great Britain | Wales | Scotland | England |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All nursing homes | 36,000 | 2,000 | 3,000 | 30,000 |
| *Type of care* | | | | |
| Mental illness | 1,000 | — | — | 1,000 |
| Drug or alcohol dependence | — | — | — | — |
| Mental handicap | — | — | — | 1,000 |
| Terminal illness | 14,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 11,000 |
| Physical disabili··· above pension age | 3,000 | — | — | 3,000 |
| Any other category | 18,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 16,000 |

*A. By standard region and type of care* — *England*

| | Greater London | South-east | North | Yorkshire and Humberside | East Midlands | East Anglia | South-west | West Midlands | North-west |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All nursing homes | 2,000 | 5,000 | 2,000 | 5,000 | 3,000 | 1,000 | 4,000 | 3,000 | 6,000 |
| *Type of care* | | | | | | | | | |
| Mental illness | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Drug or alcohol dependence | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Mental handicap | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Terminal illness | — | 1,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 1,000 | 3,000 |

*A. By standard region and type of care* — *England*

| | Greater London | South-east | North | Yorkshire and Humberside | East Midlands | East Anglia | South-west | West Midlands | North-west |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Physical disability above pension age | — | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Any other category | 1,000 | 3,000 | 1,000 | 3,000 | 2,000 | — | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some totals may not tally.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Regions are Government Standard Statistical Regions.
5. Regional figures quoted exclude cases with the Greater London Extension.

*B. By range of charge and type of care*

| | All nursing homes | Mental illness | Drug or alcohol dependence | Mental handicap | Terminal illness | Physical disability above pension age | Any other category |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Cases with charges:* | | | | | | | |
| Above weekly I. S. Limit | 36,000 | 1,000 | — | — | 14,000 | 3,000 | 18,000 |
| *of which above weekly is limit by:* | | | | | | | |
| £0.01 to £13.10 | 19,000 | 1,000 | — | — | 7,000 | 2,000 | 9,000 |
| £13.10 to £15.00 | 2,000 | — | — | — | 1,000 | — | 1,000 |
| £15.01 to £25.00 | 4,000 | — | — | — | 2,000 | — | 2,000 |
| £25.01 to £35.00 | 4,000 | — | — | — | 2,000 | — | 2,000 |
| £35.01 to £45.00 | 2,000 | — | — | — | 1,000 | — | 1,000 |
| £45.01 to £55.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | 1,000 |
| £55.01 to £65.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | 1,000 |
| £65.01 to £75.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £75.01 to £85.00 | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £85.01 to £95.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £95.01 to £105.00 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| £105.01 and over | 1,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some totals may not tally.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. "—" Denotes nil or neglible.
4. Regions are Government Standard Statistical Regions.
5. Regional figures quoted exclude cases with the Greater London Extension.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents with care ceased to claim income support within four weeks of liable relatives action for each year since 1989. [12072]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information is not available.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the benefit savings due to parents with care ceasing to claim income support were calculated prior to 1993–94. [12073]

**Mr. Evans:** By multiplying the number of income support cases where the reason for cessation was attributable to liable relative action by the amount of benefit in payment and an average anticipated duration for benefit claims.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for income support there were in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale district in each year since 1992. [10873]

**Mr. Evans:** The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many claims for Income Support (IS) there were in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale District in each year since 1992.

The number of IS claims for this District for the calendar years since 1992 are:

1992: 23,698

1993: 20,544

1994: 21,084

1995: 21,160

These figures are provisional and may be subject to change.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost of paying income support for mortgage interest payments in Scotland in each of the

years since 1988–89; and how many households received payments in each of these years. [11142]

**Mr. Evans:** The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Malcolm Chisholm, dated 30 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what was the total cost of paying Income Support for mortgage interest payments in Scotland in each of the years since 1988–89; and how many households received payments in each of these years.

Annex A details the information requested.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

*Annex A: Income Support customers with mortgage interest in Scotland*

| | *Number of cases with mortgage interest* | *Total estimated annual expenditure £ million* |
|---|---|---|
| 1988–89 | 15,000 | 19 |
| 1989–90 | 14,000 | 26 |
| 1990–91 | 18,000 | 33 |
| 1991–92 | 19,000 | 32 |
| 1992–93 | 22,000 | 33 |
| 1993–94 | 23,000 | 32 |
| 1994–95 | 25,000 | 34 |

*Notes:*

1. Cases are rounded to the nearest thousand and expenditure to the nearest million.
2. Estimated annual expenditure is derived by multiplying the number of cases with the average weekly amount then multiplying by 52.
3. For 1993–94 and 1994–95 figures have been used from the 4 quarterly enquiries which show a better estimate for expenditure.

*Source:*

Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiries 1989–1992 and Quarterly Enquiries May 1993–February 1995.

### Divorce

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what calculation he has made of the changes in divorce rates in each 10-year period to 2020 and in 2037. [11635]

**Mr. Heald:** None.

### Marriage

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what calculation he has made of the changes in marriage rates in each 10-year period to 2020 and in 2037. [11634]

**Mr. Heald:** None

### Child Support Agency

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the benefit savings attributable to the Child Support Agency since its establishment would be if they were calculated on the same basis as those forecast in the financial memorandum of the Child Support Bill; and if he will provide a breakdown of the figures. [12074]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** Such estimates cannot be provided until the longer-term incentive effects of the work of the Child Support Agency are known.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the benefit savings attributable to liable relatives action would have been in each year since 1989 if they had been calculated including the 51 multiplier in accordance with the procedures adopted by the Child Support Agency since 1993–94. [12071]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The information is in the list:

1989–90: £270 million

1990–91: £315 million

1991–92: £400 million

1992–93: £440 million

These figures include savings resulting from action to collect spousal maintenance and payments made in respect of sponsored immigrants.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which computer applications contain information relating to clients on the Child Support Agency computer system. [11806]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 30 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency computer applications.

Information relating to Child Support Agency clients is held and maintained only in the database of the main Child Support Computer System.

I hope this is helpful.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many requests he has received from clients of the Child Support Agency for copies of the records held on them by the agency computer system. [11802]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 30 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency records.

From the inception of the Agency in April 1993 to 24 January 1996, a total of 3,634 requests have been received from clients of the Child Support Agency for copies of personal information held about them on the Child Support Computer System.

I hope this is helpful.

### Company Pension Funds

**Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the role of the Pensions Act 1995 in preventing employers appropriating or transferring the surpluses from company pension funds. [12606]

**Mr. Heald:** At present, trustees can approve payments from surplus to employers if they are permitted by scheme rules. The Pensions Act 1995 will no longer allow the trustees of occupational pension schemes to make a payment to the employer from a surplus unless new

statutory requirements are met. In future, the following conditions will have to be met, irrespective of the terms of the scheme rules:

(a) the proposals to eliminate the surplus have been approved by the Inland Revenue;

(b) the trustees are satisfied that it is in the interests of the members for the payment to be made;

(c) the scheme must not be winding up;

(d) all pensions must be increased annually in line with inflation up to 5 per cent. for both past and future service;

(e) the employer has agreed that a payment should be made to him;

(f) members must be notified in accordance with prescribed requirements of the intention to make a payment from surplus to the employer.

The Act also provides that if a payment is made to an employer in breach of the statutory requirements, the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority may apply to the High Court—the Court of Session in Scotland—for an order to restore the funds to the scheme.

We have announced our intention to bring these requirements into force from April 1997.

### Compensation Recovery Unit

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of state benefits regained by the compensation recovery unit in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland in each of the past three years. [11541]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column 108, about the compensation recovery unit, if he will list the parties which were consulted in late 1995. [12484]

**Mr. Evans:** The information has been placed in the Library.

### Women's Incomes

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate his Department has made of the average income of women over the age of 25 years who are *(a)* widowed, *(b)* single and *(c)* in a partnership for each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement. [12264]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** Such information as is available is in the table. These figures show average household income after adjustment for household size and composition. These figures are used rather than individual income as the latter does not reflect all the income available to women in households; some income components can also not readily be attributed to individuals.

*Average household equivalised incomes of women over the age of 25 who are widowed, single and in partnerships*

*Equivalent monetary values in £s per week*

| | *Before housing costs* | | | *After housing costs* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Widows* | *Singles* | *Women in couples* | *Widows* | *Singles* | *Women in couples* |
| 1981 | — | 168 | 207 | — | 152 | 180 |
| 1987 | — | 205 | 251 | — | 186 | 218 |
| 1988–89 | — | 207 | 273 | — | 189 | 240 |
| 1990–91 | — | 207 | 293 | — | 189 | 258 |
| 1991–92 | 194 | 215 | 294 | 182 | 195 | 259 |
| 1992–93 | 194 | 218 | 296 | 180 | 196 | 262 |

1. The information in the table is derived from the Households Below Average Incomes' datasets.
2. Information for widows is not available before 1991. Figures for single women includes women who are single and never married, divorced, separated and widows. In 1981, 1987 and 1988–89 information for women in couples covers married women only; women who were co-habiting are counted as single women. Information for couples for later years includes married women and women who are co-habiting.
3. Estimates are of mean weekly household equivalised disposable income. For further information about equivalisation see appendix 4 of Households Below Average Income 1979–1992–93—a copy of which is in the Library. Figures are given to the nearest whole £ and are in March 1995 prices.
4. All estimates are subject to sampling error.
5. Figures for 1988–89, 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93 are for two calendar years data combined.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Thursday 1 February 1996*

## ENVIRONMENT

### Housing Need

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the *(a)* organisations, *(b)* individuals and *(c)* charities that responded to the "Access to Local Government and Housing Association Tenancies" consultation paper published in January 1994 were in favour of the proposals (i) that someone should not be found to be in need of assistance where there is alternative accommodation available, (ii) that the duty of a local authority towards someone needing assistance should be to secure accommodation for a limited period and
(iii) that the private rental sector be used to accommodate more homeless households. [12139]

**Mr. Clappison:** Nearly 80 per cent. of the 10,000 responses to the consultation paper were from members of the public. A further 10 per cent. were from local charities, churches and other voluntary groups. The next two largest groups of respondents were local housing authorities, 3 per cent., and housing associations, 2 per cent.

Only one in five responses commented on any specific proposal in the consultation paper. The majority of respondents expressed opinions about the supposed effects of the proposals as a whole on households accepted as homeless under the new duty. Fewer than 5 per cent. commented on the proposal that households should be ineligible for assistance if there is alternative accommodation available. Our analysis of the responses did not yield quantitative data for (ii) and (iii).

### Tenants (Drug Dealing)

**Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about powers available to local authorities to remove tenants convicted of drug dealing. [12564]

**Mr. Clappison:** Local authorities have powers under section 84 of the Housing Act 1985, and ground 2 of schedule 2 to that Act, to evict tenants who have been convicted of using their homes for illegal purposes, such as drug dealing.

### Negative Equity

**Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households in each region are currently in negative equity. [12568]

**Mr. Clappison:** Estimates of negative equity are sensitive to underlying assumptions made, such as changes in house prices. Using the Department's house price index, adjusted for the mix of different dwelling types, it is estimated that the total number of households in negative equity in each English region in the third quarter of 1995 was as follows:

| *Region* | *Number of households* |
|---|---|
| South east | 383,000 |
| Greater London | 180,000 |
| South west | 112,000 |
| East Anglia | 50,000 |
| East Midlands | 40,000 |
| West Midlands | 89,000 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 47,000 |
| North west | 52,000 |
| North | 24,000 |

These estimates provide only a very broad indication of the number of households in negative equity. The suitability of the assumptions used in compiling estimates of negative equity is currently under review.

### Domestic Heating

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the percentage of extra fuel which is required to heat identical houses in *(a)* Rochdale and *(b)* the north-west of England using the Building Research Establishment domestic energy model and taking Bristol as the base case. [13103]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** The percentage of extra fuel required to heat a typical house with gas central heating is estimated to be as follows for each of the specified locations:

(a) Rochdale +9 per cent. and

(b) the North West of England:
between +9 per cent. and +15 per cent. depending on precise location.

These figures have been calculated using the Building Research Establishment domestic energy model and taking Bristol as the base case.

### Council House Rents

**Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to cap rebate reimbursement to local authorities which set council housing rents above the guideline figure determined by his Department. [13147]

**Mr. Clappison:** The limit on rent rebate subsidy formed part of the 1996–97 housing revenue account subsidy determination which was issued on 22 December 1995. Authorities which keep their rent increases within the guideline increase will be unaffected, as will authorities which keep their rents below the guideline rent for 1996–97.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change the 1995–96 cash limit for Ordnance Survey. [13399]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary spring supplementary estimate for Ordnance Survey, class VII, vote 7, the cash limit will be increased by a token £1,000 from £16,984,000 to

£16,985,000, and the net running costs limit will be decreased by £918,000 from £13,465,000 to £12,547,000, reflecting an excess of increased running costs related receipts over increased gross running costs expenditure on the vote.

**Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change his Department's cash and running cost limits for 1995–96. [13544]

**Mr. Gummer:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the following cash limit changes will be made.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 1—housing and construction, England—covering sections B, C, D and G of that vote, will be decreased by £1,237,000 from £112,415,000 to £111,178,000. This change partially offsets the increased demand for tax relief grant which is administered by the Housing Corporation and is not cash limited.

The DOE/HC—Housing Corporation—cash limit will be increased by £51,000 from £1,149,038,000 to £1,149,089,000 through the take-up of entitlement to end year flexibility for capital spending on the approved development programme as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 1995, *Official Report,* column *776.*

The cash limit for class VII, vote 2, RCW—regeneration and countryside and wildlife—will be increased by £581,000 from £1,520,799,000 to £1,521,380,000. The changes reflect the transfer of £833,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry to support the coalfield strategic fund for an extension to Dearne Valley college; a transfer to the Home Office of £75,000 to support three safer cities projects in Wales and a reduction of £177,000 to allow supplementary credit approvals to be issued in respect of English Partnerships from the RCW non-voted cash limit.

The non-voted cash limit for regeneration and countryside and wildlife will be increased by £758,000 from £1,503,516,000 to £1,504,274,000. The changes reflect the transfer of £833,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry to support the coalfield strategic fund for an extension to Dearne Valley college and a transfer of £75,000 to the Home Office to support three safer cities projects in Wales.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 3—environmental protection and water—covering sections A, B, C, D, F and G will be increased by £1,444,000. This change will cover increased grant in aid to the British Waterways Board and will be funded by take-up of part of the entitlement to capital end of year flexibility as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 1995, *Official Report,* column *776.* There will be an increase of £1,640,000 in the external financing limit for the British Waterways Board, made up of £1,444,000 arising from the end of year flexibility entitlement shown above and a virement between sub-heads within the vote of £196,000.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 4—local government and planning, England—covering sections A to F of that vote, will be reduced by £300,000 from £30,087,110,000 to £30,086,810,000. This change is to allow savings due to lower than planned activity on section D—planning and minerals research—to be transferred to class VII, vote 1—housing and construction, England and Energy Efficiency Office—to partially offset the increased demand for tax relief grant.

The DOE/LGR—local government reorganisation—cash limit will be reduced by £11,140,000 from £76,696,000 to £65,556,000. This change reflects lower than anticipated applications from local authorities for supplementary credit approvals to offset the abatement and recovery of housing revenue account subsidy in respect of Greater London Council deemed debt.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 5—Administration—will be increased by £7,718,000 from £226,100,000 to £233,818,000. This change reflects the transfer of provision from Property Holdings to DOE of £5,481,000 for the relocation of the Department's headquarters, the take-up of £2,000,000 of end year flexibility entitlement for capital expenditure, as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 1995, *Official Report,* column *776,* to cover the costs of faster than expected progress on the relocation project and various other small changes of responsibility between the Department and other parts of Government.

Overall, the Department's gross running cost limit will be reduced by £2,339,000 from £228,854,000 to £226,515,000. This reflects the capitalisation of the costs of early retirements and transfers of responsibility to other parts of Government.

Property Holdings' gross running cost limit will be increased by £212,000 from £19,863,000 to £20,075,000. The increase represents a transfer from DOE.

The Office of Water Services gross running cost limit will be increased by £170,000 from £8,539,000 to £8,709,000. This will not result in an increase in the cash limit.

All the increases will be offset either by savings, transfers from other Government Departments or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

## TRANSPORT

### Coventry Air Crash

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action *(a)* has been or *(b)* will be taken against Air Algerie in respect of its not applying for permits. [12173]

**Mr. Norris:** Under the Air Navigation (No. 2) Order 1995, a permit can be issued to the operator of the aircraft or the charterer of the aircraft or to the Government of the country in which the aircraft is registered. In this particular case, responsibility for obtaining permits for the cargo charter flights operated from Coventry in December 1994 rested with the UK charterer, Phoenix Aviation. Applications were received from this company but insufficient documentation was supplied to enable a permit to be issued.

In light of the fact that flights operated without the necessary permits, the Department in conjunction with the Civil Aviation Authority conducted an investigation into the circumstances of the flights to determine whether

there should be any prosecution action. However, Phoenix Aviation were placed in liquidation before any charges could be laid.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he proposes to modify the flight permit scheme to ensure compliance in accordance with recommendations of the air accident investigation branch's accident report on the Air Algerie Boeing 737 accident at Coventry in December 1994. [12174]

**Mr. Norris:** My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping announced on 10 January that the Department had amended its procedures for the approval of wet leased aircraft—aircraft leased with crew—in accordance with the recommendation made by the air accident investigation branch. These amended procedures will require the provision of a statement from the applicant airline as to which airline's operations and flight manuals will be applicable to the proposed flight. This change will clarify responsibilities as regards future applications involving the use of wet leased aircraft.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he will be taking as a result of the recent report into the Coventry air crash in December 1994. [12956]

**Mr. Norris:** My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping announced on 10 January that the Department had reviewed its permit procedures as recommended by air accident investigation branch and taken action to amend the procedures for the approval of the operation of wet leased aircraft—aircraft leased with crew—by foreign aircraft. These amended procedures require the provision of a statement from the applicant airline as to which airline operations and flight manuals will be applicable for the proposed flight. This change will clarify permit responsibilities as regards future applications involving the use of wet leased aircraft.

### Newbury Bypass

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the present total estimated cost for the construction of the Newbury bypass; [12733]

(2) when he expects the Highways Agency to publish details of the cost-benefit analysis carried out in respect of the Newbury bypass; [12747]

(3) what actions the Highways Agency has taken to ensure that security personnel employed by contractors clearing the route of the Newbury bypass have adequate training. [12746]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Cynog Dafis, dated 1 February 1995:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the Newbury Bypass.

Reliance Security Services, the security firm employed on the Newbury Bypass scheme, are employed directly by the site clearance contractor. It is a requirement of the Highways Agency that all sub-contracted security companies are members of the British Security Industry Association and that they conform to British Standard 7499 covering static guards and mobile patrols.

The cost benefit analysis for the scheme was presented to the Public Inquiries held in 1988. That analysis showed the scheme to be very good value for money, that is still the case. The total estimated cost of the scheme is £101 million, excluding VAT.

### Public Service Vehicle Drivers

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many public service vehicle drivers' licences have been *(a)* applied for, *(b)* issued, *(c)* objected to by (i) the police, (ii) the public and (iii) others, *(d)* issued and *(e)* withdrawn by the authorities in the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on trends. [12870]

**Mr. Norris:** In the year from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995 the total number of vocational drivers licences issued was 167,650 of which we estimate 33,530 were public service vehicle drivers' licences. This figure includes provisional licences, renewals and replacements as well as new licences. During the same period, 59 licence applications were refused, 24 licences were suspended and 108 licences were revoked by traffic commissioners on grounds of the applicant's conduct record. There is no right of objection to the issue of driver licences but all relevant representations are considered by the traffic commissioners.

There is no consistent trend over the last four years.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further measures he proposes to take to prevent assaults on children by public service vehicle drivers. [12875]

**Mr. Norris:** The traffic commissioners for each area take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that drivers whose conduct suggests they are unsuitable cannot be bus drivers. The primary responsibility for the safety of children in their charge rests with the schools and local education authorities.

### Bus Company Mergers

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding Pendle borough council's decision to sell its 50 per cent. stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport. [12836]

**Mr. Norris:** Burnley borough council wrote to the Department last October. The hon. Members for Burnley and for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) spoke during the Adjournment debate on this subject on 13 December, and a number of questions has been answered from those hon. Members. Otherwise I have received no representations on this matter.

### Passengers (Buses and Coaches)

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the present policy regarding standing passengers on *(a)* buses and *(b)* coaches; what assessment he has made of the benefits of renewing this policy; and if he will make a statement. [12838]

**Mr. Norris:** The carriage of standing passengers in both buses and coaches is strictly controlled by the Public Service Vehicles (Carrying Capacity) Regulations 1984. Both seating and standing capacities must be marked clearly on the vehicle. Vehicles intended to carry more than eight standing passengers must meet minimum

requirements for both standing space and headroom. Sufficient hand grips must be fitted for each standing passenger.

We are currently consulting on a draft code of practice on the operation of one-man operated buses, which includes the measures for standing passengers. I shall be considering the safety of standing passengers, along with the other provisions of the code, in the light of that consultation.

### Rail Maintenance Contracts

**Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment is made by Railtrack of the financial soundness of a contractor before a maintenance contract is let. [12850]

**Mr. Watts:** I understand that, before Railtrack lets a maintenance contract, all prospective bidders who have expressed an interest are required to go through a pre-qualification process, including an assessment of their financial stability and robustness as well as their competence to do the work and their track record.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits and running cost limits; and what proposals there are to change the cash limit of the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Office of the Rail Regulator for 1995–96. [13611]

**Sir George Young:** (i) The cash limit for class VI, vote 2—administration and transport services—is reduced by £2,388,000 from £177,405,000 to £175,017,000. The reduction is made up of transfers to class VI, vote 3, £1,700,000, vote 7, £601,000, and the Department of the Environment, class VII, vote 5), £87,000.

(ii) The cash limit for class VI, vote 3—transport industries—is increased by £1,700,000 from £8,000,000 to £9,700,000. The increase is wholly made up of transfers from class VI, vote 2.

(iii) The cash limit for class VI, vote 4—Vehicle and Driver Licensing Agency—is reduced by £3,000,000 from £176,549,000 to £173,549,000. The reduction is wholly derived from transfers to class VI, vote 7.

(iv) The cash limit for class VI, vote 5—roads and local transport—is reduced by £2,150,000 from £514,765,000 to £512,615,000. The reduction is wholly made up of transfers to class VI, vote 3.

(v) The cash limit for class VI, vote 6—other transport agencies—is increased by £275,000 from £81,816,000 to £82,091,000. The whole of the increase comprises a transfer of funds from the Ministry of Defence, class 1, vote 1, to the Coastguard agency for stationing a search and rescue helicopter at Portland.

(vi) The cash limit for class VI, vote 7—passenger rail services—is increased by £98,878,000 from £1,620,604,000 to £1,719,482,000. £75,000,000 is funded from non-voted provision for the railways. The remainder comprises £20,277,000 as a claim on the reserve and a transfer of funds from class VI, votes 2 and 4—£3,601,000. The additional provision is required for consultancies and restructuring proposals.

(vii) The Department of Transport local authority capital cash limit has been increased by £3,796,000 from £353,906,000 to £357,702,000. This completes take up of capital end year flexibility entitlement as announced by the Chief Secretary on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *776–82*.

(viii) The Department of Transport running costs limit has been reduced by £1,579,000 from £413,464,000 to £411,885,000 and the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising running costs limit has been increased by £1,492,000 from £4,672,000 to £6,164,000. The changes in the Department of Transport running costs limit reflect salary payments for staff transferring to the Central Transport Group, £87,000 from the Department of Environment and restructuring and relocation costs, £1,492,000 for the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising.

The overall increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Central Rail Users Consultative Committee

**Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the appointment of the new chairman of the Central rail users consultative committee. [13610]

**Mr. Watts:** I have today announced the appointment of Mr. David Bertram as the new chairman of the committee.

### Lockerbie

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *391–92*, and the letter from Dr. Jim Swire, spokesman of UK Family-Flight 103, dated 22 January, what considerations led him to conclude that a fatal accident inquiry was a suitable substitute for a public inquiry into the destruction of PA103. [13001]

**Mr. Norris:** The fatal accident inquiry was a detailed examination of the circumstances of the deaths. It was held entirely in public.

### Central Railway plc

**Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in respect of how many of the applications rules under the Transport and Works Act 1992 Central Railway plc has applied for waivers or conditional waivers; and what estimate he has made of the effect on the quality and quantity of information provided in support of the Central Railway application under the Act if the waiver were granted. [12573]

**Mr. Watts:** Central Railway plc has withdrawn all its waivers' applications. I understand that it intends to submit fresh applications in a modified form. As stated in my reply to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on 31 January, copies of any future waiver requests in respect of the Central Railway project will be placed in the Library of the House. In deciding whether to grant any waivers, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have regard to the effect on the quality and quantity of information which would be provided in support of Central Railway's application.

## DEFENCE

### Bosnia

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the pontoon bridge established by the implementation force—IFOR—across the River Sava from Croatia into north-eastern Bosnia is available for use by non-governmental organisation aid traffic. [12199]

**Mr. Soames:** We understand that the bridges established across the Sava river into the US divisional area of IFOR are available for use by NGO convoys, although priority is given to IFOR traffic.

### Officer Training Recruits

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of recruits accepted for direct entry to officer training come from *(a)* public and *(b)* private sector education. [12182]

**Mr. Soames:** The percentage of recruits accepted for direct officer training in each of the three services which came from the public and private education sectors in 1994–95, the latest period for which figures are available, is shown in the table.

| *Service* | *Private sector Per cent.* | *Public sector Per cent.* |
|---|---|---|
| Royal Navy | 29 | 71 |
| Army | 50 | 47 |
| Royal Air Force | 26 | 74 |

In addition, 3 per cent. of the total direct entrant officer recruits to the Army came from overseas.

### Belize

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military aid the United Kingdom gives to Belize; and what treaty arrangements it has with the Government of Belize. [12254]

**Mr. Soames:** Belize is an independent country within the Commonwealth. Since 1 January 1994, Belize has had responsibility for its own defence. We have, however, assured the Government of Belize of our readiness to take part in consultations leading to an appropriate response should the security of Belize be threatened in the future.

We have made it clear that we shall continue our programme of assistance for the development of the Belize defence force to sustain and improve the force's capability through the provision of loan service personnel, equipment, training and advice. In addition, Belize continues to receive substantial amounts of British aid.

### Lethal Weapons (Northern Ireland)

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the value of lethal weapons that have been lost, stolen or unaccounted for in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; and what were the main weapons involved. [12577]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The number of weapons lost or stolen in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years is as follows:

1991: Nil
1992: Nil
1993: 2 x SA 80
1 x pistol
1994: 4 x pistols
1995: Nil

The aggregate value is estimated at approximately £3,300.

Over the period, some seven additional weapons were lost or stolen and subsequently recovered. No weapons were otherwise unaccounted for.

### Gulf War Medal with Bar

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed services personnel were awarded the Gulf war medal with bar. [13014]

**Mr. Soames:** Based on the latest figures available at 31 December 1995, 58,546 Gulf war medals have been issued to armed forces personnel. Of these, 66 service personnel were awarded the medal with clasp "2 Aug 1990" for their service with the Kuwait liaison team in Kuwait on 2 August 1990. A further 46,120 service personnel were awarded the medal with clasp "16 Jan–28 Feb 1991" for service in the Kuwait theatre of operations.

### Cash and Operating Cost Limits

**Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on changes to the class I cash limits and operating costs limit for 1995–96. [13549]

**Mr. Soames:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the spring supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

*Class I cash limits*

*£000*

| *Vote* | *Current cash limit* | *Change* | *Revised cash limit* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 10,796,956 | +199,050 | 10,996,006 |
| 2 | 4,957,988 | –200,000 | 4,757,988 |
| 3 | 5,965,325 | +6,310 | 5,971,635 |

These changes increase the block defence cash limit by £5,360,000 from £21,720,269,000 to £21,725,629,000. It reflects the net effect of transfers between the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments.

The Ministry of Defence operating costs limit will also be increased by £5,360,000 from £16,767,218,000 to £16,772,578,000 to reflect the net effect of transfers between the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments.

### Gulf War Syndrome

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now commission an independent inquiry into the incidence of birth deformities among children of Gulf war veterans; and if he will make a statement. [13007]

**Mr. Soames:** I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 30 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *607–8*.

### Royal Flight

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flights by No. 32 the Royal Squadron have been charged to the privy purse in the current financial year to date; what sum has been so charged; on what basis the charge is calculated; what is the charge per *(a)* hour and *(b)* mile; and what was the cost of the flight from Norwich to Zurich on 2 January. [13008]

**Mr. Soames:** In the current financial year to date, members of the royal family have undertaken eight private flights in aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron, for which the MOD has charged the relevant households £9,544.67

The basis of the charge is the marginal cost of operating the aircraft for the particular flight—fuel consumption, for example. The rates for each of the aircraft types are as follows:

*1 April 1995–30 September 1995*

BAe 146: £1,870 per hour

HS 125: £630 per hour

Wessex: £1,325 per hour

*1 October 1995 onwards*

BAe: £1,780 per hour

HS 125: £665 per hour

Wessex: £1,460 per hour

As the costs of flying are a function of time rather than distance, charges are calculated on a cost per hour basis, not cost per mile. We do not maintain records of, or utilise, cost per mile figures as they would not represent a useful basis for cost calculation or comparison purposes.

My Department will levy a charge of £1,584 for the flight from RAF Mildenhall to Zurich on 2 January: of this sum, £1,232 will be a charge to the royal household, and £352 a charge to the Metropolitan police for the two personal protection officers accompanying the party. My recent answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 23 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *136*, did not make the distinction between these two elements of the cost to be reimbursed to my Department.

### Language Training

**Mr. George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving military personnel have received advanced language training within the responsibility of his Department in each of the last 10 years; and if he will indicate the figures for each language taught. [12817]

**Mr. Soames:** The information requested for the last 10 years is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The figures provided are for the financial years 1993–94, 1994–95 and the programmed figures for 1995–96. They relate to advanced—previously linguist—and interpreter level courses delivered by the Defence school of languages at Beaconsfield, Salmond house training centre in Germany as well as individual external language training.

a. *Defence School of Languages*

RUSSIAN

FY 1995–96: 29

FY 1994–95: 29

FY 1993–94: 34

ARABIC

FY 1995–96: 27

FY 1994–95: 32

FY 1993–94: 18

b. *Salmond House Training Centre*

GERMAN

FY 1995–96: 21

FY 1994–95: 19

FY 1993–94: 13

c. *Individual Language Training*

FY 1995–96: 74

FY 1994–95: 81

FY 1993–94: 48

Training was carried out in the following languages: Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese—Mandarin—Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, Flemish, German, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Nepali, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Slovak, Turkish and Ukranian.

### Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current salary of the chief executive of the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation at Gosport; and what it will be from 1 April. [12525]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The current salary of chief executive is that of a Royal Navy captain in the range £47,000 to £57,700.

The Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation defence agency's triennial review has now been completed and has confirmed that the NARO should continue as a defence agency for a further term of three years with effect from 1 April 1996. The evaluation study into the performance of the agency during its first three years—a copy of the executive summary of which has been placed in the Library of the House—reported that the agency was competently meeting its objectives and satisfying its customers but would benefit from the introduction of best management practices from the private sector. A new chief executive will, accordingly, be recruited through open competition to take up appointment in April 1996, or as soon thereafter as possible. He/she will be required to introduce a challenging programme of efficiencies within NARO and to explore the scope for greater private sector involvement in helicopter repair. The details of this new post, including remuneration, have yet to be finalised.

A revised framework document is in preparation and will be completed once the new chief executive is in post and the necessary delegation have been approved. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House at that time.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Belize

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the value of British aid to Belize over the last five years. [12097]

**Mr. Hanley:** Aid to Belize over the last five years for which records are available, has been

1990–91: £6.016 million

1991–92; £3.674 million

1992–93: £4.498 million

1993–94: £5.966 million

1994–95: £16.618 million

The increase in aid provided in 1994–95 is due primarily to the disbursement of a CDC loan of £10.4 million to the Belize Electric Co. Ltd. for a hydro-electric power facility on the Macal river.

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list current aid and preferential trade arrangements with Belize. [12093]

**Mr. Hanley:** Belize receives concessional aid from Britain and the European Union under the Lomé convention. Other donors include Taiwan and Kuwait. Belize is also a borrowing member of the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and Caribbean Development Bank. Preferential trade arrangements include the European Community's generalised system of preferences and, under the terms of the Lomé convention, tariff-free access to Community markets for industrial products, and preferential access for a wide range of agricultural goods.

### Joint Funding Scheme

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of the recommendation in the Overseas Development Administration's fundamental expenditure review on agencies receiving £750,000 or more per year from the joint funding scheme; what considerations led the Overseas Development Administration to select the threshold figure; and what considerations were given to lower thresholds. [12242]

**Mr. Hanley:** The figure of £750,000 was selected after considering a range of options. No particular significance attaches to the figure: it simply produced a limited number of non-governmental organisations who had been major recipients of joint funding scheme funds over a sustained period and with whom we intend to begin exploring the possibilities of moving to block grant arrangements.

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if money disbursed via the joint funding scheme will, following the Overseas Development Administration's fundamental expenditure review, be limited to countries within the Overseas Development Administration's new focus. [12255]

**Mr. Hanley:** We do not anticipate any significant change in the geographical cover of the joint funding scheme as a result of the fundamental expenditure review.

### Police Officers (Training)

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the Nigerian police officers who have undergone study tours in the United Kingdom since 1985, in each case indicating the officer's rank and the date of *(a)* commencement and *(b)* completion of the training. [12566]

**Mr. Hanley:** There have been seven study tours, that is sponsored visits as opposed to classroom training, all in 1992. There are no records prior to 1990. The details are as follows:

| *Name* | *Rank* | *Duration of visit* |
|---|---|---|
| Mr. S. Adeoye | Assistant Commissioner of Police | 27 November 1992–8 December 1992 |
| Mr. E. B. Edemeka | Deputy Superintendent of Police | 27 November 1992–8 December 1992 |
| Mr. O. J. Ekama | Deputy Commissioner | 27 November 1992–8 December 1992 |
| Mr. D. K. Isiofia | Assistant Superintendent of Police | 27 November 1992–8 December 1992 |
| Mr. E. J. James | Deputy Superintendent of Police | 27 November 1992–8 December 1992 |
| Mr. Z. Muazu | Assistant Superintendent of Police | 27 November 1992–8 December 1992 |
| Mr. M. C. Okoye | Assistant Superintendent of Police | 27 November 1992–8 December 1992 |

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the Nigerian police officers who have been trained in Britain since 1985, giving each officer's rank and date of *(a)* commencement and *(b)* completion of the training. [12565]

**Mr. Hanley:** Twenty-one Nigerian police officers have received ODA funded training in the United Kingdom since 1990. There are no records prior to this date. The further details requested have been placed in the Libraries of the house.

*Details of ODA funded training provided in the United Kingdom for Nigerian police officers between 1990–91 and 1994–95*

| *Name* | *Rank* | *Duration of training* |
|---|---|---|
| Mr. B. Madake | Deputy Superintendent | 26 October 1990–2 December 1990 |
| Mr. B. D. Odigie | Deputy Superintendent | 29 October 1990–2 December 1990 |
| Mr. Salami | Chief Superintendent | 26 September 1991–8 November 1991 |
| Mr. Adeoye | Chief Superintendent | 26 September 1991–15 December 1991 |
| Mr. N. L. Hussein | Superintendent | 2 November 1992–11 December 1992 |
| Mr. B. Benjamin | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |
| Mr. T. Chenbap | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |
| Ms H. Ugochukwi | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |
| Mr. S. Gambo | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |

*Details of ODA funded training provided in the United Kingdom for Nigerian police officers between 1990–91 and 1994–95*

| *Name* | *Rank* | *Duration of training* |
|---|---|---|
| Mr. K. Gwarzo | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |
| Mr. L. Oki | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |
| Mr. U. Ntenborg | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |
| Mr. A. Yahaya | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |
| Mr. P. Ukoyono | Assistant Superintendent | 15 July 1993–27 July 1993 |
| Mr. P. Ebo | Assistant Commissioner | 5 June 1994–2 July 1994 |
| Mr. S. F. Abdullahi | Deputy Superintendent | 5 June 1994–2 July 1994 |
| Mr. M. Isa-Adejo | Detective | 5 June 1994–2 July 1994 |
| Mr. M. Yakubu | Detective | 5 June 1994–2 July 1994 |
| Mr. Onyeguiri | Deputy Superintendent | 5 June 1994–2 July 1994 |
| Mr. A. Dikko | Deputy Superintendent | 5 June 1994–2 July 1994 |
| Mr. O. J. Ekama | Deputy Commissioner | 26 March 1995–2 April 1995 |

### External Finance Limit (Commonwealth Development Corporation)

**Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what external finance limit has been set for the current financial year for the Commonwealth Development Corporation. [13718]

**Mr. Hanley:** The external finance limit for the CDC for 1995–96 is being increased by £10,000,000, from £19,000,000 to £29,000,000. The limit takes account of an increase to the provision for CDC in class II, vote 5 provision for which is made in the spring supplementary estimate. This increase is being met by transfer of resources within the vote and does not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in the 1995–96 cash and running cost limits for expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration. [13719]

**Mr. Hanley:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on the external assistance vote, class II, vote 5, will be increased by £10,390,000 from £1,764,277,000 to £1,774,667,000 and the ODA running cost limit will be increased by £400,000 from £73,993,000 to £74,393,000. The increase is in respect of: a balance of underspending against European Community budgetary aid for central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in 1993 and overspending for developing countries in 1994; an increase of £400,000 for ODA running costs in respect of a partial take up of end of year flexibility entitlements announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *776–82;* an increase of £78,000 for expected costs for the Crown Agents privatisation programme; and an inward PES transfer of £300,000 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing in respect of the know-how fund. The increase will be offset by a transfer and a claim on the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Deep-sea Fish

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of action needed to implement the recommendations of Dr. Martin Angel of Southampton's report on "Deep-Sea Fish and their Habits". [11740]

**Mr. Hanley:** In 1990, the ODA commissioned a series of papers, by Dr. Martin Angel and other specialists in aquatic biodiversity, to inform the preparation of an ODA biodiversity strategy. In 1995, ODA commissioned these authors to update their papers. The report was presented to countries at the second conference of the parties to the biodiversity convention last year to help stimulate debate. The findings of Dr. Angel's report will inform ODA's future programme but as the report goes wider than ODA's responsibilities, the ODA will be consulting other Government Departments on its follow-up.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Civil Servants (Directorships)

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those civil servants in his Department who hold non-executive directorships in private companies, indicating in each case the civil service post held and the name of the company. [10923]

**Mr. Hanley:** Any staff holding non-executive or other directorships are required to make a declaration if they come into contact in an official capacity with a business concern in which they have an interest, or if the business concern has concluded or may conclude a contract with a Government Department.

Any such declarations are carefully considered and the papers kept on the individual's personnel file. We are unable to provide a list without incurring disproportionate cost.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given in another place on 22 January by the Minister for Overseas Development, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column *51*.

### Antigua and Barbuda

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the authorities of *(a)* Antigua and *(b)* Barbuda to prohibit the right of public access to beaches on these islands. [12876]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** None.

### Departmental Entertainment Costs

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost to his Department in each of the last five financial

years and this year to date of the entertainment of foreign dignitaries. [12880]

**Mr. Hanley:** Expenditure on official entertainment by the FCO—diplomatic and aid wings—for the years requested was as follows:

1990–91: £5,178,849
1991–92: £5,700,606
1992–93: £6,946,298
1993–94: £7,488,121
1994–95: £7,680,934
1995–96: £8,213,136 (projected)

This expenditure has been incurred both in the UK and at 222 posts worldwide in the pursuit of the foreign policy and trade promotion objectives of Her Majesty's Government. Information about expenditure on particular categories of guest is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### EU General Affairs Council

**Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU General Affairs Council held on 29 to 30 January. [13110]

**Mr. David Davis:** The A points listed in document 4564/96—which will be deposited in the Library of the House as soon as it is available—were adopted, except for items 2 and 26 which were withdrawn by the presidency.

The Council took note of the European Parliament resolutions in Docs. 12131/95 and 12945/95, PE-RE 83 and 89. Copies of these documents will be deposited in the Library of the House as soon as they are available.

The Council held an open, televised debate on the Italian presidency's programme.

The Council discussed former Yugoslavia. It heard reports from Carl Bildt and the EU's administrator in Mostar, Mr. Koschnick. The Council decided to postpone the question of recognition of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It asked the commission to produce a paper on policy towards the region by March.

The Commission outlined their ideas for a possible new agreement with Albania. They will produce draft negotiating directives no later than the Foreign Affairs Council on 25 and 26 March.

The Presidency and the Commission gave a brief situation report on the follow up to the Barcelona conference on Mediterranean. The Council also discussed the MEDA regulation on assistance to the Mediterranean. This was remitted to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further work.

The head of the EU election unit monitoring the Palestinian elections, Carl Lidbom, briefed the Council, which adopted conclusions on EU/Palestinian relations.

The Council discussed the Asia-Europe meeting on 1 and 2 March in Bangkok.

The Council adopted conclusions on a proposed trade agreement with South Africa. These note the Commission's commitment to produce studies to enable approval of a mandate at the 26 and 27 February Foreign Affairs Council, with a view to concluding by June.

The presidency noted the latest applications for membership of the EU received in December and January from Lithuania, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia and agreed to invite the Commission to begin work on the options.

The Council adopted conclusions on the appointment of an EU special envoy to the great lakes region of Africa.

The Council agreed a declaration condemning the 27 January coup d'état in Niger. Ministers also discussed the situation in East Timor and Cyprus.

On 30 January, there were Association Councils with Bulgaria and the Czech Republic. The troika also had a political dialogue meeting with Albania.

No votes were taken at this Council.

### Mr. Niaz Ahmed

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he expects a decision to be taken on an application made to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad by Mr. Niaz Ahmed, Ref: Imm/C8853, to join his wife and daughters in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement; [12953]

(2) when he expects to make a recommendation to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad regarding the application by Mr. Niaz Ahmed, Ref: Imm/C8853, to join his wife and daughters in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [12954]

**Mr. Hanley:** I have asked the high commission at Islamabad for details and will arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit as soon as possible.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further changes he proposes to make in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running cost limits for 1995–96. [13452]

**Mr. Hanley:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class II, vote 1—overseas representation—will be increased by £4,379,000 from £709,165,000 to £713,544,000. The increase is the net effect of take-up of capital end year flexibility entitlement of £14,614,000 less a transfer to class II, vote 2–other external relations—of £10,211,000 and a transfer of £24,000 to the Home Office. The gross running costs limit on class II, vote 1 has been reduced by £10,235,000 from £522,799,00 to £512,564,000 due to the transfers to the Home Office and class II, vote 2 as described.

The cash limit for class II, vote 2—other external relations—will be increased by £176,809,000 from £291,633,000 to £468,442,000. Parliamentary authority will be sought for additional expenditure in respect of certain international organisations and contributions to peacekeeping operations. The increase will be met partly by increased appropriations in aid, partly from a claim on the reserve and partly by offsets from other sections of votes 1 and 2.

The cash limit for class II, vote 3—BBC World Service—will be increased by £3,015,000 from £175,039,000 to £178,054,000. Parliamentary authority will be sought in order to take up an increased capital provision under the end year flexibility scheme. The increase will be met from the reserve.

The cash limit for class II, vote 4—the British Council—will be increased by £4,245,000 from £98,496,000 to £102,741,000 in respect of adverse overseas price movements; to take account of approved end year flexibility and a public expenditure survey transfer from the Welsh Office. Aside from the latter, the increase will be met from the reserve.

All the increases in provision will be offset by appropriations in aid or charged to the reserve, and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* hid Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11438]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The available information requested is as follows. Expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by the FCO—diplomatic and aid wings:

1991–92: £5,700,606

1993–94: £7,488,121

1994–95: £7,680,934

1995–96: £8,213,136 (projected)

Figures for earlier years could be made available only at disproportionate cost. Planned expenditure in 1996–97 is approximately £7.5 million.

Expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by the ODA's agency, the Natural Resources Institute:

1991–92: £4,813

1993–94: £4,952

1994–95: £2,566

1995–96: £5,000 (projected)

Figures for earlier years could be made available only at disproportionate cost. The NRI is expected to be privatised in 1996–97.

Expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by the FCO's only agency, Wilton Park:

1994–95: £455

1995–96: £1,000 (projected)

Figures for earlier years could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Based on available information, expenditure by the FCO's non-departmental public bodies was as follows:

*British-Russia Centre*

1989–90: £3,000

1991–92: £3,356

1993–94: £2,199

1994–95: £2,362

1995–96: £2,500 (projected)

1996–97: £2,600 (estimate)

*British Association for Central and Eastern Europe*

Expenditure not recorded separately (estimated £1,000 per annum).

*British Council*

1989–90: £882,000

1991–92: £1,087,000

1993–94: £1,068,000

1994–95: £1,288,000

These figures include some programme expenditure. Owing to the British Council's accounting structure, meaningful estimates for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are not available.

*Commonwealth Institute*

Expenditure not recorded separately (estimated £5,000 per annum).

*Great Britain-China Centre*

1989–90: £569

1991–92: £406

1993–94: £140

1994–95: £369

1995–96: £190 (projected)

1996–97: £250 (estimate)

*Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission*

1979–80: £2,350

1989–90: £4,847

1991–92: £7,199

1993–94: £7,885

1994–95: £6,711

1995–96: £8,950 (projected)

1996–97: £9,500 (estimate)

*Westminster Foundation for Democracy*

Nil

Figures for other years could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Public Interest Immunity

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Attorney-General (1) what account he has taken of the case of Hehir, 1982, in advising Ministers and others on the freedom to waive necessary claims to public interest immunity; [12435]

(2) what account he has taken of the rules put forward on public interest immunity duties in the case of Makanjuola *v.* Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. [12436]

**The Attorney-General:** Advice to the Crown on public interest immunity takes account of all relevant case law, which includes Hehir and Makanjuola and, since 1994, the House of Lords decision in ex parte Wiley.

### Crown Prosecution Service

**Mr. French:** To ask the Attorney-General what changes he proposes for the Crown Prosecution Service's cash and running costs limits for 1995–96. [13344]

**The Attorney-General:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IX, vote 4 will be increased by £1,500,000 from £229,754,000 to £231,254,000. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The running costs limit of class IX, vote 4 will be reduced by £1,200,000 from £225,754,000 to £224,554,000. The reduction will fund an increase in capital provision and, with the increase mentioned earlier, will fund the accelerated implementation of team working and the CPS's SCOPE—standard case operations system—computer system.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cash and running cost limits for the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland departmental services, the independent living fund and certain national agricultural schemes for 1995–96. [13453]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** Subject to parliament approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, it is proposed that the cash limit for class XVI vote I—the Northern Ireland Office—will be increased by £15,650,000 from £888,655,000 to £904,305,000. This reflects the take-up of end year flexibility on capital and departmental running costs, and the additional expenditure on compensation and the opening of border roads.

The cash limit which covers most Northern Ireland departmental services will be increased by £97,622,000 from £3,936,723,000 to £4,034,345,000. This increase reflects the take-up of end year flexibility on capital, departmental running costs and health, the EU peace and reconciliation programme expenditure and other technical changes.

The cash limit for the independent living fund—Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Services vote 5—had been reduced by £1,125,000 reflecting lower than expected demands on the fund. This amount will be transferred to class XIII, vote 3.

The cash limit covering national agriculture capital grant schemes and certain assistance for production, marketing and processing and the fishing industry will increase by £1,120,000 from £6,882,000 to £8,002,000 as a result of the take-up of entitlement to end year flexibility on capital—£670,000—and a transfer from Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food of £450,000 in respect of the scheme to decommission nephrops vessels in Northern Ireland.

The combined gross running cost for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments will be increased by £29,782,000 from £789,017,000 to £818,799,000. This reflects the take-up of £29,877,000 of end year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns 776–82, a net transfer of £95,000 to the Department of Social Security in respect of work by the staff resources unit and adjustments to agency services. Of the revised gross running cost provision, £175,149,000 is for the Northern Ireland office and £643,650,000 is for Northern Ireland Departments.

The increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Health Service Planning

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies his Department has undertaken into work force planning in the last five years. [8333]

**Mr. Moss** *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* The following studies have been carried out by the Department of Health and Social Services over the last five years:

(a) 1992 Nursing establishment and skill mix in Northern Ireland, "Making the best use of Resources in Northern Ireland".

(b) 1995 Nursing establishment and skill mix in Northern Ireland, "Mental Health Nursing Resources".

(c) 1995 Nursing establishment and skill mix in Northern Ireland, "Learning Disability Nursing Resources".

(d) 1993 report of the task force on nursing manpower.

## TREASURY

### Incomes

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the gross net income of a married man with two children under 11 years of age, earning a national average wage and paying non-contracted-out national insurance contributions, in each year since 1966; what was the annual percentage increase in the retail prices index; what was his net real income at 1995 prices; and what was the percentage increase in his net real income compared to *(a)* 12 months previously and *(b)* to the level in 1966. [9318]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The available information is contained in the table.

*Real take-home pay*

| | *Net income*[1,2] *£ per week* | *RPI*[3] | *Real take-home pay*[2,4] *£ per week* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1973–74 | 34.90 | 24.45 | 215.71 |
| 1978–79 | 73.45 | 51.10 | 217.18 |
| 1979–80 | 88.60 | 59.20 | 226.13 |
| 1980–81 | 104.02 | 68.80 | 228.46 |
| 1981–82 | 113.06 | 76.80 | 222.44 |
| 1982–83 | 121.46 | 82.20 | 223.26 |
| 1983–84 | 132.61 | 86.00 | 233.00 |
| 1984–85 | 144.31 | 90.40 | 241.21 |
| 1985–86 | 154.81 | 95.70 | 244.44 |
| 1986–87 | 167.14 | 98.80 | 255.52 |
| 1987–88 | 183.71 | 102.70 | 270.29 |
| 1988–89 | 203.34 | 108.90 | 282.14 |
| 1989–90 | 221.73 | 117.40 | 285.43 |
| 1990–91 | 242.53 | 128.70 | 284.74 |
| 1991–92 | 260.83 | 134.90 | 292.14 |
| 1992–93 | 277.47 | 139.10 | 301.40 |

*Real take-home pay*

| | *Net income*[1,3] *£ per week* | *RPI*[5] | *Real take-home pay*[3,4] *£ per week* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 286.26 | 141.50 | 305.68 |
| 1994–95 | 288.99 | 145.40 | 300.32 |
| 1995–96 | 296.78 | 151.10 | 296.78 |
| 1996–97 | 312.24 | 154.50 | 305.37 |

[1] Net income is earnings income less income tax and national insurance contributions plus child benefit.
[2] For a one-earner couple on average male earnings, paying non-contracted-out national insurance contributions, with two children under eleven years of age.
[3] January 1987 = 100.
[4] In 1995–96 prices.

### Taxation (Costs)

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the costs of collection of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax and *(c)* capital gains tax in each year since 1974; what were the reasons for changes in costs between years; and in which areas of Government increased administrative costs were attributable to the complexity of legislation. [11135]

**Mr. Jack:** The following table shows the costs of collection in current prices and the costs expressed as a percentage of the yield for 1982–83 onwards. Figures for earlier years are not readily available.

*£ million*

| | *Income tax cost* | *Corporation tax cost* | *Capital gains tax cost* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1982–83 | 650 | 60 | 15 |
| 1983–84 | 676 | 63 | 15 |
| 1984–85 | 730 | 60 | 14 |
| 1985–86 | 805 | 62 | 15 |
| 1986–87 | 883 | 71 | 18 |
| 1987–88 | 932 | 85 | 25 |
| 1988–89 | 973 | 91 | 27 |
| 1989–90 | 1,068 | 101 | 32 |
| 1990–91 | 1,203 | 125 | 39 |
| 1991–92 | 1,248 | 152 | 43 |
| 1992–93 | 1,366 | 149 | 38 |
| 1993–94 | 1,427 | 156 | 42 |
| 1994–95 | 1,353 | 149 | 33 |

Changes in costs reflect changes in prices, in the overall burden of work and in efficiency.

It would not be practical to attempt to list every area of government where increased administration costs were attributable to the complexity of legislation, but civil service running costs are falling in real terms and are planned to fall by 15 per cent. between 1993–94 and 1998–99.

### Unemployment

**Ms Corston:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the costs to the Exchequer of unemployment in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available. [12688]

**Mr. Waldegrave:** Gross benefit payments to the unemployed in 1979–80 and 1994–95, at 1994–95 prices, are estimated to have been £3.4 billion and £9.1 billion respectively.

### Disabled People (VAT)

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the direction issued by Customs and Excise regarding the payment by registered disabled individuals of VAT on computers and printers specially adapted for them for home use. [12868]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) on 24 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *228–29*.

### Special Dividends

**Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates his Department has made of the cost to the Exchequer from the tax loophole involved in the use of special dividends in takeover bids. [12539]

**Mr. Jack:** The payment of a special dividend does not involve a tax loophole. A special dividend carries a tax credit in the same way as an ordinary dividend. This mitigates the double tax charge on distributed profits since tax is payable by the company on the profits out of which the dividend is paid.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost limit for 1995–96 for the Inland Revenue. [13547]

**Mr. Jack:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVII, vote 4 will be increased by £25,000,000 from £1,630,358,000 to £1,655,358,000 and the running costs limit will be increased by £10,000,000 from £1,662,705,000 to £1,672,705,000. Within the cash limit increase is included the take up of £10,000,000 running costs end-year flexibility entitlement announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *776–82*. A further £1,330,000 is required in respect of a shortfall in law costs receipts. The balance of £13,670,000 is required to cover reduced receipts because of lower than expected charges to the Department of Social Security and the Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) for the cost of collecting of national insurance contributions. The £13,670,000 is entirely offset by a saving to the national insurance funds out of which the charges are met.

The increases other than that relating to the receipts from the national insurance funds will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost limit for 1995–96 for HM Customs and Excise. [13548]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVII, vote 3, will be increased by £8,824,000 from £850,237,000 to £859,061,000 and the running cost limit for Customs and Excise by £7,955,000 from £741,377,000 to £749,332,000.

The increase in the running cost limit arises from the take up of £7,955,000 of the end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *776–82*. The adjustment to the cash limit also reflects an increase to provide £869,000 capital provision transferred from Property Holdings. The increase, other than the capital transfer which is offset by a saving to class VII, vote 8 will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Pensioner Incomes

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total income from all sources of all pensioners expressed as a percentage of *(a)* gross domestic product and *(b)* the total personal incomes of the population as a whole in each year since 1979. [10999]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* Available information is given in the table. The figures are influenced both by changes in the number of pensioners and by changes in their average incomes over time. Average pensioner incomes have increased by 50 per cent., in real terms, since 1979.

*Total pensioner income[1] from all sources as percentage of:*

| | *(a) GDP[2]* | *(b) total personal income[3]* |
|---|---|---|
| 1979 | 7.8 | 9.4 |
| 1981 | 8.7 | 10.0 |
| 1987 | 9.3 | 11.1 |
| 1988 | 9.2 | 10.9 |
| 1989 | 8.9 | 10.3 |
| 1990 | 9.0 | 10.0 |
| 1990–91[4] | 9.5 | 10.6 |
| 1992 | 10.2 | 11.1 |
| 1993 | 9.9 | 10.9 |

*Source:*

[1] DSS Pensioner Income Series a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. This excludes pensioners not living in private households—those living in nursing or residential care homes, for example. It is largely based on information contained in the Family Expenditure Survey and is subject to sampling variability.

*Notes:*

[2] At market prices.

[3] Personal income before tax.

[4] Combined 1990 and 1991 calendar years.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11448]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by Her Majesty's Treasury and agencies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer is included in the published running costs.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96, and *(g)* 1996–97. [11451]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Expenditure on overseas travel and subsistence by Her Majesty's Treasury and agencies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer is included in the running costs published for the Department and each agency.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Antigua and Barbuda

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the authorities of *(a)* Antigua and *(b)* Barbuda to prohibit the right of public access to beaches on these islands. [12877]

**The Prime Minister:** None.

### Lockerbie

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *16*, to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) if he will place in the Library the evidence which he claims supports the charges against two accused Libyans in respect of the destruction of Pan Am 103 in 1988. [11739]

**The Prime Minister:** No. Details of the evidence cannot be released as this would prejudice the outcome of a trial.

### Engagements

**Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 February. [11620]

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 February. [11621]

**The Prime Minister:** This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

### St. David's Day

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Prime Minister what considerations underlie his Department's decision not to declare St. Davids day a bank holiday in Wales. [12576]

**The Prime Minister:** Successive Governments have kept the pattern of bank holidays in the United Kingdom under review. The introduction of any additional bank holiday must take account of the potential costs and disruption to industry. To declare St. David's day a bank

holiday in Wales would create cost and disruption to businesses both in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

### Mitchell Report

**Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Prime Minister when a copy of his statement on the Mitchell report was communicated to the Irish Taoiseach; at what time it was *(a)* sent and *(b)* received; and what response he received from the Irish Government before to his statement to the House on 24 January. [13083]

**The Prime Minister:** A copy of the text of my statement was faxed to the Taoiseach's office at about 2 o'clock on 24 January. No response from the Irish Government reached me before I made my statement to the House.

### Departmental Costs

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11366]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Privatised Utilities (Employees)

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many people were employed by *(a)* British Gas, *(b)* British Telecom, *(c)* Central Electricity Generating Board, *(d)* East Midlands electricity board, *(e)* Eastern electricity board, *(f)* London electricity board, *(g)* Manweb, *(h)* Midlands electricity board, *(i)* Northern electricity board, *(j)* Norweb, *(k)* Seeboard, *(l)* South Wales electricity board, *(m)* South Western electricity board, *(n)* Southern electricity board, *(o)* Yorkshire electricity board, *(p)* Anglian water authority, *(q)* Welsh water authority, *(r)* Northumbrian water authority, *(s)* North West water authority, *(t)* Severn Trent water authority, *(u)* Southern water authority, *(v)* South West water authority, *(w)* Thames water authority, *(x)* Wessex water authority, and *(y)* Yorkshire water authority, in the final year before each was privatised; [12189]

(2) what was the total amount of remuneration paid to people serving on the boards of *(a)* British Gas, *(b)* British Telecom, *(c)* Central Electricity Generating Board, *(d)* East Midlands electricity board, *(e)* Eastern electricity board, *(f)* London electricity board, *(g)* Manweb, *(h)* Midlands electricity board, *(i)* Northern electricity board, *(j)* Norweb, *(k)* Seeboard, *(l)* South Wales electricity board, *(m)* South Western electricity board, *(n)* Southern electricity board and *(o)* Yorkshire electricity board in the final years before each was privatised. [12187]

**Mr. Page:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 30 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *656*.

### Nuclear Levy

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money at 1995 prices raised by the nuclear levy will be refunded to the Exchequer as a result of the proposed privatisation. [12476]

**Mr. Eggar:** No levy money will be refunded to the Exchequer as a result of the proposed privatisation.

### Sydney Olympics

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *253*, what is the make-up of the Sydney Olympics UK business task force. [12567]

**Mr. Nelson:** The membership of the Sydney Olympics UK business task force is as follows:

*Chairman*

The hon. Colin Moynihan

*Members*

Mr. Colin Adams—British Consultants Bureau

Sir Tim Bell—Lowe Bell Communications

Mr. G. Campkin—Confederation of British Industry

Mr. M. Cohen—Department of Trade and Industry

Dr. John Hooper—British Sports and Allied Industries Federation

Mr. Harvey Lipsith—Allders

Mr. Peter Lorschy—Australian Trade Commission

Sir Colin Marshall—British Airways

Mrs. Diana Morphew—Government of New South Wales

Mr. Alan Pascoe—API Sponsorship Ltd.

Mr. David Tate—Tate and Lyle plc

Mr. David Todd—Corrs Chambers Westgarth

Mr. Roger Withers—Bass Leisure Machines Services Ltd.

### Polypropylene

**Mr. Stevenson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the non-cadmium substitutes available to replace cadmium pigments in polypropylene following the implementation of European Union directive 91/338/EEC. [12821]

**Mr. Page:** There are many factors to consider when choosing a pigment to colour polypropylene, including the thermal stability of the pigment during processing, the service demands of the finished article—i.e. light and weather fastness—and suitability for use in toys and food contact articles. By assessing the demands of the application, it is then possible to choose the correct pigment for the particular application.

A wide variety of pigments can be used to colour polypropylene, varying in shade, colour, strength, physical properties and price. These include organic systems such as those based on quinacridone, diketo-pyrrolo-pyrrol, isolindolinone, quinophthalone, perylene and azo condensation products. Inorganic systems based upon nickel and chrome titanium and bismuth can also be used.

### Scott Inquiry

**Sir Peter Horden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when Sir Richard Scott's report will be published. [13612]

**Mr. Lang:** On current plans, I expect Sir Richard Scott's report to be published on 15 February.

### British Coal Land

**Dr. John Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will halt the sale of British Coal land in Copeland and inquire into the procedure followed; [13154]

(2) if he will ensure that all relevant information is available to all potential purchasers of British Coal land before any sales are concluded; and if he will make a statement. [13156]

(3) if he will set out the guidelines to be followed in the sale of British Coal land; [13157]

(4) what assessment he has made of whether the method adopted to sell British Coal land in Copeland will maximise the return for the assets disposed of; and if he will make a statement. [13155]

**Mr. Page:** The management and disposal of its property is a matter for British Coal. I understand that the corporation has followed a normal commercial approach to the disposal of property in Copeland and related areas, including the provision of all relevant information to all potential purchasers; and that bids have been assessed with a view to obtaining the best terms available for the assets involved, in the light of the corporation's statutory duties.

### Saudi Arabia (Trade)

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the value of United Kingdom trade with Saudi Arabia in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [12748]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* The information is as follows:

*UK visible trade with Saudi Arabia 1992–94 and January to November 1995*

*£ million*

| *Year* | *UK exports* | *UK imports* |
|---|---|---|
| 1992 | 1,966 | 964 |
| 1993 | 1,826 | 1,275 |
| 1994 | 1,516 | 740 |
| *January to November* | | |
| 1995 | 1,503 | 648 |

*Source:*
CSO Monthly Review of External Trade statistics.
CSO Business Monitor MA20.

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains the largest market for UK exporters outside the OECD countries. The decline in our exports over the last three years is mainly due to budgetary constraints in Saudi Arabia.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Conveyancing Law

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the benefits and disbenefits of extending section 123 of the Land Registration Act 1925 to conveyances which do not accompany a transfer of the beneficial interest in the land. [12212]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The recommendations for the introduction of legislation to extend the compulsory registration of title provisions of section 123 of the Land Registration Act 1925 to various categories of disposition did not include extending compulsory registration at present to conveyances which do not accompany a transfer of the beneficial interest. This was because responses to the consultation document on extending section 123, issued by the Land Registry in November 1992, received general support but included reservations about extending the section to such conveyances—paragraphs 2.5 to 2.7 of the first report of a joint working group on the implementation of the Law Commission's third and fourth reports on land registration, Law Com. No.235, Cm 2950. Paragraph 2.6 of the first report proposed that matters—including the extension of section 123 to such conveyances—identified as having insufficient support to justify further action at present should be reviewed again after a period of five years.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Women Prisioners (Restraints)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the chair of the board of visitors of each prison in England and Wales as to the use of restraints when women inmates are taken outside prison for whatever reason. [11600]

**Miss Widdecombe:** At last September's annual conference of boards of visitors the issue of handcuffing women in sensitive situations was raised with me.

The chairmen of the boards at Bullwood Hall and New Hall prisons wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend on 16 and 17 October 1995 respectively, about the use of restraints on women when on escort. An earlier letter of 16 June 1995, from the chairman of the board at Askham Grange prison to the then Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), about women prisoners generally, also raised this issue. Askham Grange board wrote again on 13 November 1995.

When my right hon. and learned Friend and I visit prisons, we take the opportunity to speak to boards of visitors who raise a wide range of issues. None of the records of our visits indicates that the use of restraints on women prisoners outside their establishments was raised as a concern.

### Asylum and Immigration Bill

**Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which powers contained in the Asylum and Immigration Bill affect foreign passport holders with permanent right of United Kingdom abode; if foreign passport holders will be re-classified as immigrants; how their right to remain in the United Kingdom will be affected; and if he will make a statement. [12180]

**Miss Widdecombe:** A Commonwealth citizen with the right of abode under section 2 of the Immigration Act 1971 will be unaffected by the Bill, except to the extent that certain provisions, such as the new power of search in clause 7, are applicable to all people regardless of their status under the Act.

The use of the term "immigrant" in clauses 8, 9, 10 and 12 of the Bill to refer to a person who, under the 1971 Act, requires leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom will not affect the immigration status of such a person. In particular, the entitlement of a person who is settled in this country to housing assistance and child benefit and their freedom to take employment will not be affected.

### Asylum Seekers

**Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum in the United Kingdom have been received from asylum seekers currently located in other EU countries for each year since 1990. [12607]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** An average of five asylum applications have been received from nationals of European Union countries in each year since 1990.

Information on non-EU nationals who have been located in EU countries since applying for asylum in the United Kingdom is not held centrally.

### Police Vehicles (Bull Bars)

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *261*, if bull bars have now been removed from Metropolitan police vehicles. [12519]

**Mr. Maclean:** As I stated in my reply to an earlier question from the hon. Member on 29 November 1995, *Official Report* columns *781–82*, and 12 December 1995, *Official Report* columns *604–5*, this is an operational matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. However, I understand that the Commissioner has reviewed the situation in light of the guidelines issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers and is complying with them. So far as possible, bull bars will be fitted only to vehicles for use in public disorder and where that is required in the interests of officer safety.

### Special Constables

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what benefits and payments are available to special constables. [12601]

**Mr. Maclean:** Special constables are unpaid volunteers, but they are eligible to receive a number of benefits. Under the Special Constables Regulations 1965, they may be reimbursed out-of-pocket expenses or receive payment of an allowance in lieu of reimbursement. Chief officers choosing to pay an allowance may draw on Home Office guidance about allowances in respect of footwear, tights and stockings, travel and refreshment.

Regulations entitle specials to sick pay in respect of injury suffered—or illness contracted—while on duty, and police authorities have discretion to make ex gratia payments to specials who do not qualify for sick pay under the regulations.

In addition, regulations give police authorities discretion to pay a small bounty to special constables who qualify under the criteria—which relate to a minimum commitment of hours in a defined six-month period.

We set up a working group on the special constabulary last year under Home Office chairmanship. We expect it to make a number of recommendations in March about the expenses and allowances that special constables should receive.

### Firearms

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many legally held firearms there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales (i) in total and (ii) of each type. [12989]

**Mr. Maclean:** At the end of 1994, the latest year for which figures are available, it is estimated that some 375,000 firearms were covered by firearms certificates on

issue in England and about 21,700 by firearms certificates on issue in Wales.

Information is not held centrally, however, on the type of firearm covered by these firearm certificates.

In addition, some 1,230,800 shotguns were covered by the shotgun certificates on issue in England at the end of 1994, and some 102,300 in Wales.

Figures for Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, but I understand that information on the number of weapons legally held is not available centrally.

### Illegal Drugs

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the street value of all illegal drugs, per type of drug, seized by Government officials in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [12724]

**Mr. Sackville:** The total estimated street value of drugs seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, in the last five years for which data are available, is as follows:

1990: £245 million

1991: £308 million

1992: £546 million

1993: £475 million

1994: £551 million

Estimates of the street value of police seizures of illegal drugs are not collected centrally.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the street value of all illegal drugs seized by Government officials in each of the European Union member states in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [12725]

**Mr. Sackville:** This information is not available.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest estimate of the total street value of the illegal drugs market in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [12727]

**Mr. Sackville:** It is not possible to make such an estimate with any accuracy.

### Release of Offenders

**Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on informing the families of victims of manslaughter and murder of the release of offenders. [13003]

**Mr. Sackville:** Our policy is as set out in the 1995 national standards for the supervision of offenders before and after release from custody, a copy of which is in the Library. In such cases, the probation service should arrange for the victim's family to be contacted within two months of the imposition of the sentence and offered the opportunity of being kept informed of developments. Where this opportunity is taken up, the service should inform them when release from custody is imminent.

### Informal Justice and Home Affairs Council

**Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proceedings and outcome of the EU informal Justice and Home Affairs Council on 26 to 27 January. [13111]

**Mr. Howard:** The United Kingdom was represented at the informal council in Rome by the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) and, on the second day, by Timothy Walker, a senior Home Office official. It is a rule of procedure within the European Union that informal councils cannot reach decisions or adopt texts. The main matters discussed at the meeting were as follows.

The Italian presidency invited Ministers to approve in principle the text of a draft declaration on organised crime. A number of member states, including the United Kingdom, had difficulty with the wording of the declaration as it stood, and the presidency concluded that further work was required at official level before the declaration could be submitted with a view to formal adoption at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in March.

The Council considered the presidency's work programme for the Europol drugs unit, and for developing the supplementary regulations to the Europol convention. The Council also discussed the outstanding issue of European Court of Justice jurisdiction in the Europol convention.

The presidency set out its priorities for work on immigration and asylum. These included taking forward certain of the proposals contained in the 1994 Commission communication on immigration and asylum, and securing early progress on the Dublin convention which deals with the determination of the state responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the member states. The presidency said that it also hoped to proceed with work on EURODAC, an initiative to establish a computer-based system of fingerprint exchanges on asylum claims.

The Council discussed some of the issues which are blocking agreement to the draft external frontiers convention, including the dispute between the United Kingdom and Spain over its application to Gibraltar, and held a general discussion on the temporary protection of refugees in the light of recent developments in the situation in Bosnia.

The Council discussed the main problems which had arisen during negotiations on the second convention on simplified extradition and the Brussels II convention on matrimonial matters, and examined ways in which these might be resolved.

The Council discussed arrangements for pursuing contacts with designated third countries on justice and home affairs issues, and the presidency outlined broad proposals for a multi-annual work programme within the third pillar.

### Prisoners (Repatriation)

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Irish Government responded to requests made by him in relation to the seven prisoners who have applied for repatriation from the United Kingdom; to prisons in the Irish Republic; and if he will make a statement. [12950]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Seven, out of 65 requests made by prisoners to be repatriated to the Irish Republic have been referred to the Irish Ministry of Justice for its consideration. Its response is awaited.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for changes to the 1995–96 cash and running costs limits within his responsibilities. [13624]

**Mr. Howard:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII, vote 1—Home Office administration, police, probation and other services, England and Wales—will be increased by £11,809,000 from £4,440,076,000 to £4,451,885.000. This increase is the net effect of the partial take-up of running cost end year flexibility of £9,100,000—as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *776–82*, transfer from Department of the Environment in respect of safer cities projects in Wales, transfer from Central Office of Information in respect of the media adviser service, transfer of running costs from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in respect of the United Kingdom central authority, transfer from Department of Social Security in respect of housing benefit, temporary absence from home, transfer from Property Holdings in respect to the refurbishment of Lunar house, transfer from the Ministry of Defence in respect of medical evacuation costs from the former Yugoslavia and a transfer of £1 million from non voted police credit approvals. This transfer from non-voted provision reduced the non-voted cash limit—HO/LACAP—by £1,000,000 from £115,765,000 to £114,265,000.

The cash limit on class VIII, vote 2—prisons, England and Wales—will be increased by £18,905,000 from £1,660,160,000 to £1,679,065,000. This increase has been reduced from the amount originally sought by £1,565,000, equivalent to the excess of expenditure over provision in 1994–95. The increase will be charged to the reserve and partly offset by the surrender of £6,470,000 end year flexibility. Additional provision is required to meet the further costs arising from the implementation of recommendations of the report of Sir John Woodcock into escapes from Whitemoor prison of 9 September 1994. As a result of reallocation of provision between subheads the running cost provision for vote 2 will be reduced by £5,821,000.

The Home Office running costs limit, which covers votes 1 and 2, will be increased by £3,718,000 from £1,740,615,000 to £1,744,333,000.

### Extraterritorial Jurisdiction

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the jurisdiction of the courts to enable them to deal with offences committed outside the territory of the United Kingdom by United Kingdom nationals. [13625]

**Mr. Howard:** With some exceptions, the jurisdiction of courts throughout the United Kingdom is territorially based. There are long-standing arguments of principle and of practicality which support this approach.

It is right, however, that we should, from time to time, examine whether those arguments remain valid in the light of changing circumstances. With the agreement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I have established an inter-departmental review to look at the implications for both policy and procedure of any change to the current position on jurisdiction over offences committed by United Kingdom nationals overseas throughout the United Kingdom.

The review is under way and is expected to take four or five months to complete.

### Welsh Fire Services

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the total transition cost for the new Welsh fire services; and what are the expected figures for the total cost of new services in each of the next five years expressed *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the cost of the services they replaced. [11065]

**Mr. Sackville** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The position will depend on key decisions yet to be made by the authorities concerned. The three new combined fire authorities were established in shadow form on 11 December. They are engaged in the planning and preparation for taking over their full function from 1 April. The scale of the transitional costs will depend largely on the approach which the new authorities, once fully constituted, take on the pace and degree of the changes required to amalgamate the existing brigades into the new structure. Supplementary credit approvals of up to £2.7 million have been provisionally set aside for this purpose in 1996–97.

## SCOTLAND

### Game Birds

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to enforce European Commission regulation EC 1798 banning the use of Emtryl in treating game birds; what penalties he plans to apply to offences against the regulation when it comes into force; and what warnings have been issued to *(a)* land owners, *(b)* breeders, *(c)* owners of shooting rights and *(d)* others involved against using Emtryl. [11626]

**Mr. Kynoch:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Food at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 30 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *694*.

### Dalkeith Park

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the cost of the alternative route one mile west of the proposed dual carriageway through Dalkeith park. [12465]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Appraisals, including the costs of several routes were undertaken in 1989. One of these routes was the Dalkeith park line which is approximately 1 km west of the route now proposed for the dual carriageway. As this Dalkeith park line was the most expensive alignment option and as it would have caused significant damage to the area of great landscape value within Dalkeith park, it was not pursued. Only routes further to the east were subsequently investigated.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the environmental impact on Dalkeith park of the proposed *(a)* roads and *(b)* bypass in the area. [12179]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Prior to examination of proposals at a public local inquiry in May 1992, an environmental appraisal of the proposed bypass and ancillary roads was undertaken in accordance with the procedures recommended in the Scottish traffic and environmental appraisal manual. In particular, this considered the purpose of the route, and the impact on the landscape, heritage and ecology of Dalkeith park. The reporter appointed to hear evidence at the public local inquiry recommended the proposed alignment should be adopted and this was supported by the Secretary of State in his decision.

The preferred scheme was reviewed in 1995 and is now proposed to be constructed as a dual carriageway. It was subject to a further environmental assessment as required by environmental legislation.

### Housing

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to reconcile the difference between the data for starts and completions of housing association and co-operative dwellings published in Scottish Homes regular development programme announcements and those published in the quarterly Scottish Office housing statistical bulletins. [11928]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Scottish Home's development programme announcement bulletins contain information on planned starts for the following year. They do not give information on completions. For a variety of reasons. The number of planned starts may differ from the number which finally take place in any year.

Actual starts and completions are reported in Scottish Home's statistical report. Figures published by Scottish Homes for actual starts closely match those published in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin series. There is, however, a known problem with the quarterly figures for completions which Scottish Homes provides for the statistical bulletin series. This is acknowledged in the publication. To remedy the problem, Scottish Homes carried out a major exercise in 1995 which produced validated completions data for several thousand dwellings. I understand that it plans to complete the exercise by the end of March 1996.

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assumptions he has made on the level of spending by local authorities in 1996–97 under the former non-housing revenue account block; and what measures he proposes to put in place to monitor and to publish details of expenditure or repair and improvement grants and other forms of assistance by local authorities to the private sector housing stock. [11929]

**Mr. Robertson:** It will be for local authorities to decide the level of investment in private sector housing within the single allocation which they will receive in 1996–97 for capital investment outwith their own housing stock. Local authorities will be expected to take account of the need for such investment in preparing their housing plans and capital programmes.

Information on improvement and repairs grants approved by local authorities will continue to be published quarterly in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin "Housing Trends in Scotland".

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discretion local authorities have to operate *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* compulsory contents insurance schemes for tenants of their housing stock; what guidelines his Department issues to local authorities on such schemes; and if he will make a statement. [12222]

**Mr. Robertson:** Local authorities are free to introduce arrangements whereby their tenants can insure their possessions under a block insurance policy arranged by the local authority. A number of authorities operate block insurance schemes. It is open to individual tenants to participate in such schemes if they wish to do so. The Department is currently considering whether guidance to local authorities on this matter is necessary.

### Civil Justice System

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what proposals exist to initiate a consultative inquiry into the Scottish civil justice system with a similar remit to that of the recent Woolf inquiry in England and Wales; [12086]

(2) if he will make it his policy to instigate a fundamental review of the civil justice system in Scotland. [12087]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The civil justice system in Scotland is kept under constant review through standing groups such as the sheriff court rules council and the Court of Session rules council and takes account of initiatives by ministerial and judicial interests.

The rules of both the Court of Session and sheriff court have recently been reviewed and reforms were introduced into both during 1994. The effects of these changes are being monitored by a research programme and it would be premature to initiate a further fundamental review of the whole system at this time.

### Carbon Monoxide Detectors

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make additional resources available to housing associations to install carbon monoxide detectors in their housing stock; and if he will make a statement; [12219]

(2) if he will make additional resources available to local authorities to install carbon monoxide detectors in their housing stock; and if he will make a statement; [12218]

(3) if he will make additional resources available to Scottish Homes to install carbon monoxide detectors in their housing stock; and if he will make a statement. [12217]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Substantial resources have been made available to local authorities and Scottish Homes for investment in public sector housing stock. Decisions about the installation of carbon monoxide detectors are for local authorities and Scottish Homes in the light of their assessments of priorities. Similarly, decisions about the installation of detectors in housing association properties are a matter for each association, but they would be expected to fund such work from their own resources.

## NHS Finance

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the recipients of supplementary allocations from underspend on the NHS budget in each of the past three years; and if he will publish the rules pertaining to the application for an award of such allocations. [12009]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The recipients of the supplementary allocations from underspend on the NHS budget in each of the past three years are as shown in the following table:

*£ thousand*

| *Recipient* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Argyll and Clyde health board | 2,600 | 1,815 | 1,414 |
| Ayrshire and Arran health board | 2,000 | 871 | 1,198 |
| Borders health board | 750 | 443 | 363 |
| Dumfries and Galloway health board | 900 | 885 | 517 |
| Fife health board | 1,950 | 2,393 | 1,074 |
| Forth Valley health board | 1,500 | 884 | 842 |
| Grampian health board | 2,850 | 2,367 | 1,527 |
| Greater glasgow health board | 6,100 | 5,111 | 3,115 |
| Highland health board | 1,400 | 796 | 685 |
| Lanarkshire health board | 3,000 | 1,719 | 1,671 |
| Lothian health board | 4,200 | 3,330 | 2,310 |
| Orkney health board | 300 | 329 | 68 |
| Shetland health board | 200 | 197 | 74 |
| Tayside health board | 2,450 | 1,914 | 1,319 |
| Western Isles health board | 650 | 196 | 124 |
| State Hospital | — | 220 | — |
| Common Services Agency | — | 280 | — |
| Scottish Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education | — | 185 | — |
| Total | 30,850 | 23,935 | 16,301 |

There are no rules pertaining to the application for an award of such allocations. The allocations made to enable health boards to meet national and local priorities are generally made on a weighted capitation basis.

## Sheriff Court

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the timetable for introducing the next two tiers of the full costs recovery programme in civil actions raised in the sheriff court; and what mechanisms exist to monitor the impact of each tier of full cost recovery on the numbers of actions raised in the sheriff court and its effect on access to justice. [120088]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The current fee structure is design to recover 100 per cent. of administrative costs and one-third of judicial costs in civil proceedings in the sheriff courts and the supreme courts. There is no set timetable for introducing any further tranche of judicial costs and any such proposal would be laid before the House for approval. The Department regularly monitors the level of business coming before the courts. There is no evidence that fee levels are a deterrent to those wishing to raise actions.

## Mediation

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has *(a)* to pilot a court-annexed mediation project in the Scottish courts and *(b)* to introduce a state-funded mediation agency related to court matters. [12091]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend has no such plans. There are existing rules of court which allows cases to be referred for mediation in relation to family actions and these are used approximately 1,000 cases per annum. The sheriff court rules council is currently considering the procedure rules in relation to mediation and conciliation and considering whether there is any need to strengthen these rules.

## Farm Support Scheme

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the publicly funded support schemes available to farmers and growers in Scotland giving the amount paid under each scheme for the most recent year for which figures are available. [11966]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Information for the latest complete financial year—1994–95—is set out in the table. In 1995–96, organic aid, heather moorland, habitats and set-aside access schemes commenced.

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Sheep Annual Premium | 90 |
| Suckler Cow Premium | 49 |
| Beef Special Premium | 26 |
| Arable Area Payments | 121 |
| Milk Quota—Surrender or Reduction | 1 |
| Environmental Sensitive Areas | 1 |
| Farm Woodland Schemes | 2 |
| Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances | 40 |
| Rural Enterprise Programme | 4 |
| Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants | 3 |
| Cofters etc. Building Grants and Loans | 5 |
| Farm and Conservation Grant Schemes | 5 |
| Other minor Schemes | 1 |
| Total | 348 |

### Judiciary

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to *(a)* allow pursuers/defenders to choose an appropriate member of the judiciary to hear their case, *(b)* ensure that the judge in each case has an appropriate expertise in the areas of law raised by that case and *(c)* initiate a wide consultation on the level of judicial salaries. [12089]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** In relation to parts *(a)* and *(b)* of the question, there are no plans to alter the current arrangements whereby the allocation of judges and sheriffs to particular cases is entirely a matter for the Lord President of the Court of Session or the appropriate sheriff principal. Within our current system there are opportunities for individual sheriffs and judges with particular expertise to be allocated to specific items of business. On part *(c)*, judicial salaries are determined by the Senior Salaries Review Body and there are no plans to change these arrangements.

### Water Authorities

**Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the names of those current local authority councillors who are members of the East, West and North of Scotland water authorities; how much time each annually will spend on each body; and what is the salary paid in respect of each position. [12432]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The following current local authority councillors are members of the water authority indicated:

*East:* Councillor Ian J. Berry, Councillor Ann Dickson, Councillor Ian Galloway, Councillor Tom Kerr and Councillor Pat McCafferty.

*West:* Councillor Mungo Bryson, Councillor William Petrie, Councillor Robert R. Reid, Provost Leslie Rosin and Councillor Ian R. Young.

*North:* Councillor Raymond Bisset, Councillor Joan Easten, Councillor Nigel J. O. Graham, Councillor Olwyn J. Macdonald and Councillor Donald I. Nicholson.

Each councillor is expected to devote between 24 and 36 days per annum to his or her duties, and receives £6,000 per annum in remuneration.

### Nuclear Industry (Accidents)

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the requirements for insurance to cover the risk of accidents involving radioactive materials following privatisation of the nuclear industry; what assessment he has made of whether appropriate cover is available from commercial insurance sources; what contingency plans have been drawn up for the Government to continue to cover such risks in the absence of commercial insurance; and what charge would be made to the privatised industry for such state insurance. [12239]

**Mr. Kynoch:** I refer the hon. Member to answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Small Business, Industry and Energy, Department of Trade and Industry, on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *657*.

### Planning Appeals

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how long a planning appeal to his Department may be outstanding before a public inquiry must be held; and if he will make a statement. [12246]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Planning legislation does not limit the period within which a public inquiry into a planning appeal must be held.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the regulations relating to amendments to a planning application in the appeal process being accepted by the report to the inquiry unit; and what are the inquiry's powers in this respect. [12247]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Planning regulations neither provide for, nor restrict, amendment to planning applications during the appeal process.

The consideration of applications at appeal is based primarily on the details of the proposal as submitted to and considered by the planning authority. Alteration to the detail of an application at appeal stage may exceptionally be allowed by the reporter provided that parties to the appeal are not prejudiced in any way and the following criteria are satisfied.

- the alteration does not fundamentally alter the nature of the proposed development;
- those parties consulted or notified of the original application are re-consulted or notified in any case where amendment is likely to have significant change in the impact of the development;
- the planning authority and all parties have adequate opportunity to consider the amendments;
- whether the application is solely for change of use, or is an outline application or is for full planning permission for all building and engineering works.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average time lapse between the lodging of planning appeals and the holding of a public inquiry. [12252]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Of those planning appeal cases dealt with by public local inquiry in the years 1994 and 1995, the average time lapse between the lodging of the appeal and the commencement of the inquiry was 40 weeks and 31 weeks respectively.

### Gateside Primary School

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the costs associated with the holdings of an opt-out ballot in respect of Gateside primary school. [12755]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** To date, the Secretary of State has reimbursed the Gateside primary school board for £225.60 spent on the notice to parents which it is required to place in the press to invite parents to check that their name is on the list to be used in the ballot. The Secretary of State has not yet received an account from Electoral Reform (Ballot Services), which is managing the ballot of parents, or from the school board in respect of its campaign and postal expenses. However, the likely final cost is expected to be slightly less than £900.

### Electorates

**Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *703*, relating to electorates on 16 February 1994, what were the electorates on 16 February 1995 of *(a)* East Dunbartonshire electoral ward 26, South Lensie/Waterside, *(b)* those parts of Strathclyde electoral division, 35 Toryglen/Kingspark, included in South Lanarkshire electoral wards 62 Rutherglen West, 64 Bankhead and 65, Spittal/Blairbeth, *(c)* those parts of Strathclyde electoral division 8 Vale of Leven, included in Argyll and Bute electoral ward, 31 Rhu/Garelochhead/Luss and *(d)* these parts of Tayside electoral division 31, Sidlaw, included in City of Dundee electoral wards, 13, Menzieshill West, 16 Pitalpin, 17 Ardler, 19 St. Mary's West, 20 Downfield, 27 Fintry North, 29 Whitfield North, 35 Balgillo, and 36 Dalhousie. [12734]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The information is set out.

(a) East Dunbartonshire Electoral Ward 26: South Lenzie/ Waterside—3,929 electors

(b) South Lanarkshire:

Electoral Ward 62: Rutherglen West 3,498 electors

Electoral Ward 64: Bankhead 3,087 electors

Electoral Ward 65: Spittal/Blairbeth 1,482 electors

(c) Argyll and Bute Electoral Ward 31: Rhu/Garelochhead/ Luss—350 electors

(d) City of Dundee:

Electoral Ward 13: Menzieshill West 116 electors

Electoral Ward 16: Pitalpin 15 electors

Electoral Ward 17: Ardler 2 electors

Electoral Ward 19: St. Mary's West 12 electors

Electoral Ward 20: Downfield 5 electors

Electoral Ward 27: Fintry North 18 electors

Electoral Ward 29: Whitfield North 0 electors

Electoral Ward 35: Balgillo 38 electors

Electoral Ward 36: Dallhousie 74 electors

*Source*
*Electoral Registration Officers.*

### Local Authority Advertising

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the costs incurred by each Scottish local authority in 1995 on advertising performance indicators under the citizens charter; how many *(a)* responses and *(b)* inquiries were received from the public concerning these advertisements; and if the requirement to publish such advertisements will applying in 1996 to those councils which are to be abolished in April. [12500]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The information requested about costs incurred by and responses and inquiries received by local authorities is not held centrally.

In the light of a direction issued in December 1994 by the accounts commission, in terms of section 1(1) of the Local Government Act 1992, information about the performance of the existing regional, islands and district councils in delivering services during the 1995–96 financial year will require to be published by 31 December 1996. The Government intend to specify, in regulations which will be laid before the House in due course, in each case a successor new council which will be responsible for publishing this information.

### Judicial Remuneration

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current levels of remuneration of *(a)* stipendiary magistrates, *(b)* sheriffs, *(c)* sheriffs principal, *(d)* Court of Session judges, *(e)* the Lord Justice Clerk and *(f)* the Lord President. [12134]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The current levels of remuneration are

(a) £36,576 to £39,180;

(b) £72,524;

(c) £85,241;

(d) £98,957 (Outer House) and £110,137 (Inner House);

(e) £114,137; and

(f) £114,874.

### Health Service (Waiting Times)

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many in-patient/day case episodes had a wait of greater than one year in each NHS hospital trust and health board; and what proportion of the total number of discharges these episodes represent in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995. [11215]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information requested is shown in the tables.

*NHSiS—In-patient/day case discharges after admission from the waiting list where the wait was greater than one year: non-psychiatric and non-obstetric specialties*

*Years ended 31 December 1994 and 1995*[1]

| *Provider* | *1994* | | *1995* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Number* | *Percentage of all discharges* | *Number* | *Percentage of all discharges* |
| *Argyll and Clyde Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute NHS Trust | 8 | 0.3 | 6 | 0.4 |
| Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust | 149 | 1.6 | 119 | 1.4 |
| Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust | 1 | — | 1 | — |
| Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust | 1 | 0.2 | — | — |
| Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust | 309 | 2.0 | 281 | 1.9 |
| Board Area Summary | 468 | 1.4 | 407 | 1.4 |
| *Ayrshire and Arran health board area* | | | | |
| Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust | — | — | — | — |
| North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust | 176 | 1.0 | 41 | 0.2 |

*NHSiS—In-patient/day case discharges after admission from the waiting list where the wait was greater than one year: non-psychiatric and non-obstetric specialties*

*Years ended 31 December 1994 and 1995*[1]

| Provider | 1994 Number | 1994 Percentage of all discharges | 1995 Number | 1995 Percentage of all discharges |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust | 228 | 1.7 | 91 | 1.7 |
| Board Area Summary | 404 | 1.3 | 132 | 0.6 |
| *Borders health board area* | | | | |
| Borders Community Health Services NHS Trust | — | — | — | — |
| Borders General Hospital NHS Trust | 11 | 0.1 | 22 | 0.3 |
| Board Area Summary | 11 | 0.1 | 22 | 0.3 |
| *Dumfries and Galloway health board area* | | | | |
| Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust | 268 | 2.2 | 174 | 1.6 |
| Dumfries and Galloway Community Health NHS Trust | — | — | — | — |
| Board Area Summary | 268 | 2.2 | 174 | 1.6 |
| *Fife health board area* | | | | |
| Fife Healthcare NHS Trust | 44 | 0.9 | 14 | 0.3 |
| Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust | 196 | 1.6 | 95 | 0.8 |
| Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust | 323 | 3.9 | 110 | 1.3 |
| Board Area Summary | 563 | 2.2 | 219 | 0.9 |
| *Forth Valley health board area* | | | | |
| Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust | — | — | — | — |
| Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust | 204 | 2.3 | 195 | 2.4 |
| Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust | 199 | 1.5 | 194 | 1.6 |
| Board Area Summary | 403 | 1.8 | 389 | 2.0 |
| *Grampian health board area* | | | | |
| Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust | 522 | 1.7 | 399 | 1.2 |
| Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust | 79 | 1.6 | 5 | 0.1 |
| Moray Health Services NHS Trust | 40 | 0.9 | 10 | 0.2 |
| Board Area Summary | 641 | 1.6 | 414 | 1.0 |
| *Greater Glasgow* | | | | |
| Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust | — | — | 2 | 0.3 |
| Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust | 1,384 | 4.9 | 1,048 | 3.8 |
| Southern General Hospital NHS Trust | 456 | 2.8 | 94 | 0.6 |
| Stobhill NHS Trust | 129 | 1.2 | 187 | 1.6 |
| The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust | 358 | 2.5 | 411 | 3.1 |
| The Yorkhill NHS Trust | 100 | 1.2 | 40 | 0.5 |
| West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust | 448 | 1.3 | 257 | 0.8 |
| Board Area Summary | 2,875 | 2.6 | 2,039 | 1.9 |
| *Highland health board area* | | | | |
| Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust | 6 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.1 |
| Highland Communities NHS Trust | 4 | 0.2 | 3 | 0.2 |
| Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust | 237 | 1.5 | 288 | 2.0 |
| Board Area Summary | 247 | 1.3 | 292 | 1.6 |
| *Lanarkshire health board area* | | | | |
| Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust | 88 | 0.7 | 69 | 0.5 |
| Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust | — | — | — | — |
| Law Hospital NHS Trust | 138 | 1.2 | 131 | 1.2 |
| Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust | 534 | 5.4 | 143 | 1.4 |
| Board Area Summary | 760 | 2.1 | 343 | 1.0 |
| *Lothian health board area* | | | | |
| East and Midlothian NHS Trust | 22 | 0.4 | 27 | 0.4 |
| Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust | — | — | — | — |
| Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust | 28 | 0.6 | 2 | — |

*NHSiS—In-patient/day case discharges after admission from the waiting list where the wait was greater than one year: non-psychiatric and non-obstetric specialties*

*Years ended 31 December 1994 and 1995*[1]

| Provider | 1994 Number | 1994 Percentage of all discharges | 1995 Number | 1995 Percentage of all discharges |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust | 492 | 1.3 | 372 | 1.1 |
| West Lothian NHS Trust | 400 | 3.1 | 204 | 1.4 |
| Western General Hospitals NHS Trust | 136 | 0.8 | 56 | 0.3 |
| Board Area Summary | 1,078 | 1.4 | 661 | 0.9 |
| *Orkney health board area* | | | | |
| Orkney Health Board Unit | — | — | 1 | 0.1 |
| Board Area Summary | — | — | 1 | 0.1 |
| *Shetland health board area* | | | | |
| Shetland Hospitals and Community Services Unit | 2 | 0.2 | 3 | 0.3 |
| Board Area Summary | 2 | 0.2 | 3 | 0.3 |
| *Tayside health board area* | | | | |
| Angus NHS Trust | 3 | 0.1 | 5 | 0.1 |
| Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust | — | — | — | — |
| Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust | 987 | 3.3 | 663 | 2.5 |
| Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust | 121 | 1.5 | 94 | 1.2 |
| Board Area Summary | 1,111 | 2.6 | 762 | 2.0 |
| *Western Isles health board area* | | | | |
| Western Isles Health Unit | 1 | 0.1 | 1 | 0.4 |
| Board Area Summary | 1 | 0.1 | 1 | 0.4 |
| Other Providers | 342 | 73.4 | 76 | 18.3 |
| All Providers | 9,174 | 2.0 | 5,935 | 1.4 |

*Note:*
[1] Provisional.
*Source:*
SMR1. Ref: Unit 2/96036. Date: 20 January 1996.

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new patients seeking out-patient consultations had a wait greater than nine weeks in each NHS hospital trust and health board; and what proportion of the total number of referrals these patients represent in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995. [11216]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information requested is shown in the tables.

*NHSiS—New out-patient consultation referrals*[1] *where the wait was greater than nine weeks*

*Years ended 31 December 1994*[2] *and 1995*[3]

| Provider | 1994 Number | 1994 Percentage of all referrals | 1995 Number | 1995 Percentage of all referrals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Argyll and Clyde Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Argyll and Bute NHS Trust | 1,540 | 20.0 | 1,699 | 21.3 |
| Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust | 5,404 | 26.5 | 5,936 | 21.3 |
| Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust | 1,717 | 14.6 | 2,299 | 16.2 |
| Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust | 221 | 5.5 | 641 | 12.8 |
| Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust | 8,929 | 29.8 | 13,315 | 35.7 |
| Board Area Summary | 17,811 | 24.1 | 23,890 | 25.9 |
| *Ayrshire and Arran Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust | 272 | 12.4 | 342 | 15.6 |
| North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust | 11,619 | 24.4 | 7,551 | 16.4 |
| South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust | 6,110 | 24.8 | 5,429 | 18.5 |
| Board Area Summary | 18,001 | 24.2 | 13,322 | 17.2 |
| *Borders Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Borders Community Health Services NHS Trust | 22 | 2.1 | 29 | 1.9 |
| Borders General Hospital NHS Trust | 2,135 | 13.9 | 3,444 | 16.7 |
| Board Area Summary | 2,157 | 13.1 | 3,473 | 15.7 |

*NHSiS—New out-patient consultation referrals[1] where the wait was greater than nine weeks*

*Years ended 31 December 1994[2] and 1995[3]*

| Provider | 1994 Number | 1994 Percentage of all referrals | 1995 Number | 1995 Percentage of all referrals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Dumfries and Galloway Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospital NHS Trust | 6,145 | 25.8 | 6,195 | 27.2 |
| Dumfries and Galloway Community Health NHS Trust | 6 | 1.4 | 8 | 0.9 |
| Board Area Summary | 6,151 | 25.3 | 6,203 | 26.2 |
| *Fife Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Fife Healthcare NHS Trust | 2,165 | 31.3 | 2,462 | 32.1 |
| Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust | 11,484 | 32.3 | 11,229 | 27.8 |
| Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust | 7,234 | 32.7 | 9,031 | 35.5 |
| Board Area Summary | 20,883 | 32.3 | 22,722 | 30.9 |
| *Forth Valley Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust | 37 | 7.5 | 164 | 10.0 |
| Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust | 7,707 | 30.9 | 7,549 | 26.2 |
| Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust | 4,743 | 19.7 | 6,132 | 22.5 |
| Board Area Summary | 12,487 | 25.2 | 13,845 | 24.0 |
| *Grampian Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust | 20,560 | 34.2 | 24,109 | 33.6 |
| Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust | 4,446 | 30.8 | 4,049 | 31.3 |
| Moray Health Services NHS Trust | 210 | 4.1 | 552 | 9.4 |
| Board Area Summary | 25,216 | 31.7 | 28,710 | 31.7 |
| *Greater Glasgow Health Board Area* | | | | |
| Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust | 7,670 | 36.5 | 10,725 | 42.3 |
| Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust | 16,716 | 32.1 | 22,126 | 33.0 |
| Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust | 1,579 | 18.2 | 2,308 | 22.2 |
| Southern General Hospital NHS Trust | 7,209 | 24.3 | 11,338 | 32.4 |
| Stobhill NHS Trust | 6,337 | 23.9 | 8,371 | 24.8 |
| The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust | 9,696 | 29.4 | 13,685 | 30.0 |
| The Yorkhill NHS Trust | 8,563 | 40.8 | 10,673 | 37.2 |
| West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust | 10,598 | 22.6 | 18,655 | 31.5 |
| Board Area Summary | 68,368 | 28.6 | 97,881 | 32.1 |
| *Highland health board area* | | | | |
| Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust | 1,101 | 19.4 | 1,212 | 19.1 |
| Highland Communities NHS Trust | 1,271 | 15.1 | 1,400 | 15.1 |
| Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust | 6,293 | 26.1 | 6,869 | 23.3 |
| Board Area Summary | 8,665 | 22.7 | 9,481 | 21.0 |
| *Lanarkshire health board area* | | | | |
| Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust | 5,132 | 25.6 | 7,199 | 24.0 |
| Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust | 357 | 14.2 | 506 | 15.7 |
| Law Hospital NHS Trust | 7,955 | 24.4 | 11,012 | 24.2 |
| Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust | 8,358 | 27.1 | 11,813 | 28.2 |
| Board Area Summary | 21,802 | 25.3 | 30,530 | 25.3 |
| *Lothian health board area* | | | | |
| East and Midlothian NHS Trust | 2,171 | 16.3 | 2,774 | 15.6 |
| Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust | 253 | 3.4 | 237 | 7.5 |
| Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust | 1,161 | 12.5 | 1,330 | 10.5 |
| Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust | 18,564 | 26.9 | 24,431 | 28.8 |
| West Lothian NHS Trust | 6,607 | 25.6 | 6,833 | 20.6 |
| Western General Hospitals NHS Trust | 5,438 | 22.3 | 6,603 | 20.5 |
| Board Area Summary | 34,194 | 22.9 | 42,208 | 23.0 |
| *Orkney health board area* | | | | |
| Orkney Health Board Unit | 102 | 4.9 | 157 | 5.8 |
| Board Area Summary | 102 | 4.9 | 157 | 5.8 |

*NHSiS—New out-patient consultation referrals[1] where the wait was greater than nine weeks*

*Years ended 31 December 1994[2] and 1995[3]*

| Provider | 1994 Number | 1994 Percentage of all referrals | 1995 Number | 1995 Percentage of all referrals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Shetland health board area* | | | | |
| Shetland Hospitals and Community Services Unit | 549 | 16.4 | 684 | 16.7 |
| Board Area Summary | 549 | 16.4 | 684 | 16.7 |
| *Tayside health board area* | | | | |
| Angus NHS Trust | 2,528 | 18.9 | 3,225 | 20.4 |
| Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust | 675 | 15.2 | 792 | 14.7 |
| Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust | 16,192 | 26.2 | 17,382 | 23.7 |
| Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust | 4,088 | 16.7 | 5,676 | 19.6 |
| Board Area Summary | 23,483 | 22.6 | 27,075 | 21.9 |
| *Western Isles health board area* | | | | |
| Western Isles Health Unit | 1,067 | 22.3 | 913 | 15.9 |
| Board Area Summary | 1,067 | 22.3 | 913 | 15.9 |
| Other/NK Providers | 67,191 | 24.7 | 96 | 13.4 |
| All Providers | 328,127 | 25.6 | 321,190 | 26.1 |

*Notes:*
1. Excludes Accident and Emergency and Genito Urinary Medicine specialities
2. The collection of the provider of service was not mandatory until 1 April 1994 therefore presented referral totals may be lower than the actual activity during 1994—the large number of "other/NK providers" illustrates this.
3. Provisional.

*Source:*
SMRO. Ref: Unit 2/96037.
Date: 21 January 1996.

### Hospitals (Patient Care)

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the hospitals in Scotland in which a system has been devised under which a named nurse or midwife is responsible for an individual patient's care while in hospital. [11217]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** All hospitals.

**Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of patients in Scottish hospitals had a named nurse or midwife responsible for their hospital care in December 1995. [11218]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Full implementation of the named nurse in Scotland is to be achieved by June 1997. Health boards have agreed targets with provider units working towards 100 per cent. coverage. At December 1995 the average coverage across Scottish hospitals was 89 per cent.

### Gross Domestic Product

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the Scottish gross domestic produce per head as a percentage of the United Kingdom average in each year since 1978. [13153]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The latest available estimates are shown in the following table. Figures for 1994 were published in the article "Regional accounts 1994: part 1" in the December 1995 edition of "Economic Trends". The article includes revisions to data on GDP per head for earlier years and an explanation of the reasons for the revisions. Copies of "Economic Trends" are available in the Library.

*GDP per head at factor cost: current prices: Scotland 1978–1994 (UK=100)[1]*

| | Number |
|---|---|
| 1978 | 94.9 |
| 1979 | 94.8 |
| 1980 | 94.4 |
| 1981 | 96.7 |
| 1982 | 96.3 |
| 1983 | 96.8 |
| 1984 | 95.8 |
| 1985 | 96.0 |
| 1986 | 94.6 |
| 1987 | 94.5 |
| 1988 | 93.7 |
| 1989 | 93.5 |
| 1990 | 95.8 |
| 1991 | 97.2 |
| 1992 | 98.8 |
| 1993 | 98.9 |
| 1994[2] | 99.9 |

*Notes:*
[1] United Kingdom (less Continental Shelf) =100.
[2] Provisional.

*Source:*
Central Statistical Office, Regional Accounts.

### Burns Statue, London

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who made the proposal that a wreath be laid at the Burns statue in London on 31 January; what it was proposed to commemorate; who was responsible for sending out invitations; who was invited to attend; what is the estimated cost of the event; who will be responsible for covering the cost; and what was the purpose of the event. [12961]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I was first approached in July 1995 by the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who had been discussing with Enterprise Ayrshire the possibility of marking the bicentenary of the death of Robert Burns with a ceremony at the Burns statue in London. I was happy to participate in what was one of a number of events taking place on 31 January in London and, as requested, to lay a commemorative wreath. The administrative arrangements are matters for the hon. Member for Ayr, whose constituency contains the birthplace of Robert Burns. I understand that invitations were issued to all Members of Parliament for Scottish constituencies.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he intends to make to the cash limits and running costs provision for 1995–96 within his responsibility. [13545]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, I intend to make changes to eight voted cash limits, three non-voted cash blocks and five running costs limits:

The cash limit element for class XIV, vote 1, agriculture and fisheries, Scotland will be reduced by £3,000,000 from £131,167,000 to £128,167,000 to take account of slower than expected take-up of measures aimed at providing support in special areas.

The cash limit for class XIV, vote 2, training programmes, roads and transport services, industrial and regional support, Scotland, will be reduced by £7,967,000 from £962,881,000 to £954,914,000. The reduced cash limit takes account of a transfer to the Department of Transport reflecting a decrease in requirement of £9,766,000 for grants to Strathclyde passenger transport authority to meet the costs of supporting rail services resulting from the restructuring of the railways; and the need to provide a non-voted external financing limit of £1,600,000 for the Scottish Transport Group. It also reflects increased provision of £3,000,000 transferred from class XIV, vote 1, to address pressure on the motorways and trunk roads current expenditure programme; and additional provision of £400,000 to meet costs resulting from the privatisation of the electricity industry which will be met from the proceeds of privatisation.

The cash limit for class XIV, vote 5, housing and environmental services, Scotland will be increased by a net total of £213,000 from £416,704,000 to £416,917,000. This reflects a reduction in housing support grant provision by £340,000, an increase in grant in aid to Scottish Homes of £169,000, provision of £176,000 transferred to class XIV, vote 8, and a net increase of £560,000 in gross running cost provision for Historic Scotland, from £15,821,000 to £16,381,000, reflecting the take-up of end year flexibility. Further increases in provision of £161,000 are offset fully by increased appropriations in aid. There is an increase in grant in aid provision for Scottish Natural Heritage of £1,000,000 which is offset fully by savings within the vote.

The cash limit for class XIV, vote 7, revenue support grant and payment of non-domestic rates, etcetera, Scotland will be increased by £256,000 from £4,974,997,000 to £4,975,253,000. The increase is a transfer from DSS class XIII, vote 2, in respect of residual housing benefit for Kirkcaldy and East Kilbride district councils following the recent transfer of new towns housing stock.

The cash limit for class XIV, vote 10, law, order, miscellaneous health and social work services, Scotland, will be increased by a net total of £358,000 from £315,773,000 to £316,131,000. The changes include a net transfer of £341,000 to the Scottish police college current provision from class XIV, vote 9, in respect of police superannuation. There is also a number of minor transfers within the vote and from other votes within the Scottish Office. The running cost provision decreases by £580,000 from £150,909,000 to £150,329,000.

The cash limit for class XIV, vote 12, hospital, community health, family health (part) and other health services, Scotland will be decreased by £9,416,000 from £3,161,003,000 to £3,151,587,000. This is due to: a transfer of £10,000,000 to class XIV, vote 11, to provide for increased expenditure on family health services, mainly drugs costs; a transfer of £11,000 to the health part of Class XIV, vote 10, for the Mental Welfare Commission; and an increase of £595,000 as a result of a transfer from the non-voted element of the NHS trusts' external financing limit. This, together with other transfers within vote 12, means that the NHS trusts' external financing limit will be increased by £6,702,000 from £36,403,000 to £43,105,000. Overall, the above changes will have no effect on provision for the Scottish health programme.

The cash limit for class XIV, vote 18, Scottish Office administration, is being increased by £1,327,000 from £174,607,000 to £175,934,000. Within this total, the running cost provision for Scottish Office administration is being increased by £619,000 from £153,120,000 to £153,739,000 as a result of transfers from Property Holdings, from an agreed claim on the reserve covering the Scottish Office apportionment for rent registration costs arising from housing benefit changes, less an intra vote transfer. The capital provision is also being increased as a result of a transfer from Property Holdings less an inter vote transfer and a technical transfer from running costs.

The Scottish Office running cost limit—covering votes 1, 5, 10, 15 and 18—is increased by £608,000 from £339,608,000 to £340,216,000. In addition to the changes referred to, running cost provision on vote 1 will increase by £9,000.

The cash limit for class XIV, vote 19, Scottish Record Office is being increased by £1,641,000 from £5,459,000 to £7,100,000. Within this total, the Scottish Record Office running cost limit is being increased by £641,000 from £5,586,000 to £6,227,000 and results from a transfer from Property Holdings and the take-up of 50 per cent. marginal extra receipts.

The non-voted cash limit SO/LA1, which covers non-housing capital expenditure by local authorities, is to be increased by £6,911,000 from £592,392,000 to £599,303,000, reflecting take-up of end year flexibility. The non-voted cash limit SO/LA2 which covers housing capital expenditure by local authorities and capital expenditure by new towns will be increased by

£4,841,000 from £229,973,000 to £234,814,000. This reflects take-up of capital end year flexibility of £5,010,000 and a transfer of provision to Scottish Homes of £169,000, for which a complementary increase is included in the spring supplementary estimate for class XIV, vote 5. The non-voted cash limit SO/ERDF which covers European regional development fund payments in Scotland will be increased by £10,025,000 from 110,000,000 to £120,025,000 reflecting the take-up of end year flexibility.

All the increases will be offset by savings, transfers from other votes or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### After-school Care Initiative

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money will be available in Scotland in 1996–97 for the after-school care initiative. [7742]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson** *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* The out-of-school child care initiative has offered good value for money in its first three years of operation, with 5,467 places created in Scotland to date. The scheme will continue to be delivered in Scotland until March 1999 by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Around £500,000 will be made available for each of the three years.

### General Practitioners (Rural Areas)

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioners were practising in rural areas in Scotland in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1995. [11583]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The numbers of general medical practitioners working in rural areas in Scotland at 1 October 1990 and 1 October 1995 were 394 and 441 respectively.

## WALES

### Ministerial Visits (Schools)

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local education authority (i) nursery, (ii) infants, (iii) primary and (iv) high schools he visited in 1995. [9073]

**Mr. Hague:** I have visited the following schools in 1995:

*Primary*

Llanfihangel Rhydithon Primary, Llandrindod Wells, Powys.

Caerleon Endowed Junior School (V.A.), Caerleon, Gwent.

*Secondary*

Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw, Trevethin, Gwent.

Bassaleg Comprehensive School, Bassaleg, Gwent.

Darland High School, Rossett, Clwyd.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many private schools he visited in 1995. [9074]

**Mr. Richards:** During 1995, no visits were made to independent schools by my right hon. Friend, but I visited Craig-y-Parc—Scope—school, Pentyrch, mid-Glamorgan and Llandovery college, Dyfed. I also visited Penrhos-Rydal college in my constituency as the local Member of Parliament.

### Grant-maintained Schools

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total in grants paid to opted-out schools in Wales was in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [10725]

**Mr. Richards:** The information on a financial year basis is as follows:

| | *LMS element* | *Central services element* | *School meals element* | *Total annual maintenance grant* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 3,687,648 | 561,195 | 83,423 | 4,332,266 |
| 1993–94 | 12,123,231 | 1,785,845 | 200,096 | 14,109,172 |
| 1994–95 | 19,259,649 | 2,238,152 | 464,948 | 21,962,749 |

| | *Special purpose grants* | *Capital grants* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 208,708 | 516,967 | 5,057,941 |
| 1993–94 | 1,002,942 | 6,195,751 | 21,307,865 |
| 1994–95 | 849,768 | 7,349,278 | 30,161,795 |

Annual maintenance grant is recouped from the local authority in which the school is situated.

### Trade Missions

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will name, by company title and head office address, the companies which participated in the Welsh trade mission to Indonesia and the specific products they were promoting; [11812]

(2) what appraisal is made of the human rights conditions in countries which are to be visited under the auspices of the Welsh Office trade mission programme; [11814]

(3) what information on human rights issues was given to participants in the recent trade mission to Indonesia; [11817]

(4) what steps were taken to inform participants in the Welsh Office trade mission to Indonesia of the human rights conditions in that country. [11815]

**Mr. Hague:** The following companies participated on the Indonesian leg of the recent Welsh Office trade mission to Indonesia and Singapore.

| *Company name and address* | *Products* |
|---|---|
| *Biocatalysts Ltd.* Main Avenue<br>Treforest Industrial Estate<br>Pontypridd<br>Mid Glamorgan<br>CF37 5UT | Enzyme technologies |

| Company name and address | Products |
|---|---|
| *NCM Credit Insurance Ltd.*<br>3 Harbour Drive<br>Capital Waterside<br>Cardiff<br>CF1 6TZ | Export credit insurance |
| *Boride Ceramics and Composites Ltd.*<br>Lake Road<br>Leeway Industrial Estate<br>Newport<br>Gwent<br>NP9 0SR | Metal borides |
| *Tedea Huntleigh Europe Ltd.*<br>37 Portmanmoor Road<br>Cardiff<br>CF2 2HB | Load cells |
| *Conren International*<br>Redwither Road<br>Wrexham Industrial Estate<br>Wrexham<br>Clwyd<br>LL13 3RD | Construction materials |
| *British Rototherm Co. Ltd.*<br>Kenfig Industrial Estate<br>Margam<br>Port Talbot<br>SA13 2PW | Instrumentation |
| *TODO Products Ltd.*<br>14 Pontyfelin Avenue<br>New Inn<br>Pontypool<br>Gwent<br>NP4 0DQ | Industrial valves |
| *Soundscape Digital Technologies*<br>Crichton House<br>Mount Stuart Square<br>Cardiff<br>CF1 6DR | Audio equipment |
| *Procter, Johnson and Co. Ltd.*<br>Excelsior Works<br>Castle Park<br>Evans Street<br>Flint<br>CH6 5NT | Pigments |
| *Laurence, Scott and Electromotors Ltd.*<br>P0 Box 25<br>Hardy Road<br>Norwich<br>NR1 1JD | Electrical rotating machines and control gear |
| *Technical Support and Supplies Ltd.*<br>Unit 1, Falcon House<br>Kinmel Park<br>Royal Welsh Avenue<br>Bodelwyddan<br>Clwyd<br>LL18 5TY | Isolators for street lighting |
| *Cambrian Mapping Services Ltd.*<br>Mayfield<br>Lanbadoc<br>Usk<br>Gwent<br>NP5 1BT | Maps |
| *Cambrian SE Asia Ltd.*<br>Mayfield<br>Lanbadoc<br>Usk<br>Gwent<br>NP5 1BT | Geotechnical services |
| *Pinacl Communications Systems Ltd.*<br>Kinmel Park<br>Bodelwyddan<br>Clwyd<br>LL18 5TZ | Telecommunications |
| *Merton Wire Ltd.*<br>11 Cyfarthfa Industrial Estate<br>Merthyr Tydfil<br>CF47 8PE | Aluminium wire |
| *EFE International Ltd.*<br>7–11 Kensington High Street<br>London<br>W8 5NP | Marketing services |

Trade missions are essentially commercial events in which individual companies develop contacts with potential partners in the target market.

Members of this mission were provided with briefing about the commercial situation in Indonesia.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he raised the question of human rights during his recent visit to Indonesia; and if he will make a statement. [11818]

**Mr. Hague:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) on 26 January, *Official Report*, column *478*.

## Patient Death (Legal Action)

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what legal action is outstanding in the case of Patient C, subject of an inquest in north Wales. [11926]

**Mr. Richards:** I believe that no legal action is outstanding in respect of the High Court proceedings commenced by originating summons which resulted in a declaration leading to the withdrawal of mechanical feeding and the consequent death of Patient C, who had been in a persistent vegetative state. Further legal action is involved in connection with the inquest which is due to be resumed and it is also possible that further legal action will take place if claims are pursued in the courts on behalf of C's estate or family, but the Welsh Office has no direct knowledge concerning such claims.

### School Funding (Flintshire)

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what capital funding allocations have been made to local education authority schools for the new unitary authority of Flintshire for 1996–97. [12421]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Flintshire county council has been issued with a basic credit approval of £66.441 million for 1996–97, which allows borrowing for any capital purpose including schools. Essentially the Government provide moneys, and borrowing approval to local government on an unhypothecated basis and it is up to the council to determine the use of such resources.

In addition, Hawarden high school, Deeside, has been awarded funding of £250,000 commencing in 1995–96 under the technology schools initiative. Of this £120,000 will be issued to Flintshire county council in 1996–97 as a supplementary credit approval.

Under the popular schools initiative supplementary credit approval of £155,000—phased over three years from 1995–96—has been offered to Clwyd local education authority and Flintshire county council in respect of an extension to Ewloe Green county primary school.

### Planning Policy Guidance

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to publish new guidelines for planning in Wales. [12687]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Comments on the draft planning policy guidance (Wales) documents issued in July have been thoroughly evaluated and my right hon. Friend will be making a decision shortly on what planning policy guidance to publish in Wales.

### Sustainable Development

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the impact on his Department's work priorities of the advice to Her Majesty's Government contained in the second report of the Government's panel on sustainable development. [12686]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The Government are considering this report and will respond shortly.

### Nutrition Task Force

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *599*, what plans he has to set up a nutrition task force and a low income project team for Wales; and if he will make a statement. [13148]

**Mr. Hague:** The Health Promotion Authority for Wales has pioneered a range of programmes to help people in Wales, including those on low incomes, to eat more healthily. I have no plans to establish a nutrition task force or low income project team for Wales to duplicate the work already undertaken by HPW.

### NHS EstateCare

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *599*, on what date the decision was taken to instruct the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to invite bids from the private sector for NHS EstateCare. [13146]

**Mr. Hague:** My department wrote to the chairman of the authority on 16 August 1995 confirming my predecessor's decision to privatise the current function of EstateCare group. The conduct of the process, including the seeking and evaluation of bids, is a matter for the authority.

### University Hospital of Wales

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter from the director of the NHS in Wales to the chief executives of the South Glamorgan health authority and the University Hospital of Wales NHS trust received on 29 January, concerning the proposed transfer of accident and emergency facilities from the Cardiff royal infirmary to the University hospital of Wales. [13151]

**Mr. Hague:** Copies of the relevant decision letter have been placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chief executive of University hospital of Wales concerning the *(a)* private and *(b)* public funding of the (i) new multi-level access road and (ii) new accident and emergency services; on what criteria he proposes to judge private sector offers to design, build, finance and operate the two projects; and if he will make a statement. [13149]

**Mr. Hague:** None. This is a matter for the trust in producing an acceptable business case which will then be tested for private sector interest.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has discussed with the chief executive of the University hospital of Wales concerning the means of acquiring land for the construction of the access road across the A48 in connection with the transfer of accident and emergency services from the Cardiff royal infirmary to the University hospital of Wales; and what estimate he has made of the time required for such land acquisition by *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* compulsory means. [13150]

**Mr. Hague:** None. This is a matter for the trust in consultation with the local planning authority.

### Crickhowell House

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he expects Crickhowell house to be available with vacant possession for sub-letting. [12942]

**Mr. Hague:** No date has been fixed.

### Urban Investment Grant

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what urban investment grant he has awarded *(a)* the financial year 1994–95 and *(b)* this financial year; and if he will give the same information for grants awarded by the Cardiff Bay development corporation. [12943]

**Mr. Hague:** A list of all projects awarded urban investment grant, by the Welsh Office, in 1994–95 and 1995–96 is in the following tables. Cardiff Bay development corporation did not make any awards of urban investment grant in the period.

*Table 1: Urban investment grants awarded 1994–95*

| *Project and location* | *Grant awarded £* |
|---|---|
| Industrial development: Gresford Industrial Estate, Wrexham | 600,000 |
| Retail development: Bridgend Bus Station site | 150,000 |
| Offices: Broncoed Business Park, Mold | 175,000 |
| Offices: Gordon Street, Pembroke Dock | 111,000 |
| Offices: High Street Bargoed | 47,000 |
| Industrial: Trecenydd Business Park, Caerphilly | 220,000 |
| Commercial: Vauxhall Dealership, Tredegar | 152,000 |
| Residential: Swan Road, Port Talbot | 34,000 |
| Residential: Hopefield Street, Newport | 37,600 |
| Residential: East Street, Trallwn, Pontypridd | 90,000 |
| Residential/retail: Red Garages site, Llandudno | 315,000 |
| Offices, John Street, Carmarthen | 158,000 |
| Retail: Church Street, Abertillery | 125,000 |
| Residential: Elmwood Grove, Tredegar | 166,000 |
| Offices/retail/carpark: St Catherine's Corner, Pontypridd | 1,000,000 |
| Retail: Milford Haven Retail Park | 1,600,000 |
| Retail: Former Carlton Cinema, Swansea | 400,000 |
| Retail: Howards Furnishers, Ebbw Vale | 50,000 |
| Residential: Main Road, Llantwit Fardre | 66,000 |

*Table 2: Urban investment grant awarded 1995–96 (to 31 January 1996)*

| *Project and location* | *Grant awarded £* |
|---|---|
| Retail development: Bethel Square, Brecon | 530,000 |
| Retail/commercial/residential development: Castle Hotel, Bangor | 1,100,000 |
| Bingo/Leisure Club: Mariners Wharf, Newport | 250,000 |
| Residential development: Main Road, Cadoxton | 230,000 |
| Industrial/office development: J. K. Smit Factory, Colwyn Bay | 100,000 |
| Industrial: Duffryn Industrial Estate, Ystrad Mynach | 57,000 |
| Residential development: Crown Road, Maesteg | 180,000 |
| Offices: Park Street, Ammanford | 66,000 |
| Residential development: Penrhys Estate, Rhondda | 65,000 |
| Retail/commercial development: The Walk, Ebbw Vale | 750,000 |
| Office/commercial development: The Old Courthouse, Bridgend | 152,000 |
| Residential development: Ann Street, Cilfynydd | 77,000 |
| Retail/residential development: Rich Way, Brecon | 88,000 |
| Retail development: Pentre Felin, Wrexham | 3,500,000 |

### Health Authorities (VAT)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the financial position of health authorities with respect to the windfall recovery of VAT; and what correspondence he has had with health authorities in this regard. [12944]

**Mr. Hague:** It is the responsibility of registered organisations within the NHS to account for VAT. Advice about VAT was last given to the NHS in Wales on 12 December 1994. This gave advance notice of a change in the registration arrangements from 1 April 1995.

### Fluoridation

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the most recent guidance on fluoridation he has issued to Welsh health authorities; and what discussions he has had with those authorities and with Welsh Water to update it. [12945]

**Mr. Hague:** The most recent guidance to health authorities in Wales on fluoridation is contained in the "Protocol for Investment in Health Gain" of November 1992. The protocol advises that health authorities should give high priority to water fluoridation. Welsh Office officials discuss fluoridation issues with health authorities from time to time. I have had no discussions with the chairman of Welsh Water on this issue.

### NHS Hospitals

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the most recent guidance he has issued to health authorities on the definition of a *(a)* district and general hospital, *(b)* local general hospital, *(c)* neighbourhood hospital and *(d)* cottage hospital; and if he will list each non-psychiatric hospital in Wales and specify which category it falls into. [12946]

**Mr. Hague:** I have issued no guidance of this kind as in most cases the definitions involved are clear to the service. A list of hospitals in Wales was published in appendix II of "Health Statistics, Wales", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

### NHS Trusts

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all loans outstanding by NHS trusts in Wales; and if he will specify the terms on which the loans were arranged and the dates of commencement and final repayment of principal. [12947]

**Mr. Hague:** The information requested is in the following table.

*NHS trust long-term loans*

| *Date of loan* | *Trust* | *Amount £* | *Number of years* | *Interest rate Per cent.* | *Balance outstanding £* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1993–94* | | | | | |
| 4 February 1994 | Clwydian community care | 250,000 | 20 | 6.500 | 231,250 |
| 15 March 1994 | South and East Wales ambulance | 600,000 | 9 | 6.875 | 500,001 |
| 15 March 1994 | Llandough hospital | 2,727,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 2,522,475 |
| 15 March 1994 | Glan Clwyd hospital | 1,515,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 1,401,375 |
| 15 March 1994 | Powys health care | 2,215,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 2,048,875 |
| 15 March 1994 | Glan Hafren | 3,830,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 3,543,750 |
| 15 March 1994 | Wrexham Maelor | 2,023,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 1,871,275 |

*NHS trust long-term loans*

| *Date of loan* | *Trust* | *Amount* £ | *Number of years* | *Interest rate Per cent.* | *Balance outstanding* £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 March 1994 | Gwent community health | 3,000,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 2,775,000 |
| 15 March 1994 | Bridgend and district | 4,700,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 4,197,500 |
| 15 March 1994 | Clwydian community care | 1,463,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 1,353,275 |
| 18 March 1994 | Carmarthen and district | 2,345,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 2,227,750 |
| 18 March 1994 | Pembrokeshire | 500,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 475,000 |
| 21 March 1994 | Swansea | 1,063,000 | 20 | 7.500 | 1,009,850 |
| 24 March 1994 | Ceredigion and Mid Wales | 289,000 | 20 | 7.750 | 274,550 |
| 25 March 1994 | Pembrokeshire | 170,000 | 20 | 7.750 | 161,500 |
| *1994–95* | | | | | |
| 31 August 1994 | Llandough hospital | 1,000,000 | 20 | 8.875 | 975,000 |
| 9 September 1994 | Morriston hospital | 1,182,191 | 20 | 9.000 | 1,152,636 |
| 15 September 1994 | Clwydian community care | 2,000,000 | 20 | 9.250 | 1,950,000 |
| 15 September 1994 | Morriston hosptial | 1,200,000 | 20 | 9.250 | 1,170,000 |
| 15 September 1994 | Swansea | 2,000,000 | 20 | 9.250 | 1,950,000 |
| 15 September 1994 | Glan Hafren | 2,000,000 | 20 | 9.250 | 1,950,000 |
| 28 September 1994 | Llandough hospital | 1,000,000 | 20 | 9.250 | 975,000 |
| 29 September 1994 | Pembrokeshire | 323,000 | 20 | 9.250 | 314,925 |
| 12 December 1994 | Clwydian community care | 2,000,000 | 20 | 8.875 | 1,950,000 |
| 6 January 1995 | North Wales ambulance | 290,000 | 7 | 8.875 | 269,286 |
| 16 January 1995 | Swansea | 300,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 292,500 |
| 16 January 1995 | Powys healthcare | 900,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 877,500 |
| 27 January 1995 | Gwynedd community | 400,000 | 20 | 9.125 | 390,000 |
| 30 January 1995 | Llandough hospital | 1,000,000 | 20 | 9.125 | 975,000 |
| 1 February 1995 | Morriston hospital | 600,000 | 20 | 8.875 | 585,000 |
| 7 February 1995 | Gwent community health | 2,000,000 | 20 | 8.875 | 1,950,000 |
| 8 February 1995 | Morriston hospital | 500,000 | 20 | 8.875 | 487,500 |
| 9 February 1995 | Ceredigion and Mid Wales | 200,000 | 20 | 8.875 | 195,000 |
| 13 February 1995 | Llandough hospital | 1,000,000 | 20 | 8.875 | 975,000 |
| 15 February 1995 | Swansea | 1,300,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 1,267,500 |
| 15 February 1995 | Bridgend and district | 4,471,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 4,359,225 |
| 20 February 1995 | Clwydian community care | 1,000,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 975,000 |
| 22 February 1995 | Gwynedd community | 600,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 585,000 |
| 27 February 1995 | Gwynedd community | 400,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 390,000 |
| 6 March 1995 | Llandough hospital | 3,249,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 3,167,775 |
| 8 March 1995 | Glan Clwyd | 1,344,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 1,310,400 |
| 9 March 1995 | Ceredigion and mid Wales | 254,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 247,650 |
| 15 March 1995 | Powys health care | 500,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 487,500 |
| 15 March 1995 | Gwynedd community | 2,444,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 2,382,900 |
| 15 March 1995 | Llanelli/Dinefwr | 566,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 551,850 |
| 15 March 1995 | Velindre | 243,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 236,925 |
| 15 March 1995 | Clwydian community care | 3,071,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 2,994,225 |
| 15 March 1995 | Swansea | 1,118,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 1,090,050 |
| 15 March 1995 | Carmarthen and district | 1,949,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 1,900,275 |
| 15 March 1995 | Derwen | 1,124,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 1,095,900 |
| 15 March 1995 | South and East Wales ambulance | 281,000 | 9 | 8.875 | 265,389 |
| 15 March 1995 | Mid Glamorgan ambulance | 265,000 | 9 | 8.875 | 250,278 |
| 15 March 1995 | Morriston | 2,000,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 1,950,000 |
| 15 March 1995 | Llandough hospital | 184,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 179,400 |
| 15 March 1995 | Wrexham Maelor | 2,182,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 2,127,450 |
| 15 March 1995 | Wrexham Maelor | 2,000,000 | 10 | 8.875 | 1,900,000 |
| 15 March 1995 | Glan Hafren | 1,185,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 1,155,375 |
| 15 March 1995 | Nevill Hall | 89,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 86,775 |
| 15 March 1995 | Gwynedd hospitals | 2,500,000 | 20 | 9.000 | 2,437,500 |
| 23 March 1995 | East Glamorgan | 1,044,000 | 20 | 8.750 | 1,017,900 |
| 24 March 1995 | North Wales ambulance | 197,000 | 7 | 8.500 | 182,929 |
| 24 March 1995 | Morriston | 2,579,809 | 20 | 8.750 | 2,515,314 |
| 29 March 1995 | Gwynedd hospitals | 291,000 | 20 | 8.750 | 283,725 |
| 2 May 1995 | Ceredigion and Mid Wales | 200,000 | 20 | 8.750 | — |
| 15 June 1995 | Swansea | 600,000 | 20 | 8.3750 | — |
| 3 July 1995 | Ceredigion and Mid Wales | 100,000 | 20 | 8.6250 | — |
| 14 July 1995 | Swansea | 1,200,000 | 20 | 8.3750 | — |
| 15 August 1995 | Swansea | 1,360,000 | 20 | 8.5000 | — |
| 30 August 1995 | East Glamorgan | 272,000 | 20 | 8.3750 | — |
| 5 September 1995 | Clwydian community care | 3,000,000 | 20 | 8.2500 | — |
| 15 September 1995 | Mid Glamorgan ambulance | 159,000 | 9 | 7.6250 | — |
| 15 September 1995 | Carmarthen and district | 1,000,000 | 20 | 8.2500 | — |
| 15 September 1995 | Glan Hafren | 1,000,000 | 20 | 8.2500 | — |
| 15 September 1995 | East Glamorgan | 612,000 | 20 | 8.2500 | — |
| 25 September 1995 | Gwent community health | 1,200,000 | 20 | 8.1250 | — |
| 25 September 1995 | Llandough hospital | 1,000,000 | 20 | 8.1250 | — |
| 27 September 1995 | UHW healthcare | 1,300,000 | 20 | 8.2500 | — |

*NHS trust long-term loans*

| *Date of loan* | *Trust* | *Amount £* | *Number of years* | *Interest rate Per cent.* | *Balance outstanding £* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28 September 1995 | Gwynedd community health | 800,000 | 20 | 8.2500 | — |
| 28 September 1995 | Nevill Hall and District | 632,000 | 20 | 8.2500 | — |
| 24 October 1995 | Gwent community helath | 300,000 | 20 | 8.5000 | — |
| 25 October 1995 | East Glamorgan | 646,000 | 20 | 8.5000 | — |
| 30 October 1995 | South and East Wales ambulance | 750,000 | 10 | 8.000 | — |
| 2 November 1995 | UHW Healthcare | 1,900,000 | 20 | 8.3750 | — |
| 22 November 1995 | Ceredigion and Mid Wales | 100,000 | 20 | 8.1250 | — |
| 24 November 1995 | South and East Wales ambulance | 1,000,000 | 10 | 7.5000 | — |
| 29 November 1995 | East Glamorgan | 544,000 | 20 | 7.8750 | — |
| 8 December 1995 | Clwydian community care | 500,000 | 20 | 7.8750 | — |
| 15 December 1995 | Swansea | 1,200,000 | 20 | 7.8750 | — |
| 15 December 1995 | North Wales ambulance | 301,000 | 7 | 6.8750 | — |
| 18 December 1995 | Gwent community health | 650,000 | 20 | 7.8750 | — |
| 21 December 1995 | East Glamorgan | 272,000 | 20 | 7.8750 | — |
| 11 January 1996 | Gwynedd community health | 200,000 | 20 | 7.8750 | — |
| 11 January 1996 | East Glamorgan | 204,000 | 20 | 7.8750 | — |
| 18 January 1996 | Ceredigion and Mid Wales | 200,000 | 20 | 7.7500 | — |
| 24 January 1996 | East Glamorgan | 340,000 | 20 | 7.7500 | — |
| 29 January 1996 | Gwent community health | 400,000 | 20 | 7.7500 | — |
| 30 January 1996 | Gwynedd community health | 600,000 | 20 | 7.8750 | — |

No repayments of principal have been made to date for loans issued in financial year 1995–96.

### Primary Care (Out-of-hours Centres)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with health authorities concerning the provision of out-of-hours centres for primary care and the issuing of new guidelines with respect to such centres; and if he will make a statement. [12948]

**Mr. Hague:** My officials met representatives of family health services authorities on 2 November 1995 to discuss the new arrangements for delivering GP out-of-hours services. The arrangements provide an opportunity for GPs to organise their emergency services in ways that will maintain and improve patient care.

### Pembrokeshire NHS Trust

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when his Department's officialS received a copy of the draft report produced by the auditors of Pembrokeshire NHS trust, Coopers and Lybrand, into the circumstances leading up to, and the financial implications of, the departure of the chief executive of the Pembrokeshire NHS Trust in 1994. [13002]

**Mr. Richards:** Welsh Office officials received a copy of a draft on 30 June 1995. Questions arising on the draft were raised by officials who are now considering a further draft. Whether a final report is submitted at a future date to the Secretary of State will be for the Audit Commission to determine.

### Cash Limits

**Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he is proposing to make to the cash limits for his Department and the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales for the current year. [13543]

**Mr. Hague:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit on class XV, vote 1 will be reduced by £1,799,000 from £24,557,000 to £22,758,000; the cash limit on class XV, vote 2 will be reduced by £4,256,000 from £659,934,000 to £655,678,000; the cash limit on class XV, vote 3 will be increased by £5,500,000 from £561,690,000 to £567,190,000; the cash limit on class XV, vote 5 will be reduced by £2,724,000 from £1,789,920,000 to £1,787,196,000 and the cash limit on class XV, vote 7 will be reduced by £500,000 from £8,746,000 to £8,246,000.

The decrease in the cash limit for vote 1 arises mainly from a transfer of a forecast underspend on cash limited agricultural grants to the resources for demand-led agricultural grants including hill livestock compensatory allowances and compensation payments for the control of animal diseases.

The net reduction in the cash limit for vote 2 comprises mainly a transfer of £750,000 from class I, vote 3 for the local initiative fund and a transfer of £5,000,000 to class XV, vote 3.

The cash limit increase on vote 3 relates to a transfer from class XV, vote 7 for Welsh Office administration capital and a transfer from class XV, vote 2 for the central Government roads programme.

The cash limit reduction on vote 5 results mainly from a transfer from cash limited resources within the vote to meet higher than forecast expenditure on demand-led family health services.

The decrease in the cash limit for vote 7 results from fewer than expected tenders being received for school inspections.

None of the proposed changes adds to the overall level of public expenditure.

### Dance and Drama Students (Funding)

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local education authorities have sought from her Department improved funding for students of dance and drama in the past two years. [10349]

**Mr. Forth:** The Department is in frequent contact with local authorities to discuss a wide range of issues. It is not possible to identify from the Department's records every instance in which the issue of funding for dance and drama students may have arisen during the course of those discussions. However, my right hon. Friend has within the past two years received letters from Lancashire and Sutton local authorities proposing that a wider range of dance and drama courses should be designated for mandatory awards.

## Schools (Balances)

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list, by local education authority, the total amount of balances held by schools in England according to the latest figures. [11747]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table shows the aggregate balances held by the schools maintained by each local education authority in England at the end of the financial year 1994–95.

| LEA | School Balances £000 |
|---|---|
| Avon | 13,422 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 2,681 |
| Barnet | 4,763 |
| Barnsley | 2,795 |
| Bedfordshire | 7,512 |
| Berkshire | 8,334 |
| Bexley | 1,973 |
| Birmingham | 16,319 |
| Bolton | 2,416 |
| Bradford | 4,084 |
| Brent | 4,234 |
| Bromley | 3,036 |
| Buckinghamshire | 9,030 |
| Bury | 2,311 |
| Calderdale | 1,975 |
| Cambridgeshire | 8,784 |
| Camden | 4,737 |
| Cheshire | 15,314 |
| City of London | 54 |
| Cleveland | 8,611 |
| Cornwall | 9,007 |
| Coventry | 6,643 |
| Croydon | 4,905 |
| Cumbria | 2,026 |
| Derbyshire | 8,467 |
| Devon | 9,325 |
| Doncaster | 3,751 |
| Dorset | 6,635 |
| Dudley | 1,207 |
| Durham | 7,001 |
| Ealing | 2,393 |
| East Sussex | 8,218 |
| Enfield | 6,026 |
| Essex | 25,252 |
| Gateshead | 1,859 |
| Gloucestershire | 6,743 |
| Greenwich | 4,781 |
| Hackney | 2,324 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 2,493 |
| Hampshire | 25,921 |
| Haringey | 2,896 |
| Harrow | 1,693 |
| Havering | 4,445 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 12,294 |
| Hertfordshire | 20,832 |
| Hillingdon | 2,297 |
| Hounslow | 4,963 |
| Humberside | 9,713 |
| Isle of Wight | 1,325 |
| Isles of Scilly | 43 |
| Islington | 3,394 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 1,155 |
| Kent | 14,553 |
| Kingston | 890 |
| Kirklees | 2,825 |
| Knowsley | 2,216 |
| Lambeth | 5,308 |
| Lancashire | 32,096 |
| Leeds | 3,892 |
| Leicestershire | 13,154 |
| Lewisham | 3,921 |
| Lincolnshire | 7,178 |
| Liverpool | 7,705 |
| Manchester | –1,365 |
| Merton | 4,503 |
| Newcastle | 5,443 |
| Newham | 4,640 |
| Norfolk | 9,262 |
| North Tyneside | 439 |
| North Yorkshire | 11,543 |
| Northamptonshire | 10,061 |
| Northumberland | 3,075 |
| Nottinghamshire | 14,959 |
| Oldham | 516 |
| Oxfordshire | 11,955 |
| Redbridge | 3,111 |
| Richmond | 2,648 |
| Rochdale | 577 |
| Rotherham | 1,101 |
| Salford | 3,048 |
| Sandwell | 5,420 |
| Sefton | 6,049 |
| Sheffield | 3,619 |
| Shropshire | 4,864 |
| Solihull | 4,253 |
| Somerset | 7,678 |
| South Tyneside | 1,898 |
| Southwark | 3,852 |
| St. Helens | 4,163 |
| Staffordshire | 12,381 |
| Stockport | 3,456 |
| Suffolk | 11,487 |
| Sunderland | 1,781 |
| Surrey | 12,109 |
| Sutton | 2,092 |
| Tameside | 1,293 |
| Tower Hamlets | 6,733 |
| Trafford | 556 |
| Wakefield | 3,135 |
| Walsall | 2,807 |
| Waltham Forest | 3,857 |
| Wandsworth | 3,567 |
| Warwickshire | 6,987 |
| West Sussex | 4,489 |
| Westminster | 2,928 |
| Wigan | 5,320 |
| Wiltshire | 6,549 |
| Wirral | 2,572 |
| Wolverhampton | 4,036 |

1. The figures (derived from the LMS outturn statements for 1994–95 published by LEAs under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988) cover all county, voluntary and special schools. Prior to 1994–95 special schools were covered by LMS only in the case of 8 LEAs

2. All figures represent surpluses net of deficits.

### National Vocational Qualifications

**Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost per place of delivering NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3 for *(a)* the unemployed funded by training and enterprise councils and *(b)* those in work attending further education courses or day release. [12753]

**Mr. Paice:** The information requested is not available.

### Jobcentres (Advertised Pay Rates)

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average pay rate on offer at each jobcentre in England for the latest week for which figures are available. [12841]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from R. D. Horne to Mr. Peter L. Pike, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the average pay rate on offer at each Jobcentre in England. In the absence of Mr Fogden I have been asked to reply.

The Employment Service does not collect regular figures on wage rates of vacancies held by Jobcentres.

However, research has been undertaken on advertised vacancies in February 1994 which gave the following estimates for Great Britain, based on those vacancies for which wages and hours were given (ie not those open to an element of negotiation). These show that at that time 11% of vacancies were for hourly rates of pay of £2.50 or below, 47% for £2.51–3.50, 27% for £3.51–£4.50, 8% for £4.51–£5.50 and 7% for over £5.50. Research on the value of vacancy circulation is being carried out at present and is expected to be published by the summer. It is expected to provide some further, limited information on wage rates of Jobcentres vacancies.

I am sorry that I cannot be of more help.

### School Premises Regulations

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to lay new drafts of the Education (School Premises) Regulations before Parliament; and what the time scale will be for their coming into effect. [13080]

**Mrs. Gillan:** We expect to lay the revised Education (School Premises) Regulations before Parliament in February. Subject to the consent of Parliament, they will take effect 21 days later.

### Public Supplies Contract Legislation

**Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what occasions her Department received correspondence from the European Commission during the review of public supplies contract legislation in 1992, on the subject of what preferential schemes were in operation in the United Kingdom; when her Department responded to this consultation; and at what point her Department informed the European Commission that the priority suppliers scheme was in operation. [12917]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The European Commission was informed in 1981 that the priority suppliers scheme was in operation. The Department did not receive any correspondence from the European Commission on the subject of preference schemes during the consolidation and revision of the supplies directive in 1992.

### Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the range of accommodation for play groups which is likely to qualify for the scheme for nursery vouchers. [12918]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** To qualify for initial validation to redeem nursery vouchers, all play groups must be registered under part X of the Children Act 1989. As such, their accommodation and facilities should comply with the guidance on premises in volume 2 of the Children Act guidance and regulations.

### European Social Fund

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what amount of European social fund money is currently being held in reserve by the European Commission; and what reasons have been given for a reserve being put on this funding. [13079]

**Mr. Forth:** Some 3,377 million ecu are available for spending in Great Britain under objectives 3 and 4 of the structural funds between 1994 and 1999. The objective 3 plan for 1994 to 1996 period, which was agreed with the European Commission, provided for 1,501 million of that money to be spent in the UK. The remaining 1,876 million ecu are available for spending in Great Britain under objectives 3 and 4 of the structural funds between 1997 and 1999. The plans for spending that money will be negotiated this year.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what changes she has made to cash limits and running cost limits on votes within her responsibility for the year 1995–96. [13546]

**Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limits for class V, vote 1, employment programmes and central services; class V, vote 2, Department for Education and Employment: Employment Service; class X, vote 1, schools research and miscellaneous services; class X, vote 3, Department for Education: administration; and class X, vote 5, Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England, will be amended as follows:

| *Class* | *Vote* | *Existing cash limit* | *Change* | *New cash limit* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| V | 1 | 2,122,564,000 | 9,480,000 | 2,132,044,000 |
| V | 2 | 906,952,000 | –8,600,000 | 898,352,000 |
| X | 1 | 735,483,000 | –75,000 | 735,408,000 |
| X | 3 | 90,295,000 | –2,000,000 | 88,295,000 |
| X | 5 | 98,152,000 | –12,875,000 | 85,277,000 |

The cash limit for class V, vote 1 will be increased by £9,480,000 from £2,122,564,000 to £2,132,044,000. This is as a result of a running costs transfer of £11,600,000 from the Employment Service—£2,700,000 for

jobseeker's allowance consultancy costs and £8,900,00 to cover restructuring costs—offset by a transfer of £1,983,000 to the Department for Social Security class XIII, vote 1 for youth training provision; and additional receipts in respect of a recovery of VAT on consultancy fees totalling £138,000. A new net subhead is also being added to the vote for agency payments on behalf of the European regional development fund. The increase will be offset by transfers and a charge to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The running costs limit for class V, vote 1 will increase by £4,992,000 from £294,401,000 to £299,393,000 as a result of the transfer of running costs of £11,600,000 from the Employment service class V, vote 2, offset by a transfer of £6,608,000 to the Department for Trade and Industry class IX, vote 1, as part of the machinery of government changes announced on 5 July 1995.

The cash limit for class V, vote 2, will be reduced by £8,600,000 from £906,952,000 to £898,352,000. The running costs limit for that vote will be reduced by £12,600,000 from £1,023,060,000 to £1,010,460,000. This is as a result of transfers of £11,600,000 to class V, vote 1 in respect of additional jobseeker's allowance consultancy costs and restructuring costs, and of £1,000,000 to the Department of Social Security in respect of salary costs of staff transferred to the Benefits Agency. This decrease is offset by capital transfers of £2,000,000 from class X, vote 3 and the take-up of £2,000,000 under the capital end year flexibility scheme from class V, vote 1 in respect of labour market system infrastructure requirements and rationalisation of the Employment Service estate.

The gross running costs limit for the Department for Education and Employment is reduced by £7,608,000 from £1,403,916,000 to £1,396,308,000 as a result of the running costs changes to class V, votes 1 and 2.

The cash limit on class X, vote 1 will be reduced by £75,000 from £735,483,000 to £735,408,000 as a result of a transfer of £25,000 to the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England to cover the costs of setting up an inspection framework for institutions intending to take part in the new arrangements for the education of the under-fives and a transfer of £50,000 to the Department of Social Security to cover work undertaken in connection with the new under-fives arrangements.

Payments will be made from class X, vote 1 to capita, the body selected to administer the new under-fives arrangements, to cover the setting-up costs of the new scheme. There will be no change in the net provision on the vote as a result.

The cash limit for class X, vote 3 will be reduced by £2,000,000 from £90,295,000 to £88,295,000. This is as a result of the transfer of £2,000,000 of capital provision to the Employment Service class V, vote 2.

The cash limit for class X, vote 5 will be decreased by £12,875,000 from £98,152,000 to £85,277,000. This is as a result of a reduction in forecast expenditure on the inspection of schools. The running costs limit will be increased by £25,000 from £28,451,000 to £28,476,000. This is to allow a transfer of £25,000 from class X, vote 1, to cover the costs of setting up an inspection framework for the pre-school sector.

The opportunity is also being taken to increase provision for appropriations in aid to class X, vote 5 of additional receipts in the form of VAT refunds. This is to offset increased payments resulting from greater contracting out to the private sector. There will be no change in the net provision as a result.

The planned total of public expenditure for these votes is reduced by £14,070,000 as a result.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11909]

**Mr. Willetts:** The Cabinet Office, including the Office of Public Service, is signing up in the near future to use the symbol for external recruitment and internal recruitment and promotion.

The non-agency areas of the Cabinet Office have been putting procedures in place to make the five commitments. These will be introduced in the next two months. This will qualify the Department to use the symbol.

The Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency has also put the relevant procedures in place and intend to use the symbol from February 1996.

The Buying Agency uses the symbol for external recruitment purposes.

The Security Facilities Executive has declared an intention to follow the Cabinet Office's lead in introducing the symbol.

The other OPS agencies, Central Office of Information and Her Majesty's Stationary Office have not yet considered using the symbol.

### Departmental Staff

**Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people are employed in *(a)* the Prime Minister's Office and *(b)* his own office; and what percentage are disabled. [12228]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** For these purposes, the Prime Minister's Office and my own form part of the Cabinet Office. The latest available figures showing disability in the Department relate to 1 April 1995. They showed that, of the 1,549 staff in the Cabinet Office—excluding executive agencies—at the time, 49 staff, 3.1 per cent., had a disability. However, this was before the machinery of government changes of July 1995 which had an impact on the Department's organisation. The Department is about to undertake a new survey of

disability among its staff in preparation for adopting the positive about disabled people symbol. I shall write to the hon. Member when the results are available.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* to date and *(b)* as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11371]

**Mr. Willetts:** Information on consultancy expenditure is not held centrally and can be provided only for earlier years at disproportionate cost. The expenditure on external consultants for 1993–94, 1994–95, year to date and estimated expenditure for the whole of 1995–96 is shown as follows:

*Cabinet Office (including 10 and 12 Downing street)*

| | *Office of Public Service, and agencies* |
|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 5,936,200 |
| 1994–95 | 5,969,000 |
| Year to date | 3,272,400 |
| 1995–96 estimated total | 7,276,000 |

A large part of these totals was consultancy to CCTA, the Government Centre for Information Systems.

| | *HMSO* | *COI* |
|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 1,061,000 | 66,700 |
| 1994–95 | 1,750,700 | 162,200 |
| Year to date | 827,000 | 21,400 |
| 1995–96 estimated total | [1]827,000 | 132,400 |

[1] HMSO financial year: 1 January to 31 December.

Detailed estimates for 1996–97 are not currently available.

Consultants are used in a variety of activities designed to produce different types of benefits, not just cost saving.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines for 1995–96 to date; and if he will list the publications purchased. [11508]

**Mr. Willetts:** This information, and similar information for earlier years, can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### EU Regulations and Directives

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the EU regulations and directives which will not be enforced in the United Kingdom *(a)* in part and *(b)* as a whole. [13081]

**Mr. Freeman:** The Government's policy is to implement EC legislation in an effective, timely and proportionate manner. The enforcement regime adopted in each case should impose least burden on business and others affected.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Dicks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on changes to the 1995–96 cash limit and running costs limit for the Office of Public Service. [13542]

**Mr. Freeman:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Office of Public Service, class XVIII, vote 1, will be increased by £1,636,000 from £53,713,000 to £55,349,000 and the gross running cost limit will be increased by £291,000 from £78,830,000 to £79,121,000. The changes reflect the transfers of the Security Facilities Executive Agency and the Buying Agency from the Department of the Environment—class VII, vote 8, the Office of Science and Technology being transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry and the deregulation unit and competitiveness division being transferred from the Department of Trade and Industry. Provision is also made for the privatisation of executive agencies. SAFE will have a net running cost limit of zero.

### Departmental Properties

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-used properties for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [11506]

**Mr. Willetts:** Until 1 April 1996, responsibility for Cabinet Office empty and under-used property on the common user estate falls to Property Holdings Division of DoE.

For the years in question, there has been no vacant space within Nos. 10 to 12 Downing street or the central Cabinet Office estate in London. Over this period, only HMSO had empty or under-used departmental estate. The costs were as follows:

1979: Not available
1989: Nil
1991: Nil
1993: £137,300
1994: £252,800
1995: £88,700
1996: £34,825 (January–March).

After 1 April 1996, responsibility for Cabinet Office property on the CUE will fall to the Department. It is forecast that the estimated cost to the Cabinet Office of empty and under-used properties in 1996–97 will be £2,035,739, consisting of HMSO; Crown buildings, Basingstoke; and Leatherhead road, Chessington.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### National Lottery

**Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps are being taken to eliminate the sale of nation lottery tickets to under-age children. [10581]

**Mr. Sproat:** The Secretary of State has, under section 11 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, issued a direction to the Director General of the National Lottery,

that no licence should be granted which authorises the promotion of any lottery which does not allow for sufficient controls to prevent persons who have not attained the age of 16 from participating. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

## British Library

**Dr. John Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the contractors involved in the British Library project. [11989]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** According to records held by the Department of National Heritage, the following organisations and individuals are, or have previously been, directly under contract to the Department or its predecessors in respect of the British library construction project:

Abbeywood Floor Coverings Ltd.
AE Hadley Ltd.
Allaway Acoustics
Allsop
Archbell Greenwood Structural Engineers
Argent Building Services Ltd.
ARI Propafloor Ltd.
Arthur Syddall (Grantham) Ltd.
Atlantis Fine Art and Architecture Supplies Ltd.
A to Z Couriers Ltd.
Avondale Construction Ltd.
AW Elliot and Co. (Steeplejacks) Ltd.
Baco Contracts Ltd.
Balfour Beatty Ltd.
Balmforth Engineering Ltd.
Baris Dry Lining Ltd.
Bellow Machine Co. Ltd.
Bolte (UK) Ltd.
Bolton Gate Company Ltd. (formerly Bolton Brady Ltd.)
British Engine Insurance Association Ltd.
British Rail Ltd.
Briton Poole and Burns Ltd.
Brophy Construction plc
Bruce Nivison
Bruynzeel Storage Systems Ltd.
Building Management Southeast
Business Gas plc
Byrne Bros (Formwork) Ltd.
Cambridge Asphalt Co. Ltd.
Carlton Waller Ltd.
Carpet Services (Surrey) Ltd.
Carter and Co. (London) Ltd.
Chubb Fire Ltd.
CJ O'Shea Construction Ltd.
Clark and Fenn Ltd.
Clarke Instruments Ltd.
Colin St. John Wilson and Partners
Colt International Ltd.
Coverite (Asphalters) Ltd.
Cranfield Logistics Ltd. (formerly the National Materials Handling Centre)
Curtis Steel Ltd.
Custom Metal Fabrication Ltd.
Davis Langdon and Everest
Diespeker Interiors Ltd.
Direction Group Air Conditioning Ltd.
Dormar Mechanical Services Ltd.
Drake and Scull Engineering Ltd.
Dun and Bradstreet Ltd.
Durable Contracts Ltd.
E. Coules and Son Ltd.
East and Son Ltd.
Eastern Electricity plc
Elizabeth Burney-Jones
Envopack Group Sales Ltd.
Eurolog Ltd.
Expanded Piling Co. Ltd.
F. Brooks Ltd.
F. Smith and Son (Grimsby) Ltd.
Facade Hoists Ltd.
Farren and Sons Ltd.
FE Beaumont Ltd.
FHC Plant Maintenance (formerly Flowerhouse Craigwell Ltd.)
Fondedile Foundations Ltd.
Forster Metallbau Gmbh
Forward Catering Ltd.
FP Fire Protection Services Ltd.
FW Bull and Son (Construction) Ltd.
G. Dew and Co. Ltd.
G and H McGill Ltd.
Glasbau Hann GMBH and Co. KG
Gormley (Marble Specialists) Ltd.
Greenwood Airvac
Griffiths McGee Demolition Ltd.
Guthrie Allsebrook and Co. Ltd.
Hacker Young
Haden Technology Ltd.
Haden Young Ltd.
Hawes Signs Ltd.
Heath Fielding Ltd.
Higgs and Hill Southern Ltd.
HJ Wedge and Sons Ltd.
How Fire Ltd.
Interface Europe Ltd.
Intermove Services Ltd.
Irvine Whitlock Ltd.
Jacklin Decorators Ltd.
James R. Knowles
Jandor Metal Doors Ltd.
JL Joinery Ltd.
John Mowlem and Co. plc
John Rowlson (Engineers) Ltd.
John Smith and Sons
Jonathan James Ltd.
Joseph Murphy Structural Engineering Ltd.
Keller Colocrete Ltd.
Keltbray Ltd.
Kenneth Eaton Associates
Kenneth Oldham-Smith

Kittridge Flooring Ltd.
Laing Management Ltd.
LH Rothwell Associates
Lilley Construction Ltd.
London Borough of Camden
London Electrify plc
London Underground Ltd.
Mark Hammond Design
Martin Drake
McGill Insulation Group Ltd.
McGinley Construction Services Ltd.
McKenna and Co.
Miles Carter Ltd.
Mobil Gas Marketing (UK) Ltd.
MPG Contracts Ltd. (formerly MPG Plastering Ltd.)
MW and RW Bacon Ltd.
Nick Artim
North London Dry Lining Ltd.
Norwest Holst Civil Engineering Ltd.
Norwest Holst Construction Southern Ltd.
Nuclear Electric plc
O and K Escalators Ltd.
Octavius Atkinson and Sons Ltd.
Ove Arup and Partners
PA Consulting Group Ltd.
Pembridge Builders Ltd.
Plescon Ltd.
Plumb Bespoke Shopfitting Ltd.
Pollards Fyrespan Ltd.
Price Waterhouse Ltd.
Princeton plc
Project Fire Engineering Ltd.
PSA Specialist Services
Quest Insulation Ltd.
Richardson Roofing Co. Ltd.
Rivermeade Signs Ltd.
Robinson Metalwork (Luton) Ltd.
Rust Consulting Ltd. (formerly Kennedy & Donkin Building Services Ltd.)
Samuel Elliott and Sons Ltd.
Shanahan Dover Systems Ltd.
Shapland and Petter Ltd.
Sharrocks (London) Ltd.
Sindall Joinery Ltd.
Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd.
Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd./Haden Young Ltd. Joint Venture
Situsec Contractors Ltd.
Spectra Engineering Ltd.
Stitson White Services Ltd.
Straeker Construction Ltd.
Stuarts Industrial Flooring Ltd.
Syston Rolling Shutters Ltd.
TA Consultancy Services Ltd.
Tarmac Construction Ltd.
Tarmac Servicemaster
TBV Consult (formerly PSA Projects)
Terry Hedgeland
Thames Water plc
The Buying Agency (formerly the Crown Suppliers)
The Expanded Piling Co. Ltd.
The Express Lift Co. Ltd.
The Paint Research Association
The Steensen Varming Mulcahy Partnership Ltd.
Thrope Model Makers
Trafalgar House Interiors Ltd.
Trench Farrow and Partners
Trident Safeguards Ltd.
WA Dawson Ltd.
Wallis Joinery Ltd.
WB Simpson and Sons Ltd.
Wembley Roofing Ceilings Ltd.
William Steward London Ltd.
Wiltshier Construction (London) Ltd.
Wiltshier Construction Ltd.
WM and RW Bacon Ltd.
WS Harvey (Decorators) Ltd.
YAY Brightside Ltd. (Formerly Young Austen and Young Ltd.)

*Note:*
Does not include sub-contractors.

**Dr. Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what inquiries she has instigated into the delay to the British library project; what reports she has received from those inquiries; and what measures have been taken as a consequence. [11990]

**Mrs. Bottomley:** The primary cause of delay to this project has been the need to identify and specify the technical changes required to deal with problems discovered since 1991. In particular, these relate to the mobile bookshelving, the low voltage cabling, and the fire protection system. I and my predecessors have commissioned leading experts to report on the issues and we have received a number of technical reports. As a consequence, the key changes which have been made, or are in the process of being made, include the replacement of faulty components in the bookshelving, at the contractor's expense; the repair and replacement of cabling, where necessary and practicable, and the installation of automatic fuse switches to protect the cabling system; and changes to the fire protection system to reduce the likelihood of corrosion, and improve effectiveness.

## Millennium Site, Greenwich

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will consider themes or other suggestions, brought to her attention by *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* members of the public, which add to those which have already, or will be, submitted by Imagination Ltd. relating to the proposed exhibition on a site, or sites adjacent or near to, that designated by the Millennium Commission on the Greenwich peninsula. [11734]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** *[holding answer 26 January 1996]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96 and (iv) 1996–97. [11509]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The available information is given in the following table:

| | *1993–94 actual* £ | *1994–95 actual* £ | *1995–96 spend to date* £ | *1996–97 estimate* £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Department of National Heritage | 18,277 | 14,967 | 20,795 | n/a |
| Historic Royal Palaces Agency | 16,800 | 16,313 | 32,394 | n/a |
| Royal Parks Agency | 8,926 | 23,862 | 14,819 | 12,150 |

Information on non-departmental public bodies is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her estimate of the expenditure of her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97. [11512]

**Mr. Sproat:** The available information is given in the following table:

| | *1993–94* £ | *1994–95* £ | *1995–96* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Department of National Heritage | 99,152 | 161,396 | 132,518 |
| Historic Royal Palaces Agency | 4,567 | 14,605 | 18,135 |
| Royal Parks Agency | Nil | Nil | 2,000 |

Information on non-departmental public bodies is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Estimated figures for 1996–97 are not yet available.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her estimate of departmental expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97. [11510]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Expenditure on administration for my Department is included in the expenditure plans table which is published in the annual report, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

### Eurimages Scheme

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the impact on film production companies arising from the United Kingdom's withdrawal from participation in the Eurimages scheme; and if she will make a statement. [12714]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* I am confident that the very high quality of production facilities in this country, along with the excellent skills of those working in the industry, and the distribution value of the English language, will continue to make the British product truly competitive, and British production companies much sought after as co-production partners supported by the European co-production fund which my Department sponsors.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations took place prior to the announcement of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Eurimages scheme; and with whom. [12713]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Normal confidentiality requirements as to the contents of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement and my Department's spending plans did not allow for prior consultation.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many United Kingdom production companies received awards from Eurimages in each year of the United Kingdom's participation in the scheme; what were the total amounts received each year; and if she will provide a breakdown by *(a)* nation and *(b)* region within the United Kingdom. [12711]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The UK joined Eurimages in April 1993. The number of films awarded Eurimages funding and involving UK co-production companies since April 1993 was 12 in 1993, 21 in 1994 and 22 in 1995, and the total amounts awarded were FF23.3 million—£2.66 million—FF45.05 million—£5.45 million—and FF48.15 million—£6.138 respectively.

The information necessary to provide a breakdown by *(a)* nation and *(b)* region within the United Kingdom is unavailable.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the estimated savings which are expected for 1996–97 as a result of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Eurimages scheme; and if she will make a statement. [12715]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* My Department's contribution to Eurimages in 1995–96 was £2 million. The rate of exchange against the French Franc indicates that the subscription for 1996–97 would have been £2.6 million.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many film production companies were awaiting a determination on funding from Eurimages when the United Kingdom withdrew from the scheme; and if she will provide a breakdown by *(a)* nation and *(b)* region within the United Kingdom. [12712]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* There were no Eurimages funding decisions involving UK companies outstanding when we announced our intention to withdraw from the scheme last November.

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her estimate of the annual cost to her Department and her Department's agencies and

non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-used properties for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97. [11511]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* My Department, which was created in April 1992, occupies properties which form part of the common user estate. The Department of the Environment will provide central figures covering all common user estate vacant space.

Of my two agencies, only the Royal Parks, formed in April 1993 has any vacant or under-used space, all of which are park buildings, the majority greenhouses. The cost of maintaining these net of VAT is as follows:

1993–94: £12,300.00

1994–95: £11,500.00

1995–96: £26,700.00

1996–97: £4,400.00 (estimated)

To provide this information for the properties for which my non-departmental public bodies are responsible could be achieved only by incurring disproportionate cost.

### Museums and Galleries

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the surplus or deficit in her museums and galleries account for 1994–95; and what is the estimated surplus/deficit for 1995–96. [12705]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The surplus on this vote for 1994–95 was £2,117,638.77. Full details were published in the appropriation account for class XI, vote 1 (HC 15-VIII of 1995–96), copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Provision for 1995–96 is given in section A of class XI, vote 1—Department of National Heritage (Programme expenditure and administration), HC 271-XI of 1994–95—copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

## HEALTH

### Northern and Yorkshire Outpost Headquarters

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated capital cost of acquiring the site, building and commissioning the new headquarters building of the northern and Yorkshire outpost of the NHS executive; what is the estimated annual revenue cost of the capital or leasing charges for the building; who will own it; when it will open; and how many people will work in it. [11113]

**Mr. Malone:** The estimated capital cost of the new headquarters building for the northern and Yorkshire regional office in Durham is £2.54 million. This is more than offset by the proceeds from the sale of one of the existing regional health authority's former headquarters buildings in Harrogate of £2.825 million. The accommodation charge will not be determined until the building is complete but, on the basis of comparison with other Department of Health regional headquarters buildings, this move will result in minimum revenue savings of £300,000 per annum. The freehold of the building will be owned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. The building is expected to be complete for handover on 29 April 1996, ahead of schedule. One hundred and thirty staff will work in the building.

### Prescriptions (Students)

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the effect on a student's entitlement to free prescriptions of *(a)* the award of and *(b)* taking out a student loan through the Student Loans Company; [12099]

(2) which categories of student are not entitled to free prescription charges. [12098]

**Mr. Malone:** Those in full-time education between the ages of 16 and 18 are entitled to free national health service prescriptions.

Any student aged 19 or over who is not entitled to free NHS prescriptions on health grounds may make a claim to the national health service low income scheme for free prescriptions on an income-related basis.

Student loans have been an integral element of the provision made from public funds for student support since September 1990. Wherever a loan would be available to a student, it is taken into account as a resource in assessing entitlement to help through the low income scheme.

### Mental Health

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated annually for mental illness specific grants since 1990, showing in each year the amount contributed *(a)* by central Government and *(b)* by local authorities, including the amounts projected for the next two years. [12295]

**Mr. Bowis:** The table shows the amount of mental illness specific grant allocated in each year since the grant was introduced in 1991–92 showing the sums contributed by central and local government for each year. The table also shows the amounts projected for 1996–97. The figures assume that local authorities will take up the full amount of grant made available to them in 1995–96 and 1996–97. The figures for 1991–92 to 1994–95 represent actual expenditure.

The contribution from central Government includes an amount, currently £2.2 million, which helps to fund the homeless mentally ill initiative in London.

The circular announcing the arrangements for the 1996–97 MISG will be published shortly.

*£million*

| *Year* | *Total contribution from central Government* | *Amount of central Government's contribution taken up by local authorities* | *Local authority contribution* | *Total expenditure* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 21.0 | 18.9 | 7.8 | 26.7 |
| 1992–93 | 31.4 | 30.8 | 12.8 | 43.6 |
| 1993–94 | 34.4 | 34.4 | 14.0 | 48.4 |
| 1994–95 | 36.0 | 36.0 | 14.5 | 50.5 |
| 1995–96 | 47.3 | 47.3 | 19.3 | 66.6 |
| 1996–97 | 58.3 | 58.3 | 21.3 | 79.6 |

### Psychiatric Hospitals

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement of 17 January, *Official Report*, column 671, (1) of the 80,000 beds how many are psychiatric hospital beds; [12293]

(2) whether the 20,000 acute beds referred to are *(a)* psychiatric hospital beds and *(b)* included within the figure of 80,000 beds referred to at the same time, or additional to that figure. [12294]

**Mr. Bowis:** The figure of 80,000 refers to the number of beds in hospital and residential units for mentally ill people. This figure includes some 66,000 hospital beds of which some 20,000 are "acute" or "short-stay" beds.

### Hip Replacement Operations

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hip replacement operations have been carried out by the NHS on individuals over the age of 65 years during the past 12 months. [12330]

**Mr. Horam:** The latest year for which information is available is 1993–94. The number of finished consultant episodes for hip replacement and other arthroplasty of the hip operations, carried out on patients aged 65 years and over, in England during that period was 45,570.

### Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd.

**Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much NHS trusts and general practitioner practices pay Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. of Loughborough for the use of the Read clinical coding system broken down by *(a)* trust and *(b)* family health services authority. [12749]

**Mr. Horam:** The Read codes are Crown copyright and there is no change to the national health service for their use.

National Health Service users of Read codes pay Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. for support and distribution services only. These services are charged under a formula agreed with the Department of Health, subject to a permitted cost plus mechanism to ensure value for money and audited annually by external auditors acting for the Department of Health.

The annual sums payable by users for support and distribution services are:

general practitioners—£75 per practice.

Family health services authorities—normal charges are £75 per computer screen in each authority.

Trust/unit users are charged according to usage: the current annual charge is £3,691.

**Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the NHS receives each year from Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd.; when the contract comes up for renewal; and if the current contracted arrangement will remain unchanged after renewal. [12751]

**Mr. Horam:** The national health service receives no payment from Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. in respect of its work in distributing and supporting the use of Read codes within the service.

The contract for this work, between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. is subject to annual audit by external auditors acting for the Department of Health to ensure value for money. It is three-year rolling contract, subject to continuing review.

**Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the contractual relationship between Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. and the NHS centre for coding and classification. [12750]

**Mr. Horam:** There is no direct contractual relationship between Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. and the NHS centre for coding and classification; however, there is a contract for the distribution and support of the use of Read codes between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd.

### Cardiac Surgical Centres

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received from the Royal College of Surgeons about supra-regional paediatric cardiac surgical centres. [12493]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department has received no formal representation from the Royal College of Surgeons about supra-regional paediatric surgical services. The supra-regional services advisory group sought the advice of the Royal College of Surgeons when considering whether the service should remain designated. In the event, the group recommended that the service should no longer be designated from 31 March 1994.

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms exist for supra-regional cardiac surgical centres to report or account to his Department. [12498]

**Mr. Horam:** The only supra-regional cardiac service currently designated is that for thoracic—cardiac and lung—transplantation. The supra-regional services advisory group is responsible for managing the SRS arrangements and for monitoring designated units performance against contract. Designated units provide the SRSAG with monthly activity reports and an annual report giving additional information about performance. The SRSAG makes recommendations on any changes to the supra-regional service arrangements through the national health service executive to me.

### Neo-natal Cardiac Surgery

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department has given during the last five years to *(a)* the United Bristol Healthcare NHS trust and *(b)* other bodies about the performance of neo-natal arterial switch operations at Bristol royal infirmary. [12494]

**Mr. Horam:** The performance of specific clinical procedures is a matter of clinical judgment on which it would not generally be appropriate for my Department to advise. In the case of the United Bristol Healthcare NHS trust however, my Department's advice was sought on how to resolve a difference of clinical opinion about the advisability of proceeding with "switch" operations. My Department's advice was that procedures should not be performed about which concerns had been raised until appropriate expert clinical advice had been obtained.

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received during the last five years about the performance of neo-natal arterial switch operations at Bristol royal infirmary, from *(a)* the Royal College of Surgeons, *(b)* Dr. Steven Bolsin, *(c)* other medical professional bodies and *(d)* other bodies. [12495]

**Mr. Horam:** My Department has received a number of expressions of concern from Dr. Steven Bolsin and others about the difficulty of resolving professional differences of opinion about the performance of certain paediatric cardiac surgical procedures, including the arterial "switch".

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of which health authorities in the South Western region refer patients needing neo-natal cardiac surgery to health care providers other than Bristol royal infirmary. [12496]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairmen of the appropriate health authorities for this information.

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish comparative statistics showing the success rate of neo-natal arterial switch operations at those hospitals or institutions performing such operations within the NHS during the last five years. [12497]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally. Outcomes of treatment are a matter for clinical audit.

### Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the projects in Newcastle and North Tyneside health authority for which business cases have been submitted to the NHS executive since 1 April 1995 indicating for each *(a)* the location, *(b)* the projected cost and *(c)* the date on which the business case was received. [12752]

**Mr. Horam:** The information will be placed in the Library.

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes will be made to the cash limits and running cost limits of his Department in 1995–96. [13717]

**Mr. Dorrell:** The cash limit for class XII, vote 1—hospital, community health, family health services and related services, England—will be increased by £68,671,000, from £26,539,964,000 to £26,608,635,000. This allows for an increase of £210,159,000 in respect of the take-up of entitlements to carry forward of underspends from the 1994–95 financial year under the end year flexibility arrangements as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *776-82*, partially offset by £140,082,000 following a reappraisal of drugs budget requirements. In addition, the following transfers will take place; £1,145,000 to class XV, vote 5—national health service, Wales—for services provided by the London post-graduate teaching hospital, £1,050,000, and for operating costs of the NHS Supplies Authority, £95,000; £8,000 to the Department of Health and Social Services, Northern Ireland in respect of services provided by the London post-graduate teaching hospital as mentioned and £253,000 to class XII, vote 2—Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England—for day care and domiciliary services, £106,000, for research work undertaken on behalf of the Clinical Standards Advisory Group, £248,000, partially offset by £101,000 for work of the NHS Estates agency.

The cash limit for class XII, vote 2—Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England—will be increased by £628,000, from £1,279,378,000 to £1,280,006,000. This increase allows for transfers of £253,000 from class XII, vote 1 as mentioned, £212,000 from class XIII, vote 4—Department of Social Security, administration and miscellaneous services—for the headquarters recreational association, £62,000 running costs; and for storage and distribution costs, £150,000 running cost; and £169,000, running costs, from class XVII, vote 1—HM Treasury—for superannuation costs. The overall increase is partially offset by transfers of £3,000 to class XIV, vote 14—national health service (superannuation etc.), Scotland; £2,000 to class XV, vote 5—national health service, Wales—and £1,000 to DHSS, Northern Ireland, for services provided by the NHS Estates agency.

The Department's gross running costs limit will be reduced by £4,436,000 from £239,350,000 to £234,914,000. This reflects a reallocation of £4,817,000 for capital works partially offset by the transfers mentioned.

All increases will either be offset by savings, increased receipts or transfers to or from other votes or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Nutrition and Low Incomes

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Departments were represented in the work of *(a)* the nutrition task force and *(b)* the low income project team. [13152]

**Mr. Horam:** Department of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Department for Education and Employment and the Office of Science and Technology are represented on the nutrition task force; Welsh Office, DHSS Northern Ireland, Scottish Home and Health Department and the Department of Social Security have observer status. Department of Health and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are presented on the low income project team and the Department of Social Security has observer status.

### Family Planning

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implementation of guidelines laid down by the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority; and if he will make a statement. [13011]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 19 October 1995, *Official Report*,

column *367*. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is required to maintain a code of practice about the proper conduct of licensed activities. The current code was laid before the House on 14 December 1995.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the viability of human embryos following freezing. [13009]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 26 January, *Official Report*, column *415*. The Department of Health has not commissioned such research.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inspections have been carried out on licensed in vitro fertilisation centres in the last two years; and if all such centres have been inspected in that period. [13010]

**Mr. Horam:** Between 30 January 1994 and 30 January 1996 the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority made 256 inspections of licensed IVF centres. All such centres were inspected during that period.

### Pharmaceutical Imports

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the value of prescribed products which are imported from overseas having been manufactured in the United Kingdom: and of what savings are achieved as a result of not purchasing direct from a United Kingdom manufacturer. [13078]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally.

### Bed and Staff Shortages (Liverpool)

**Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received the letter from the Liverpool Central and Southern community health council respecting bed and staff shortages and the problems of accident and emergency units at Liverpool hospitals; what response he has made; what action he plans to take; and if he will make a statement. [13082]

**Mr. Horam:** We received the letter on Monday 15 January and I expect to reply shortly. My reply will include a full explanation of the measures which the national health service has implemented to deal with the recent high levels of demand.

### Intensive Care (Bradford)

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will arrange for additional funding from his Department to be made available to provide more intensive care and high dependency beds in Bradford; if he will discuss with the regional health authority the funding of intensive care and high dependency beds in Bradford from the authority's unrenewable resources budget; and if he will make a statement. [12955]

**Mr. Horam:** This is a matter for Bradford health authority. The national health service executive's Northern and Yorkshire regional office has asked health authorities to give a high priority to intensive care provision.

### Nurses

**Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the proportion of nursing staff that are *(a)* full time and *(b)* bank or temporary in each hospital trust in the north-west region. [10466]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The information will be placed in the Library.

### Consultants

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11335]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The Department of Health and its agencies have spent the following amounts from running costs on consultancy:

1991–92: £24,258,000
1993–94: £15,933,037
1994–95: £18,479,405
1995–96: £11,100,000 (to date)

Expenditure of some £17 million is estimated for the whole of the 1995–96 financial year. Estimates of expenditure for 1996–97 are not yet available.

Details of consultancy expenditure for 1979–80 and 1989–90 are not available, the Department of Health formed part of the Department of Health and Social Security until July 1988 and the Department's accounting records did not identify consultancy expenditure separately.

Consultancy expenditure by non-departmental public bodies is as follows:

1989–90: £125,532
1991–92: £271,237
1993–94: £661,256
1994–95: £664,984
1995–96: £333,532 (to date)

Expenditure of some £538,000 is estimated for the whole of the 1995–96 financial year and expenditure of some £510,000 is estimated for 1996–97.

Details of expenditure by non-departmental public bodies for 1979–80 are not held.

External consultants provide advice on improving efficiency and effectiveness in the Department. They have contributed to a large variety of projects, including the Department's "Competing for Quality" programme; but it is not possible to assess the savings which are a direct consequence of their activity.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and

non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11336]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Annual publicity spend information for the financial years 1989–90 to 1996–97 is shown in the table. Functions which are commonly associated with press and public relations for the Department of Health are included in the functions carried out by the Department's information division. Information for the year 1979–80 is not available.

*£ million*

| *Financial year* | [1]*Total publicity expenditure* | [2] *Information division manpower and running costs* |
|---|---|---|
| *1979–80* | — | — |
| *1989–90* | | |
| Department of Health | 17.20 (9.00) | 0.90 |
| Agencies | — | — |
| NDPBs | 0.78 | 0.01 |
| *1991–92* | | |
| Department of Health | 24.50 (8.70) | 1.50 |
| Agencies | — | — |
| NDPBs | 0.78 | 0.01 |
| *1993–94* | | |
| Department of Health | 19.20 (6.10) | 1.90 |
| Agencies | — | — |
| NDPBs | 0.16 | 0.02 |
| *1994–95* | | |
| Department of Health | 18.20 (4.30) | 2.00 |
| Agencies | 0.20 | — |
| NDPBs | 0.19 | 0.02 |
| *1995–96*[1] | | |
| Department of Health | 8.07 (0.99) | 2.02 |
| Agencies | 0.15 | — |
| NDPBs | 0.18 | 0.02 |
| *1995–96*[2] | | |
| Department of Health | 18.04 (1.98) | [3]— |
| Agencies | — | — |
| NDPBs | 0.24 | 0.03 |
| *1996–97*[3] | | |
| Department of Health | — | — |
| Agencies | — | — |
| NDPBs | — | — |

[0] = Advertising cost.
[1] Expenditure to date.
[2] Estimate for 1995–96 expenditure.
[3] Manpower and running costs estimates for 1995–96 full year and for 1996–97 budget are not yet available.

## Medicinal Drugs (Deaths)

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of deaths and serious illnesses that resulted from the use of *(a)* antibiotics and *(b)* other medical drugs in each of the last five years. [12166]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Tables 1 to 3 show the number of people who have died as a result of using drugs, medicaments and biological substances in England and Wales in the last five years for which figures are available. Deaths are broken down into adverse effects in correct usage, accidental poisoning, suicides and undetermined deaths.

Table 4 shows the number of serious adverse reactions in patients taking antibiotics and other drugs reported by health professionals to the Committee on Safety of Medicines. A report does not necessarily mean the reaction was caused by the drug and the levels of reporting vary due to many factors, so comparisons of absolute numbers are not valid.

*Table 1: Deaths in England and Wales due to drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use (ICD[1] E930-E949) as underlying or secondary cause*

| | *Antibiotics E930* | *Others E931–E949* |
|---|---|---|
| 1988 | 4 | 97 |
| 1989 | 7 | 104 |
| 1990 | 2 | 106 |
| 1991 | 4 | 80 |
| 1992 | 5 | 88 |

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision.

*Table 2: Deaths in England and Wales due to accidental poisoning by drugs medicaments and biological substances (ICD[1] E850–E858)*

| | *Antibiotics E856* | *Others E850–E858 (excluding E856)* |
|---|---|---|
| 1988 | 0 | 329 |
| 1989 | 0 | 334 |
| 1990 | 0 | 402 |
| 1991 | 0 | 402 |
| 1992 | 0 | 498 |

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision.

*Table 3: Deaths in England and Wales due to poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances (ICD[1] 960–979)*

| | *Suicides and self-inflicted injury*[2] | *Injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted*[2] |
|---|---|---|
| 1988 | 915 | 609 |
| 1989 | 785 | 586 |
| 1990 | 816 | 544 |
| 1991 | 793 | 588 |
| 1992 | 874 | 596 |

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision.
[2] Antibiotics cannot be distinguished separately from other drugs.

*Table 4: Serious adverse effects related to the use of antibiotics and all drugs in the UK and reported to the CSM*[1]

| | *Antibiotics* | *All drugs (including antibiotics)* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 819 | 8,816 |
| 1992 | 887 | 9,014 |
| 1993 | 777 | 8,397 |
| 1994 | 735 | 8,562 |
| 1995 | 723 | 9,094 |

[1] Serious means fatal, life threatening, requiring or prolonging hospitalisation, disabling, cancer, congenital abnormality or overdose.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Set-aside Scheme

15. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new measures he intends to introduce to improve the set-aside scheme. [11280]

**Mr. Baldry:** We will continue to manage the scheme so as to provide maximum flexibility for farmers as well as environmental benefits.

### Live Animal Transport

16. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received regarding the live transportation of animals; and if he will make a statement. [11281]

**Mrs. Browning:** We continue to receive a wide range of representations. We have been pleased with the level of response to our consultation exercise on implementation of the new EU rules.

21. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will announce the results of his consultations on his proposals for the implementation of EU directive 95/29 on the welfare of animals in transit; and if he will make a statement. [11286]

**Mrs. Browning:** Consultation has not yet finished. As our initial document set out, we shall undertake further consultation on draft proposals for legislation, which we are putting together taking account of the first round of comments we have received.

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will issue a consultation document on the consolidation of legislation relating to the welfare of animals in transit. [11983]

**Mrs. Browning:** Our intention to consolidate existing rules on welfare during transport was set out in the consultation document which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 23 October 1995, on our initial ideas for implementation of directive 95/29/EC on the protection of animals during transport. As confirmed in the consultation document, we shall be consulting further on draft legislative texts, including consolidation of all extant legislation.

### Fishing Industry

17. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals his Department has to improve market mechanisms in the fishing industry. [11282]

**Mr. Baldry:** The main responsibility for improving market mechanisms rests with the industry itself. The Government will play their part by continuing to do all that they can to create an environment in which the industry can prosper.

### Common Agricultural Policy

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans next to meet his German counterpart to discuss CAP reform. [11283]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** The German Minister of Food, Agriculture and Forestry, Mr. Jochen Borchert, has accepted my invitation to visit the UK to discuss the future of the CAP. I hope we will shortly be able to agree specific dates. We do, of course, meet regularly at meetings of the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels or Luxembourg.

25. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how often the common agricultural policy advisory group has met to discuss the future of the CAP; and what is its intended programme of meetings for the coming year. [11290]

**Mr. Hogg:** The report of the CAP review group, which records the conclusions of its 11 independent members, was published on 26 July 1995. The report, which was circulated widely to politicians, academics and non-Governmental public bodies both here and throughout Europe, was instrumental in promoting a genuine debate on the future of the CAP. Copies of the report were placed in the House Library.

**Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has made to curb fraud within the CAP across the EU. [11275]

**Mr. Baldry:** The Government have fully supported Commission initiatives to introduce tough automatic penalties against those proved to have benefited from fraud.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

19. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the procedures for ensuring that only calves born to mothers who are free of BSE are exported from the United Kingdom. [11284]

**Mrs. Browning:** Before signing an export health certificate for any consignment the certifying local veterinary inspector must obtain documentary evidence from owners, exporters or auctioneers that none of the calves is the progeny of a BSE-infected dam. In addition, the ear tag numbers of all calves intended for export are checked against the Ministry's computer records. I have no plans to review these procedures.

### Confiscated Animals (Disposal)

20. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to change the law with regard to the disposal of confiscated animals; and if he will make a statement. [11285]

**Mrs. Browning:** Under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, as amended, the police have powers to remove animals, pending a prosecution for cruelty offences, or to require an animal to be slaughtered where a veterinary surgeon has certified that it would be cruel to keep it alive.

The Act also empowers courts, on conviction for cruelty offences, to order the disposal of an animal if they are satisfied that it would be cruel to keep it alive, or to deprive the person convicted and to make orders as to the disposal of the animals concerned.

We have no plans at present to introduce changes to this legislation.

### Fisheries (Access)

22. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with fishermen's organisations about access to the Irish box. [11287]

**Mr. Baldry:** I have had frequent discussions with fishermen's organisations over the last six months on a wide range of issues including access to the Irish box and its enforcement.

28. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the fishing industry to discuss Spanish and Portuguese fishing access. [11293]

**Mr. Baldry:** I have had frequent meetings with representatives of the fishing industry over the last six months at which a wide range of issues have been discussed including Spanish and Portuguese access to western waters.

### Milk

23. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money the United Kingdom received from the EU to help pay for milk in secondary schools and milk in school catering in 1994–95. [11288]

**Mr. Baldry:** EU expenditure on these discretionary elements of the school milk scheme in the UK in 1994–95 totalled £6.1 million.

24. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the percentage of milk sold in each of the last three years *(a)* in supermarkets and *(b)* by doorstep delivery. [11289]

**Mr. Baldry:** The percentage of milk sold in supermarkets and at the doorstep for household consumption in England and Wales is as follows:

| | *Doorstep delivery* | *Supermarkets* | *Other shops* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 56.9 | 32.3 | 10.8 |
| 1994 | 51.1 | 38.4 | 10.5 |
| 1995 | 45.2 | 43.3 | 11.5 |

*Source:*
Dairy Industry Federation.

### Surplus Male Calves

26. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage the use of separated sperm to reduce the number of surplus male calves; and if he will make a statement. [11291]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Ministry is well aware of the potential of this technique. However, it is not yet ready for commercial application.

### Countryside Conservation

27. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that the Government are working in partnership with farmers to conserve the countryside. [11292]

**Mr. Boswell:** The White Paper "Rural England—A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside" sets out the objectives which guide the Government's approach to the countryside. It contains a number of initiatives aimed at conserving the countryside. "Rural England" is not intended to be a blueprint imposed by Government but is a framework for working in partnership with others who care about rural issues.

Since publication of the White Paper, I have announced that £5 million will be available for new applications under countryside stewardship in 1997 and a further £5 million for applications in 1998.

### Animal Welfare

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the extent of compliance with paragraph 3 of part IV of schedule 3 to the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994; and if he will make a statement; [13085]

(2) what plans he has to monitor the effect of paragraph 3 of part IV of schedule 3 to the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 on the incidence of tail docking of piglets; and if he will make a statement. [13013]

**Mrs. Browning:** Compliance with all aspects of the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 is monitored by the state veterinary service. Welfare inspections of pig farms include, where appropriate, an assessment of compliance with paragraph 3 of part IV of schedule 3 to those regulations which relates specifically to the tail docking and tooth clipping of piglets.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11352]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Expenditure on paid publicity by the Department in the financial year 1979–80 and in each of the subsequent years, broken down into advertising and press and public relations, is as follows:

| | *Advertising* £ | *Paid publicity*[1] £ | *Total* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 116,000 | 2,373,000 | 2,489,000 |
| 1990–91 | 126,719 | 2,305,281 | 2,432,000 |
| 1991–92 | 402,903 | 3,691,097 | 4,094,000 |
| 1992–93 | 779,566 | 3,437,434 | 4,217,000 |
| 1993–94 | 749,595 | 3,562,405 | 4,312,000 |
| 1994–95 | 827,115 | 3,972,885 | 4,800,000 |
| 1995–96[2] | 606,583 | 3,819,417 | 4,426,000 |
| 1996–97[2] | 455,000 | 3,712,000 | 4,167,000 |

[1] These figures represent other expenditure associated with paid publicity campaigns, they do not include staff costs.
[2] Forecast.

Paid publicity expenditure prior to 1984–85 was not kept in this form and figures would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Figures for advertising, include poster campaigns and port boards, and are different from previous answers as these forms of advertising had previously been included under the heading of "other publicity and promotional activities".

Expenditure on publicity by agencies is a matter for their chief executives. I have asked them to reply direct to the hon. Member.

*Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question concerning expenditure on publicity. [11352 ]

The Directorate was launched as an executive agency on 1 April 1993. Figures prior to this date are not available. PSD incurred expenditure totalling £14,990 on publicity in 1993/94 in connection with the launch of the agency which can be classified as 'public relations'. No expenditure on publicity was incurred in 1994/95 and no expenditure is anticipated in 1995/96 or 1996/97.

In addition, PSD spent £481 on newspaper advertising in 1993/94 and £4,440 in 1994/95. There has been no expenditure in 1995/96 to date but the agency expects to spend £2,000 before the end of the year and we estimate expenditure of £5,000 in 1996/97. All of this expenditure is directly attributable to recruitment advertising.

*Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on publicity by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for 1979/80 and each year since 1989/90, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

The Directorate was established as a Next Steps Agency on 2 April 1990 and did not maintain its own accounts until 1991/92. Details of expenditure on publicity since that date are as follows:

| | *Advertising* £ | *Press and public relations* £ | *Total* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 34,376 | 7,730 | 42,106 |
| 1992–93 | 22,993 | 21,339 | 44,332 |
| 1993–94 | 19,593 | 60,513 | 80,106 |
| 1994–95 | 10,883 | 41,246 | 52,129 |
| 1995–96 to date | 4,855 | 43,786 | 48,641 |
| 1995–96 Forecast | 11,000 | 58,543 | 69,543 |
| 1996–97 Forecast | 11,300 | 60,300 | 71,600 |

Advertising covers the announcement of the grant and expiry of Marketing Authorisations in the official gazettes and, up to 1993/94, direct recruitment advertising.

Press and public relations includes the VMD's Annual Report and Accounts, publicity relating to the safe use of organophosphorus sheep dips, and expenditure on the VMD's quarterly newsletter MAVIS. This newsletter is circulated to the veterinary profession, the veterinary medicinal products industry, representative bodies and opinion formers.

*Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

EXPENDITURE ON PUBLICITY

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for details of expenditure on publicity by his Department and its Agencies during certain specified years. The Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.(11352)

CSL was first launched as an Agency in April 1992 and therefore expenditure for earlier years is included in the Departmental totals. Further, CSL was significantly enlarged in April 1994 following its merger with the MAFF Food Science Laboratories and this is reflected in increased expenditure from 1994–95.

Expenditure in £'000s for each of the years specified is:

| | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advertising | 0.08 | 11.20 | 6.03 | 4.50 |
| Press + P.R. | 16.30 | 29.93 | 20.42 | 17.00 |
| Total Publicity | 16.38 | 41.13 | 26.45 | 21.50 |

Advertising includes all forms of business advertising and excludes costs of recruitment advertising in newspapers and journals. Press + P.R. includes marketing expenses such as promotions and exhibitions at agricultural shows.

The final out-turn 1995/96 and the 1996/97 figures are estimated.

*Letter from Phillip Needham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary question in which you asked what assessment has been made of the total expenditure on publicity for each of the years i) 1979–80 ii) 1989–90 iii) 1991–92 iv) 1993/94 v) 1994/95 vi) 1995/96 todate and what estimate has been made of such 1996/97; and if the figures could be broken down to indicate expenditure on a) advertising and b) press and public relations.[11352]

ADAS was formed as an Executive Agency of MAFF and the Welsh Office in 1992. Any detail relating to expenditure prior to that date would be available from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The assessment of expenditure on publicity is as follows:

| | *Advertising* £ | *Press public relations* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 49,000 | 58,017 |
| 1994–95 | 102,000 | 79,540 |
| 1995–96[1] | 27,747 | [2]24,389 |

[1] to January 1996
[2] to December 1995

There are no forecasts available for 1995/96 and 1996/97.

*Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on expenditure on publicity in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA).

The VLA was established on 1 October 1995, from the merger of the existing Central Veterinary Laboratory with the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was part of the State Veterinary Service.

VLA expenditure on publicity, which is confined to job advertisements only, is as follows:

1993/94: £5,000

1994/95: £5,000

1995/96: £5,000

1996/97: £6,000 (estimated)

Expenditure prior to 1993/94 is included in MAFF figures.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11354]

**Mr. Hogg** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The annual telephone costs, including VAT, for the Ministry, but excluding all agencies, was as follows:

1979–80: This information is no longer available;

1989–90: £4.924 million

1991–92: £6.646 million

1993–94: £3.910 million

1994–95: £3.636 million

1995–96: £1.977 million—this figure includes expenditure up to 24 January 1996.

1996–97: This estimate is not as yet available.

The Ministry has an internal directory which includes staff within all our major offices.

*Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

TELEPHONE COSTS AND DIRECTORIES

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about annual telephone costs of his Department and its Agencies during certain specified years and whether internal telephone directories are available to staff. The Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible. (11354)

CSL was first launched as an Agency in April 1992 and therefore expenditure for earlier years is included in the Departmental totals. Further, CSL was significantly enlarged in April 1994 following its merger with the MAFF Food Science Laboratories and this is reflected in increased expenditure from 1994/95.

Telephones costs in £'000s for each of the years specified is:

1993/94: 157.3

1994/95: 255.9

1995/96: 252.2

1996/97: 175.2

The final out-turn for 1995/96 and the 1996/97 figures are estimated.

The Government Telephone Network (GTN) connects over 1,000 government offices nationwide. As a user of the GTN, a GTN Dialling Codes booklet is available to all CSL staff. It enables staff to identify the operator in any government building for enquiry services. Further, MAFF Directories and internal CSL Directories are available to all staff in the Agency.

*Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question seeking information on the estimated expenditure on annual telephone costs in the agency. (11354)

PSD relocated to its new offices in York during October 1994. Prior to this date, the annual telephone costs for the agency were included in the overall budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Minister will therefore respond to you separately covering this period. Full year estimates for the agency are available for the following periods:

1995/96: £37,000

1996/97: £38,000

Staff within the agency are both included in, and have access to, MAFF's telephone directory. In addition, PSD maintains its own internal telephone directory and all staff have a copy.

*Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

PQ2: 18 January 1996 (11354)

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about annual telephone costs incurred by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for 1979/80 and each year since 1989/90, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

The Directorate was established as a Next Steps Agency on 2 April 1990 and did not maintain its own accounts until 1991/92. Details of annual telephone costs since that date are as follows:

1991/92: £11,200

1992/93: £9,477

1993/94: £11,553

1994/95: £8,199

1995/96: £10,140 (forecast)

1996/97: £11,000 (forecast)

Internal telephone directories are available to all staff.

*Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on annual telephone costs in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA).(11354)

The VLA was established on 1 October 1995, from the merger of the existing Central Veterinary Laboratory with the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was part of the State Veterinary Service.

Annual telephone costs, inclusive of VAT, from 1993/94 are as follows:-

1993/94: £100,200

1994/95: £94,800

1995/96: £100,200

1996/97: ££120,000 (estimated)

Telephone costs prior to 1993/94 are included in MAFF figures.

Internal telephone directories are available to all staff.

*Letter from Phillip Needham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary question in which you asked what estimate has been made of the annual telephone costs for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97 and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in the Agency. (11354)

ADAS was formed as an Executive Agency of MAFF and the Welsh Office in 1992. Any detail relating to expenditure prior to that date would be available from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The telephone costs for ADAS are as follows:

1993–94: £1,217,675

1994–95: £1,177,311

1995–96: £1,268,243 (forecast)

1996–97: £1,250,000 (forecast)

Internal telephone directories are available to all staff in ADAS.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his

Ministry, *(b)* his Ministry's agencies and *(c)* non-ministerial public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; [11413]

(2) what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Ministry, his Ministry's agencies and non-ministerial public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11416]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The information requested in respect of 1979–80 is no longer available.

The table details expenditure in respect of *(a)* all forms of hospitality and entertainment and *(b)* all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, excluding its agencies, for the years 1989–90, 1991–92, 1993–94, and 1994–95, together with expenditure for the first nine months of 1995–96.

| *Year* | *(a)* £ | *(b)* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 45,817.93 | 1,194,517.48 |
| 1991–92 | 64,851.87 | 1,954,411.83 |
| 1993–94 | 79,758.19 | 2,103,838.99 |
| 1994–95 | 64,092.62 | 1,872,568.44 |
| 1995–96 | 42,734.07 | 1,202,142.30 |

Detailed information relating to 1996–97 is not yet available, but it is expected that budgets will be similar to those for the current year.

The agency chief executives have been asked to provide similar information for each agency.

Information on the expenditure of self-accounting non-departmental public bodies is given in their annual accounts. Further analysis could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for (i) 1979/80, (ii) 1989/90, (iii) 1991/92, (iv) 1993/94, (v) 1994/95, (vi) 1995/96 and (vii) 1996/97, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible. (11413)

The Directorate was established as a Next Steps Agency on 2 April 1990 and did not maintain its own accounts until 1991/92. Since that date, expenditure on hospitality and entertainment, which principally covers working buffet lunches for industry liaison meeting and advisory groups, is as follows:

1991/92: £1,239

1993/94: £1,035

1994/95: £1,817

1995/96: £1,000 (forecast)

1996/97: £1,000 (forecast)

*Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), your questions regarding costs of empty/under-utilised properties, hospitality and entertainment, overseas expenses, publicity, telephones and external consultants have been passed to me for response with respect to this Executive Agency.(11413)

As I am sure you are aware, the MHS was established on 1 April 1995 and therefore has incurred no such costs for all but one of these areas prior to this date.

The Meat Hygiene Service has incurred no costs to date resulting from empty or under-utilised properties and does not expect to do so in 1996/97.

With regard to hospitality and entertainment, £10,580 was spent in 1994/95, prior to the Agency's launch. A total of £7,000 is expected to be spent in 1995/96 and £9,000 in '96/97.'

There has been no overseas travel by MHS staff to date and none is anticipated in 1996/97.

In the 1995/96 financial year, the MHS incurred no costs for publicity, although leaflets about the Agency, costing £2,570, were produced and paid for by MAFF prior to launch. The MHS expects to spend no more than £1,000 on publicity in 1996–97.

Current forecasts of telephone costs for the 1995/96 financial year are £112,000 and the estimate for 1996/97 is £123,000. Both these figures include mobile phone costs. The Government Telephone Network (GTN) connects over 1000 government offices nationwide. As a user of this system, a GTN dialling codes booklet is available to all MHS office staff. It enables staff to identify the operator in any other government building connected to GTN, for enquiry services.

The MHS has spent £375,000 on external consultancy so far in 1995/96 and estimates that such costs will total £496,000 for the current financial year. Early projections for 1996/97 anticipate expenditure of no more than £200,000. The savings gained from using consultants are difficult to estimate. Many of these services provided have been on financial and computer systems where benefits will be achieved in long term savings which cannot accurately be quantified.

In the first year of operation it has been necessary to use consultants to deal with start-up issues; providing resources to cope with short-term workload peaks whilst avoiding the need to incur long-term costs of employing permanent staff. Consultants have also provided necessary expertise in certain specialised areas either not contained within the MHS, to an insufficient degree, or that has only been required for limited periods. As you can see from the estimates for the future, the use of consultants is expected to reduce considerably.

*Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on expenditure on hospitality and entertainment in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA).

The VLA was established on 1 October 1995, from the merger of the existing Central Veterinary Laboratory with the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was part of the State Veterinary Service.

Figures for expenditure on hospitality are as follows:

1993/94: £16,720

1994/95: £12,076

1995/96: £16,400 (estimated)

Figures prior to 1993/94 are included in MAFF figures. We expect expenditure in 1996/97 to be of the same order as that of 1995/96.

*Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question concerning expenditure on hospitality and entertainment. [11413]

The Directorate was launched as an executive agency on 1 April 1993. Figures prior to that date are not available.

The following amounts have been spent on hospitality or are projected to be spent in the other years identified in the Question:

1993/94: Actual expenditure—£380

1994/95: Actual expenditure—£422

1995/96: Projected expenditure—£1,400

1996/97: Projected expenditure—£1,400

There has been no expenditure by the Directorate on entertainment.

*Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

EXPENDITURE ON HOSPITALITY AND ENTERTAINMENT

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by his Department and its Agencies during certain specified years. The Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.(11413)

CSL was first launched as an Agency in April 1992 and therefore expenditure for earlier years is included in the Departmental totals. Further, CSL was significantly enlarged in April 1994 following its merger with the MAFF Food Science Laboratories and this is reflected in increased expenditure from 1994/95.

Expenditure in £'000s for each of the years specified is:

| | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Entertainment | 0.09 | 2.07 | 2.45 | 2.40 |
| Hospitality | 4.62 | 10.43 | 21.19 | 10.00 |
| Total | 4.71 | 12.50 | 23.64 | 12.40 |

Expenditure on hospitality in 1995/96 includes the costs of the Visiting Group to CSL's Agriculture and Environment Directorate. The purpose of the Visiting Group was to assess the quality and management of the science delivered by the Directorate.

The final out-turn for 1995/96 and the 1996/97 figures are estimated.

*Letter from Phillip Needham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary question in which you asked for an estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11413]

ADAS was formed as an Executive Agency of MAFF and the Welsh Office in 1992. Any detail relating to expenditure prior to that date would be available from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The estimated costs by ADAS on hospitality and entertainment are as follows:

*Estimated Cost*

1993–94: £14,197

1994–95: £20,086

1995–96: £10,630

There are no estimates available for 1996–97.

*Letter from T. W. A Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on expenditure on overseas travel, accommodation and associated expenses in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. [11416]

The VLA was established on 1 October 1995, from the merger of the existing Central Veterinary Laboratory with the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was part of the State Veterinary Service.

Total expenditure on overseas travel is as follows:-

1993–94: £61,700

1994–95: 66,200

1995–96: £63,900

1996–97: £75,000 (estimated)

Figures prior to 1996–97 are included in MAFF figures. The estimate for 1996–97 includes expenditure by the former Veterinary Investigation Service.

*Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses, by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for (a) 1979–80, (b) 1989–90,(c) 1991/–2, (d) 1993–94, (e) 1994–95, (f) 1995–96 and (g) 1996–97, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

The Directorate was established as a Next Steps Agency on 2 April 1990 and did not maintain its own accounts until 1991–92. Details of this since that date are as follows:

1991–92: £95,848

1993–94: £118,009

1994–95: £126,864

1995–96: £85,000 (forecast)

1996–97: £87,500 (forecast)

The main element of overseas travel was in respect of immunological inspections of manufacturing premises overseas, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and Europe. VMD staff also attend meetings of E.U. working groups in Brussels. In both cases, all or part of the travel costs are reimbursed.

*Letter from Phillip Needham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary question in which you asked what is the estimated expenditure on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for: (i) 1979–80 (ii) 1989–90 (iii) 1991–92 (iv) 1993–94 (v) 1994–95 (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97.[11416]

ADAS was formed as an Executive Agency of MAFF and the Welsh Office in 1992. Any detail relating to expenditure prior to that date would be available from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The estimated expenditure on overseas travel for ADAS is as follows:

1993–94: £198,407

1994–95: £249,388

1995–96: £396,947 (forecast)

1996–97: £400,000 (forecast)

*Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

OVERSEAS TRAVEL EXPENDITURE

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for details of expenditure on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and associated expenses by his Department and its Agencies during certain specified years. The Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible. (11416)

CSL was first launched as an Agency in April 1992 and therefore expenditure for earlier years is included in the Departmental totals. Further, CSL was significantly enlarged in April 1994 following its merger with the MAFF Food Science Laboratories and this is reflected in increased expenditure from 1994–95.

Expenditure in £'000s for each of the years specified is:

1993–94: 57.4

1994–95: 155.8

1995–96: 175.2

1996–97: 145.0

The final out-turn for 1995–96 and the 1996–97 figures are estimated.

*Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question concerning expenditure on overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses. (11416)

The Directorate was launched as an executive agency on 1 April 1993. Figures prior to that date are not available.

The following amounts of expenditure have been recorded, or are estimated for the years concerned.

1993–94: Actual expenditure—£97,668

1994–95: Actual expenditure—£74,980

1995–96: Estimated expenditure—£89,000

1996–97: Estimated expenditure—£89,000

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of ministerial expenditure on administration for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11414]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The departmental report 1995, Cm 2803, at annexe 5 gives detailed information in respect of departmental expenditure on administration from 1989–90, as do the appropriation accounts for years up to and including 1994–95, as well as forecasts for 1995–96 onwards.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Incapacity Benefit

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claims for incapacity benefit have been made since April in each of the benefit district offices that covers Doncaster and Mexborough; what percentages of these have been for *(a)* males and *(b)* females; and what percentages were unsuccessful; [8453]

(2) how many claims there have been for the new incapacity benefit in each of the benefit district offices that cover Doncaster and Mexborough; and how many of these were claimants with mental health problems. [8454]

**Mr. Burt:** The administration of incapacity benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about how many claims for incapacity benefit (IB) have been made since April in each of the benefit district offices that covers Doncaster and Mexborough; what percentage of these have been for (a) males and (b) females; and what percentage were unsuccessful; and how many of these were claimants with mental health problems.

The number of IB claims since April 1995 to November 1995 for Doncaster District is 5171. This District comprises of Doncaster East and Doncaster West Offices. Figures for the Mexborough Branch office, which forms part of the Rother and Dearne District are available for the same period. The number of IB claims is 1607.

The percentage of claims for male and female and those that were unsuccessful could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Details about a persons incapacity, for example mental health problems, could also only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average cost of each incapacity benefit appeal *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in the Greater Manchester area. [12236]

**Mr. Burt:** The average cost of an incapacity benefit appeal is estimated to be approximately £340. It is not possible to provide estimates of the average cost in individual areas.

### Child Support Agency

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *625*, what considerations led the chief executive of the Child Support Agency to conclude that including fully assessed cases only in respect of child maintenance assessments gives a more accurate picture. [10189]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 31 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance assessments.

My letter to you of 12 December 1995 updated information I had provided on 18 May 1995.

The table providing information on the benefit status of parents with care and absent parents was amended to provide information at the full maintenance assessment stage. Previously the benefit status was determined at the point when maintenance application and enquiry forms were returned. It is more accurate to record benefit status at the end of the assessment process as there may be considerations that affect the benefit status between the time of receipt of the relevant maintenance form and completion of a full maintenance assessment.

All the other tables shown in the answer were updated using the same definitions as previously used (which was fully assessed cases for all tables, apart from those relating to interim maintenance assessments).

I hope this is helpful.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to transfer Child Support Agency operations to local offices; and how this transfer will affect the operations of the agency's main centres. [11183]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 31 January 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the transfer of work from the Child Support Agency's six centres to local Field offices.

As the Agency's Business Plan for 1995/96 explains, from April 1995 nearly all our field staff, who are based in local Social Security offices, have had better access to the Child Support Computer System (CSCS). They are able to register cases on the system and to deal with client enquiries more effectively. As much of our paper work is automated this has reduced clerical administration and the amount of forms and work sent between the centres and field offices.

Plans are in hand for our staff in the field to play an even larger role during 1996/97 as they will also complete some maintenance assessments locally using CSCS. A pilot exercise will take place in six field offices within Dudley CSAC Business Unit involving the take-on of new applications for child support maintenance. Training for staff is due to be delivered next month, with the pilot exercise running from March to May. The exercise will be subject to a full and robust evaluation prior to any decision being made on the timing for national rollout. This work will be carefully integrated with the work on implementing the Departures system and is likely to continue over a two year period.

The movement of the bulk of maintenance assessment work to the field will allow the centres to concentrate on maintaining an ever increasing caseload and the efficient and effective collection of child maintenance.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many two-parent families are in receipt of *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* disability working allowance; and for each benefit what is the number of two-parent families estimated to included a qualifying child for the purposes of the Child Support Act 1991; [12800]

(2) how many lone parent families are in receipt of *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* disability working allowance; and for each benefit what is the number of lone parent families estimated to include a qualifying child for the purposes of the Child Support Act 1991. [12801]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The latest available information as at May 1994 is as follows:

| | *Two-parent families* | *Lone parent families* |
|---|---|---|
| Income support | 537,000 | 1,089,000 |
| Family credit | 315,000 | 236,000 |
| Disability working allowance | 1,000 | — |

There is no information available on the number of two-parent families that include a qualifying child for the purposes of the Child Support Act 1991.

We estimate that 1,068,000 lone parents receiving income support and nearly all of the lone parents in receipt of family credit have a qualifying child for the purposes of the Child Support Act 1991.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many of the cases in which a child support officer refused a parent with care exemption on the grounds of harm or undue distress he or she decided not to issue a reduced benefit direction because there was a risk to the welfare of the child. [12781]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when it is planned to republish the CSA's charter; and what plans there are to extend the commitments given to clients. [12790]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The Child Support Agency will publish its new charter in the next financial year. The charter will contain more information than the first version, cover a wider range of the agency's business, and concentrate on the agency's principle functions.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many child support appeal tribunals hearings have been held to date; what proportion of appeals have been successful; how often both the person with care and the absent parent attend; and how often the parties are represented; [12794]

(2) what proportion of child support appeals has been lodged with the independent tribunal service within the required 28 days; and, of those lodged after this time limit, what proportion are accepted. [12793]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

| | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|
| Appeals lodged within 28 days | — | 71 per cent. |
| Appeals lodged over 28 days admitted | — | 89 per cent. |
| Hearings held | 6,129 | 6,859 |
| Success rates | — | 64 per cent. |
| Attendance by absent parent and person with care | — | 21 per cent. |
| Attendance by representative | — | 16 per cent. |

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many *(a)* lone parent families and *(b)* two-parent families are denied access to the CSA by section 4(10)(a) of the Child Support Act 1991. [12797]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The information is not available in the format requested.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on research his Department *(a)* is conducting, and *(b)* has commissioned, on the subject of the Child Support Agency and child maintenance. [12779]

**Mr. Mitchell:** This Department does not generally carry out its own research. However, we have commissioned the following research from outside contractors, which is either in progress or under negotiation: a review of the operation of the requirement to co-operate provision; measuring self-employed income for the purposes of the Child Support Agency; a number of surveys on how absent parents view the system and the impact on their lives; and an extension of work on lone parents, benefits and maintenance by the Policy Studies Institute.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many potential section 4 applicants come to private arrangements for child maintenance and do not seek the CSA's services. [12798]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The information is not available.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend the Child Support Agency's powers to obtain information from the Inland Revenue. [12785]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The Child Support Agency already has powers which allow it to obtain information from the Inland Revenue. These powers relate solely to the tracing of both the current address, or the current employer, of the absent parent. We have no current plans to extend these powers further.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many departure applications are likely to be made to the CSA over each of the next three financial years and how many departure directions issued; what further grounds for departure will be added to those included in the Child Support Act 1991; and how long it is estimated that it will take for a departure officer to make a decision on a departure application. [12789]

**Mr. Mitchell:** There is insufficient data available at present to enable accurate estimates to be made of the likely number of departure applications or the proportion that are likely to be successful. However, estimates of the financial effect have been based on the broad assumption that no more than 10 per cent. of the Child Support Agency's caseload will qualify for a departure direction. One of the main reasons for running the pilot exercise from April this year is to provide the detailed information necessary to make accurate estimates.

Regulations for the conduct of the pilot exercise will be laid before Parliament in March. There are no plans for these regulations to add further grounds for a departure direction beyond those exemplified in the Act. However, the ground which deals with cases of inconsistent life style has been enhanced. It will now, for example, cover instances where parents divert income over which they have control to a third party in order to avoid their true liability.

The pilot exercise will also enable the Child Support Agency to produce estimates of the time it will take to process applications.

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will be making an announcement about the changes to compensation available to clients of the Child Support Agency who have suffered loss and distress; how many applications have been made to the Child Support Agency for compensation to date and how many have been successful; and what is the total that has been paid out in compensation. [12780]

**Mr. Mitchell:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *830–31*.

There have been 1,182 applications for compensation made to the agency from launch in April 1993 to the 30 November 1995; the number of successful claims is 112; the total that has been paid out in compensation is £56,752.50.

### Pensions (Automated Credit Transfer)

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners opted to receive their state pension by automated credit transfer in 1995. [11044]

**Mr. Heald:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Sir Andrew Bowden, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what proportion of pensioners opted to receive their state pension by automated credit transfer (ACT) in 1995.

As of 9 October 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, a total of £3,040,729 pensioners were having their Retirement Pension paid by ACT. This represents 30.3 per cent of the total caseload.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

### Vibration White Finger

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claimed disablement benefit because of vibration white finger in the period 1990 to 1995; and how many of those claims were approved between 1990 and 1995. [11594]

**Mr. Burt:** Information is not readily available in the formate requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is in the table.

*Initial assessments of disability where PD A11(vibration white finger) diagnosed and those resulting in an award of industrial injuries disablement benefit*

| | *Total PD A11 assessments* | *PD A11 assessments of 14 per cent. or more* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 6,850 | 36 |
| 1991–92 | 5,223 | 21 |
| 1992–93 | 2,476 | 40 |
| 1993–94 | 1,877 | 65 |
| 1994–95 | 1,883 | 146 |

*Source:*

100 per cent. count of cases.

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11924]

**Mr. Burt:** The Department of Social Security and its agencies, the Benefits Agency, the Contributions Agency, Child Support Agency, War Pensions Agency and the Information Technology Services Agency, adopted the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol in May 1995, to demonstrate their commitment to disabled staff. In light of this, all disabled staff who apply to be treated under the symbol, and who satisfy the minimum criteria for a job, will be offered an interview. This applies to direct recruitment, advertised internal vacancies, promotion boards, selection for management development programmes and the selection of in-service candidates for the fast-stream selection board.

The Resettlement Agency is closing in April 1996 and has therefore not adopted the symbol.

## Benefit Payment Card

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make sure that the new benefits payment card is user-friendly to older people and people with disabilities. [11751]

**Mr. Heald:** We have had extensive consultations with a wide range of customer representative organisations, including those with a special interest in the needs of the elderly and of people with disabilities. They have provided valuable input into the design requirements of the benefit payment card.

The final card design has not yet been chosen, being subject to the evaluation of service providers' proposals, but we are looking to ensure that the new system will be simple and straightforward for all our customers to use, as well as secure.

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to ensure that information currently contained in the pension book will be preserved and improved with the proposed new benefit payment card system with particular reference to *(a)* a permanent record of pension payments received, *(b)* details of how the pension is made up, *(c)* clear information on the amount due and the date available, *(d)* information on change of circumstances and *(e)* details of claiming income support. [11750]

**Mr. Heald:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what plans he has to ensure that information currently contained in the pension book will be preserved and improved with the proposed new benefit payment card system with particular reference to (a) a permanent record of pension payments received, (b) details of how the pension is made up, (c) clear information on the amount due and the date available, (d) information on change of circumstances and (e) details of claiming Income Support (IS).

The Benefits Agency is committed to continuing to provide full information and advice about benefits to all our customers.

Each time a customer receives a payment of benefit at a post office a receipt will be issued. This receipt will include details of the type(s) of benefit paid, the amount(s) payable, the due date and the date of payment and the date of the last payment(s) made. Customers will be encouraged to retain these receipts as a record of the pension they have received, although full statements of the account will be available on request from the DSS office responsible for authorising the payment.

New pensioners will continue to receive a notice of entitlement before their Retirement Pension is due, as they do now, which will include details of how their benefit is made up. Existing pensioners will receive a notification before their first card is issued. When a customer notifies a change in circumstances which affects the amount of benefit payable, a written notification will be issued. These arrangements reflect those which are already in place for pensioners who have chosen to be paid by Automated Credit Transfer.

It is intended that details of the date the next pension payment is due will be included on the last benefit receipt issued.

There will be information about the need to report changes of circumstances printed on the reverse of the card.

Final decisions have not yet been made about how information on other benefits such as IS will be made available to individual customers. Current communication facilities will continue to be used for example, leaflets, advertisements etc. Firmer proposals will be available once the final selection of the card payment system supplier is made.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

## Benefits Agency Offices

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average daily attendance at the Benefits Agency offices at *(a)* Highgate and *(b)* Finsbury Park for (i) 1993, (ii) 1994, (iii) 1995 and (iv) the current year to date; what were the staffing levels for (i) to (iv); and if he will make a statement. [12270]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 31 January 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what was the average daily attendance at the Benefits Agency offices at (a) Highgate and (b) Finsbury Park for (i) 1993, (ii) 1994, (iii) 1995 and (iv) the current year to date; what were the staffing levels for (i) to (iv); and if he will make a statement.

The information requested is given for twelve month periods, January to December and is shown at Annex A.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

*Annex A: Average daily attendance at Highgate and Finsbury Park branch offices*

| *Branch office* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* | *[1]1996* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Highgate | 258 | 210 | 271 | 270 |
| Finsbury Park | 253 | 290 | 261 | 275 |

*Average daily staffing levels at Highgate and Finsbury Park branch offices*

| *Branch Office* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Highgate | 30 | 34 | 30 | 30 |
| Finsbury Park | 30 | 32 | 30 | 30 |

[1] Up to and including 26 January 1996. Figures are provisional and subject to change.

## Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes there have been in the cash limits or running costs limits of his Department. [13179]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XIII, vote 3—housing benefit administration and council tax benefit administration, payments into the social fund in respect of discretionary expenditure and other grants—will be increased by £1,550,000 from £417,705,000 to £419,255,000. The cash limit for class XIII, vote 4—administration and miscellaneous services—will be increased by £19,355,000 from £2,676,396,000 to £2,695,751,000.

The revision for vote 3 takes account of an increase in the grant in aid to Independent Living, £1,550,000, to enable it to continue to help severely disabled persons to live independently, partly offset by a reduction of £1,125,000 on Department of Health and Social Services

(Northern Ireland) vote 5. The balance of £425,000 will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Vote 4 revisions take account of increased requirements resulting from policy changes and work load increases—£93,378,000 of which £62,967,000 is running costs a reduction of £212,000 (running costs) offset by a corresponding increase in Department of Health administration and miscellaneous health services and personal social services England, class XII, vote 2, a reduction of £10,000 (running costs) offset by a corresponding increase on Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) vote 3, an increase of £50,000 (running costs) offset by a corresponding reduction on schools, research and miscellaneous services class X, vote 1 and an increase of £1,000,000 (running costs) offset by a corresponding reduction on Department of Employment: Employment Service, class v, vote 2, an increase of £105,000 in running cost cover for services provided to the Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) on repayment and an increase of £74,851,000 in appropriations in aid.

Further running costs changes arise from a reduction of £6,239,000 as a result of a re-allocation to capital and other current expenditure and an increase of £5,633,000 in value added tax refunds.

As a result of these changes the running costs limit of the Department of Social Security will be increased by £52,028,000 from £3,035,513,000 to £3,087,541,000.

The additional vote 4 requirements will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Pensions (Uprating)

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to bring the uprating of pensions forward to 1 April in each year. [13077]

**Mr. Heald:** None.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Friday 2 February 1996*

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what changes have been made to the cash limits for class IX, votes 1, 2 and 3. [13764]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit for class IX, vote 1 will be reduced by £1,850,000 from £783,014,000 to £781,164,000, and the running cost limit reduced by £150,000 from £439,329,000 to £439,179,000. This reduction has been made to offset extra provision required by the Northern Ireland Court Service for legal aid and by the Public Record Office for works to remove asbestos.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 2 will be reduced by £2,300,000 from £28,794,000 to £26,494,000 partly to offset an increase of £4,000,000 in non-cash limited expenditure.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 3 will be increased by £2,310,000 from £40,396,000 to £42,706,000 and the running cost limit increased by £310,000 from £26,945,000 to £27,225,000. Some £2,000,000 of the cash limit increase is covered by take up under the capital end year flexibility scheme and £160,000 of the running cost limit is similarly covered by the running cost end year flexibility scheme. The remaining £150,000 increase is offset by a reduction in LCD's running cost limit—class IX, vote 1.

The increases will be offset by savings or charged to the reserve and will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

### Land Transfers

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, column *674*, if he will seek reasons from the Law Commission and Land Registry, beyond those which appear in the Law Commission's report, No. 235, as to why they did not feel able to recommend the extension of section 123 of the Land Registration Act 1925 to conveyances which do not accompany a transfer of the beneficial interest in the land. [12333]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** As referred to in my answer of 18 January, the recommendations made were informed by the responses to an earlier consultation document issued by the Land Registry. The consultation document was widely circulated and drew responses from a broad range of bodies and individuals, including local authorities, Government landowners, utilities, financial institutions, those requiring information about land, professionals advising those dealing with land and property, academic institutions and consumer bodies. The responses showed a consensus in favour of extending the application of section 123 of the Land Registration Act to other dispositions than those to which it currently applies.

However, objections were raised to its possible extension to conveyances not accompanying a transfer of the beneficial interest by a significant number of respondents, particularly having regard to the cost likely to be incurred in preparing such applications for registration. It was not considered appropriate to recommend, as a priority, the adoption of proposals which lack sufficient support from those who would be affected by them. Instead, the Government have accepted the recommendation that the issue is one which it would be appropriate to consider further after a period of five years.

### Pensions (Divorce)

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he plans to introduce regulations on shared pensions on divorce under the Pensions Act 1995; what factors have prevented their introduction to date; and if he will make a statement. [12438]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The Government plan to introduce regulations under sections 166 and 167 of the Pensions Act 1995, concerning the courts' treatment of pensions on divorce, on 1 July 1996. The Government are concerned to ensure full consideration of the proposed regulations, which will bring these sections into force, and to allow consultees sufficient time to comment on the proposals.

## SCOTLAND

### Legal Aid

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a Green Paper on legal aid in Scotland. [12090]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce a Green Paper on legal aid in Scotland.

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has *(a)* to implement part V of the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 and (b) to introduce non-solicitor legal aid franchising in Scotland. [12080]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend currently has no plans to implement part V of the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 or to introduce non-solicitor legal aid franchising in Scotland.

### Conveyancing

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the estimated expenditure on the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board for 1996–97 relates to *(a)* Government guarantees in respect of the compensation fund to be established by the board and *(b)* any provision to secure that successful claims made against a conveyancer in connection with a provision of conveyancing services are satisfied. [12081]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** None of the estimated expenditure relates to Government guarantees. The Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board will require to make payments to cover premiums and fees for the management of the compensation fund and the indemnity policy, with fees to the board's brokers. The brokers are still negotiating with the insurance industry and the level of these payments is not yet clear.

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated annual subscription of practitioners under the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board to the compensation fund established by the board; and what is the estimated annual premium to be paid by *(a)* an independent qualified conveyancer, *(b)* a qualified conveyancer and *(c)* an executry practitioner in respect of indemnity insurance. [12082]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board's brokers have entered into negotiations with the insurance industry over the compensation fund and indemnity policy. It is not yet clear, however, what the cost of the subscription and annual premium will be to individual practitioners.

### Child Care

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legislation to establish a presumption in the law on registration of day care and other provision for young children that registration should be granted unless there is some good reason not to. [12434]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** A local authority may refuse to register providers of day care for children under eight except only on the specific grounds set out in section 71 of the Children Act 1989.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Positive about Disabled People Symbol

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Service's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11921]

**The Prime Minister:** For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, on 1 February.

### Honours (Public Nominations)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister how many persons have been *(a)* created knight or dame and *(b)* elevated to the peerage following nomination by members of the public since April 1992. [12385]

**The Prime Minister:** It is not normal practice to reveal the sources of nomination for particular levels of award. Overall, nearly a third of awards have been supported by members of the public. The bulk of the remainder are recommended from a variety of official sources, for example health and education authorities.

### Jewellery

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister what items of jewellery given to previous Prime Ministers are kept on the official inventory at 10 Downing street. [13385]

**The Prime Minister:** Gifts received by Ministers in their official capacity are dealt with in accordance with the procedures set out in "Questions of Procedures for Ministers". The details are not made public.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department from the use of consultants in each of these years. [11363]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, on 1 February *Official Report,* column *911.*

### Departmental Property

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under-utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11455]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, on 1 February *Official Report,* column *912.*

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Efficiency Unit

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what studies the efficiency unit has undertaken since 1994; and if he will make a statement on its findings. [12603]

**Mr. Willetts:** Since 1994, the efficiency unit has undertaken two multi-departmental efficiency scrutinies: resource management systems and construction procurement by Government, and participated in the following single Department scrutinies:

Department of Employment: Training Enterprise Councils;

Department for Education: Burdens of Bureaucracy on Schools;

Home Office: Burdens of Bureaucracy in the Context of the Criminal Justice System;

Department of Health: Burdens of Bureaucracy in General Practice;

Department of Transport: Traffic Area Offices;

Inland Revenue: Scrutiny on Charging;

Overseas Development Administration: Delegated Authority for Bilateral Financial Commitments;

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: Burdens of Bureaucracy on Farmers (in progress);

Department of Health: Burdens of Bureaucracy on Hospital Trusts and Health Authorities (in progress).

The unit is currently carrying out a review of the competing for quality initiative and a review of objective setting and monitoring in executive non-departmental public bodies. It is normal practice for scrutiny reports to be published.

Individual members of the efficiency unit have also worked with officials from other Departments to contribute to a range of individual studies and reviews including fundamental expenditure reviews and senior management reviews.

The efficiency unit's scrutiny programme continues to deliver value-for-money solutions across a wide range of issues. Since 1979, the scrutiny technique has proved its worth as a catalyst for improvement, resulting in better management, less bureaucracy and real cost savings. As an example, the first tranche of the burdens of bureaucracy scrutinies, whose reports were published in 1995, looked at paperwork imposed on the police and the courts, GPs and teachers. Recommendations from the reports will, on implementation, result in annual cost savings for the police of £30 million; 15 million fewer forms will need to be completed by busy GPs; and, teachers will receive 10 million fewer pieces of paper.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Sustainable Development

**Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment how many countries had submitted national reports to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development for 1996 by 23 January 1996; and to whom Her Majesty's Government have made available the United Kingdom's report in addition to the UN commission. [13969]

**Mr. Gummer:** I understand that 13 countries, including the United Kingdom, had submitted reports to the UN Commission by 23 January 1996. Copies of the UK's report have been placed in the Library, and are being sent to all member countries of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and to other interested parties. Further copies are available from the Department of the Environment.

### Vacant Local Authority Dwellings

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for vacant local authority dwellings in England. [13968]

**Mr. Clappison:** At 1 April 1995, the total number of empty council homes in England stood at some 71,800—2 per cent. of council stock. This represents a slight increase on the 1994 figure—70,300—but follows nine successive years in which the number fell. The latest figure is nearly 40 per cent. lower than the total for 1985—116,500.

Within the overall total, "management vacants"—dwellings ready for occupation immediately or after minor repairs—accounted for around 41,000 of the vacants. I am placing in the House of Commons Library a list of local authorities ranked on the basis of the number of their management vacants at 1 April 1995.

We want to see the best use made of existing council stock and I look to local authorities to continue their efforts to keep their own empty dwellings to a minimum. Most authorities have a good record on filling their vacant dwellings but there are still some where there is room for improvement.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Small and Medium Enterprises

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount of EU funding intended to help small and medium enterprises Her Majesty's Government cancelled in 1990 to 1993, expressed in ecus; what factors led to the decision to cancel; and what proportion of all such cancellations in the EU this figure represents according to figures produced by the Court of Auditors. [10836]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** None of the EU funding which my Department is responsible for administering was cancelled in 1990 to 1993.

### British Workers Overseas

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many British citizens work for *(a)* British or *(b)* other companies in (i) Asia and (ii) Africa; [12243]

(2) how many United Kingdom companies regularly employ expatriate staff in *(a)* Africa and *(b)* Asia. [12244]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Bus Company Mergers

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many bus company mergers or takeovers have been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in each year since 1985. [123835]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The information requested is as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1985, 1986, 1987 | none |
| 1988 | 1 |
| 1989 | none |
| 1990 | 8 |
| 1991, 1992 | none |
| 1993 | 1 |
| 1994 | 3 |
| 1995 | 4 |
| 1996 | [1]none |

[1] To 31 January.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many bus company mergers or takeovers his Department has been requested to refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in each year since 1985. [12864]

**Mr. Taylor:** Under merger control procedures, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade receives advice from the Director General of Fair Trading about whether specific mergers would be referred to the MMC. Since 1985, in all merger cases involving bus companies, where the DGFT has recommended reference, my right hon. Friend and his predecessors have accepted the advice of the DGFT to refer to the MMC. In addition, from time to time my right hon. Friend and the DGFT receive requests from third parties for specific mergers—including those involving bus companies—to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. It is not possible to quantify those requests except at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will refer the proposed sale of Pendle borough council's 50 per cent. stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement. [12837]

**Mr. Taylor:** In the event that such a merger were announced, it would be for the Director General of Fair Trading to consider the matter in the first instance. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade would then make his decision whether to refer the proposed merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission once he had the DGFT's advice.

### Insider Dealing

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many prosecutions have been brought for insider dealing since 1 March 1994. [13129]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Since 1 March 1994, three prosecutions against four individuals have been commenced under insider dealing legislation. One individual was convicted in 1995. Proceedings against the remaining individuals have not yet been concluded.

### World Trade

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the United Kingdom's current share of world trade. [12929]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Information on the UK share of world trade is published by the World Trade Organisation in "International Trade, Trends and Statistics 1995", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

### Electricity Imports

**Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated cost of the importation of electricity from France for the years *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95. [13668]

**Mr. Page:** This is a commercial matter for the parties to the relevant contracts.

### Working Time

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library copies of all *(a)* relevant academic and departmental research papers relating to the impact of working time on health and safety at work on which the Government have based their response to the European directive on working time and *(b)* departmental studies he has commissioned with regard to working time and its effects on health and safety. [12774]

**Mr. John M. Taylor** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The Government commissioned Professor J. M. Harrington of the university of Birmingham institute of occupational health to identify and evaluate pertinent medical and scientific literature relating to the effect, if any, of hours of work on employees' health. The study forms part of the Government's legal challenge to the working time directive, 93/104/EC. I have been advised that, in accordance with established practice, it should not be published now; I expect to be able to do so after the case has been concluded. No other studies have been commissioned with regard to working time and its effects on health and safety by this Department.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Cash and Running Cost Limits

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what changes she proposes to make to her Department's running costs and cash limits for 1995–96. [13763]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit for class XI, vote 1 will be increased by £4,570,000 from £1,017,049,000 to £1,021,619,000. This is to increase provision for assets accepted in lieu of tax and to increase the gross running costs limit for the Department by £1,900,000 from £26,975,000 to £28,875,000. The increases will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### European Directives

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance notes, office notes and other relevant documents which relate to his efforts in *(a)* removing gold plating from existing domestic regulation and *(b)* ensuring new European directives are not gold plated. [10058]

(2) what new systems he has put in place to ensure that European directives are not gold plated in domestic regulations. [10062]

**Mr. Ancram:** My Department's policy is not to gold plate EC directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in Northern Ireland. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy. Official guidance on gold plating is currently being reviewed in consultation with other Government Departments.

### Shantallow RUC Station—Fort George Army Base

**Mr. Peter Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the future of the joint Shantallow RUC station—Fort George Army base; and what plans the Government have for the property after 1 September. [12237]

**Sir John Wheeler:** Accommodation for the police is a matter for the Police Authority for Northern Ireland in line with the operational requirements of the Chief Constable.

I understand that the RUC is currently examining its accommodation requirements to meet future policing needs in Londonderry. As the provision of new facilities at the Maydown complex nears completion, a number of options to rationalise existing accommodation are being considered, including the future of the Shantallow base. The army will consider the position with Fort George once the outcome of the RUC review is known.

### Mobile Phones

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9744]

(2) what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public fund of each agreement. [9743]

(3) what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9745]

**Sir John Wheeler** *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* Within the Northern Ireland departments and agencies, the procurement of mobile equipment and car phones is carried out using normal Government procurement and accounting procedures, advised by the department of finance and personnel's telecommunication branch. It is normal practice to obtain three quotations for the instruments themselves and a quotation from each of the network providers in Northern Ireland. Quotations are normally obtained from among the following:

British Telecom
Cartec
Motorola
Netcom
Vodac
Communications Shop
Mobile Communications Specialists
CAB Phones
Euromobile
Cellularphones
Hutchison Telecom
Vodafone

The Northern Ireland Office and its agencies have also obtained mobile and car phones, taking into account the cost and most suitable network.

Individual agreements are taken out for each mobile and car phone purchased within the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland departments and agencies. Agreements have been taken out with British Telecom, Hutchison Telecom, Vodafone, Netcom, Vodac, Cartec, Motorola, The Communication Shop, Mobile Comms Specialists, CAB phones, Euromobile and Cellularphones covering 533 phones at a total annual cost of £145,026 rental plus call charges.

The normal duration for each agreement is one year plus a three-month cancellation period and the cost depends on the type of service required.

The costs incurred by the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland departments and agencies withdrawing from such agreements has been £94. The company involved was British Telecom.

### Deportation

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what review of practices related to deportation or refoulement he has carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations committee against torture. [12849]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** I have been asked to reply.

The Government have noted the Committee's recommendations. We are satisfied that our practices relating to deportation do not conflict with our international obligations, including those under the United Nations convention on torture, and do not plan to undertake a review of the kind proposed.

## TRANSPORT

### Air Traffic Control

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the new en-route air traffic control centre at Swanwick will be on line to meet traffic demands; to what extent this is in accordance with the original time scales for the project; and what implications this has for the new Scottish centre. [12466]

**Mr. Norris:** The original target date set for the centre to enter operation was the end of 1996. The CAA has announced that, in view of problems that have arisen in integrating the software sub-systems of the air traffic management system, it has been decided to re-schedule the operational date to December 1997.

There are no implications for the new Scottish centre.

### Road Schemes (Violence)

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will instruct the Highways Authority to issue instructions to the security firms they have hired in relation to his Department's road schemes not to instigate violence against demonstrators; [12814]

(2) what reports have been received by the Highways Authority in respect of violent incidents involving private security firms at Newbury; and if he will make a statement. [12762]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 2 February 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about security firms in general and the security firm involved with the Newbury Bypass.

There have been a number of media articles about violent incidents involving security guards at Newbury and we are aware of the incidents where protestors appear to have assaulted security guards. But we have received no formal substantiated reports of such incidents and none have been reported to us by the Police, who are present on site at all times when the security firm's staff are present.

It is a requirement of the Highways Agency that sub-contracted security firms are members of the British Security Industry Association and that they conform to British Standard 7499 covering static guards and mobile patrols; they are instructed to work within the law.

## TREASURY

### Child Tax Allowance

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claimants *(a)* would cease to be eligible for family credit, housing benefit and other means tests if a child tax allowance was re-introduced and set each at multiple of £100 up to an including £1,000 and *(b)* would cease to pay tax at each charge; if he will estimate the cost in gross and net terms of such a charge; how many tax payers would not have a high enough income to use each of the tax allowances; and if he will estimate an average amount of unused allowances for each £100 median in child tax allowances. [9935]

**Mr. Jack:** Information for 1995–96 is given in the tables. It has been assumed that either partner of a married couple may use such a child tax allowance. Estimates in the tables have been produced for three of the multiples of £100. Estimates for all 10 multiples could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*Table 1: Effect on recipients of means-tested benefits*

| *Tax allowance per child (under 16)* | *Number of recipients of:* Family credit | | Housing benefit | | Council tax benefit | | Income support | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *No longer eligible (000)* | *Taken[1] out of tax (000)* | *No longer eligible (000)* | *Taken[1] out of tax (000)* | *No longer eligible (000)* | *Taken[1] out of tax (000)* | *No longer eligible (000)* | *Taken[1] out of tax (000)* |
| £100 | [2]— | 10 | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— |
| £500 | 10 | 30 | 10 | 20 | [2]— | 20 | [2]— | [2]— |
| £1,000 | 20 | 60 | 10 | 30 | [2]— | 30 | [2]— | [2]— |

[1] Husbands and wives treated separately.
[2] Denotes estimates of less than 5,000.
The total numbers of claimants no longer eligible for any means-tested benefit or taken out of tax cannot be obtained by adding together the estimates for each benefit. This is because claimants for one benefit are often also claiming one or more of the other benefits. It is only possible to provide figures for claimants of each benefit separately.
These estimates are based on data drawn from the 1991 1992 and 1993 Family Expenditure Surveys uprated to 1995–96 price and benefits levels. Income related benefit cases have been calibrated to those contained in the 1995 DSS Departmental Report.

*Table 2: Effect on tax liabilities*

| *Tax allowance per child (under 16)* | *Exchequer cost £ million* | *Net cost[1] £ million* | *Married couples and single individuals taken out of tax (thousand)* | *Average amount of unused child tax allowances[2] £ per child* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| £100 | 250 | 240 | 50 | 98 |
| £500 | 1,200 | 1,150 | 200 | 465 |
| £1,000 | 2,300 | 2,200 | 350 | 902 |

[1] Tax revenue cost less reductions in means-tested benefits.
[2] This is the average for those who have an unused allowance.
These estimates are based on information projected from the 1993 Family Expenditure Survey and are therefore provisional.

### Unemployment

**Ms Gordon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made to the value of the economy of a reduction of unemployment by 100,000 assuming normal cost-benefit assumptions. [12600]

**Mr. Waldegrave:** A fall of 100,000 in unemployment in the UK is a strong signal of the fundamental strength of the UK's economy, and unemployment in the UK has fallen by 741,600 since December 1992 as a result of Government policies.

Estimating the overall numerical value of a reduction in unemployment of 100,000 requires several heroic assumptions. However, the Department of Social Security's departmental report shows that a variation in unemployment of 100,000, assuming the 100,000 have the same characteristics as the existing unemployed population, would change total expenditure on benefits paid to the unemployed by £385 million in 1995–96.

### Taxation

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of taxation taken in *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect taxation in (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1985–86 and (iii) 1995–96. [11126]

**Mr. Jack:** The national accounts distinguish between taxes on income and capital, and taxes on expenditure. Social security contributions are identified separately. The

table presents the information requested on this basis. Rates and community charge/council tax are shown separately so as to avoid the distortion to the series resulting from the 1990 switch from domestic rates to community charge. The table also shows equivalent figures for 1978–79.

*Direct and indirect tax receipts as a percentage of total taxes and social security contributions*

| Year | Taxes on income[1] | Taxes on expenditure[2] | Taxes on capital | Rates[3] council tax, community charge | Social security contributions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1978–79 | 40¼ | 31 | 1½ | 10 | 17½ |
| 1979–80 | 38 | 34½ | 1½ | 9½ | 16½ |
| 1985–86 | 39 | 31½ | 1¾ | 10 | 17¼ |
| 1995–96[4] | 37½ | 35¼ | 1 | 8¾ | 17½ |

[1] Excludes community charge and council tax.
[2] Excludes rates.
[3] Business rates from 1990.
[4] Budget forecast.
Totals may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

## Employment (Year-on-year Change)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the year-on-year change in employment in the United Kingdom, Belgium, France and the Netherlands for each year since 1987. [12599]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The latest available information is shown in the table. For Belgium, France and the Netherlands, it is for the period 1986 to 1993.

*Employment: year on year change 1987 to 1995 (thousands)*[1]

| | United Kingdom | Belgium | France | Netherlands |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1986–87 | 489 | –49 | –116 | 554 |
| 1987–88 | 929 | 10 | 109 | 59 |
| 1988–89 | 829 | 103 | 241 | 120 |
| 1989–90 | 247 | 39 | 128 | 244 |
| 1990–91 | –536 | 94 | 241 | 146 |
| 1991–92 | –587 | 51 | –94 | 194 |
| 1992–93 | –301 | –26 | –113 | 26 |
| 1993–94 | 186 | — | — | — |
| 1994–95 | 276 | — | — | — |

*Note:*
[1] Unadjusted.
*Source:*
UK (CSO, Labour Force Survey); Belgium, France and Netherlands (Eurostat).
*Reference period:*
Year on year changes for UK, Belgium and France based on spring employment figures and for Netherlands on average of January to June employment figures.

## Privatisation

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the proceeds from privatisation indicating source and cash in real terms and constant value terms in each year since 1979. [12854]

**Mr. Jack:** Table 5.6 to the statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96" (HMSO Cm 2821) gives privatisation proceeds by source in cash terms. The table sets out the annual proceeds in cash and real terms at 1995–96 prices.

*Privatisation proceeds*

*(£ billion)*

| Year | Cash | Constant 1995–96 prices |
|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 0.4 | 1.0 |
| 1980–81 | 0.2 | 0.5 |
| 1981–82 | 0.5 | 1.0 |
| 1982–83 | 0.5 | 0.8 |
| 1983–84 | 1.1 | 2.0 |
| 1984–85 | 2.1 | 3.4 |
| 1985–86 | 2.7 | 4.3 |
| 1986–87 | 4.5 | 6.9 |
| 1987–88 | 5.1 | 7.5 |
| 1988–89 | 7.1 | 9.7 |
| 1989–90 | 4.2 | 5.4 |
| 1990–91 | 5.3 | 6.4 |
| 1991–92 | 7.9 | 8.9 |
| 1992–93 | 8.2 | 8.8 |
| 1993–94 | 5.4 | 5.7 |
| 1994–95 | 6.4 | 6.6 |
| | 61.6 | 78.9 |

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the golden shares held by Her Majesty's Government in the privatised industries, indicating when these lapse. [12853]

**Mr. Jack:** The remaining special or golden shares and their expiry dates, where applicable, are as follows:

| Company | Expiry date |
|---|---|
| Cable and Wireless | — |
| Sealink Stena Line | — |
| BT | — |
| British Aerospace | — |
| VSEL Consortium | — |
| British Gas | — |
| Rolls-Royce | — |
| BAA | — |
| National Grid Group | — |
| National Power | — |
| PowerGen | — |
| Scottish Power | — |
| Scottish Hydro-Electric | — |

| *Company* | *Expiry date* |
|---|---|
| British Technology Group | 31 March 1997 |
| British Technology Group International | 31 March 1997 |
| Northern Ireland Electricity | — |
| Belfast International Airport | — |

### Income Tax

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer how much total tax revenue would be generated if the 1978–79 income tax regime were in place today assuming no behavioural change; and what would be *(a)* the total difference over the period and *(b)* the average yearly difference for taxpayers, broken down into the top 1 per cent. of tax payers and thereafter each 10 per cent. band of tax payers. [1483]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* Information on the reduction in income tax liability for 1995–96 compared with the 1978–79 indexed regime is given in the table. This comparison is hypothetical since if an indexed version of the 1978–79 tax regime had prevailed over the last 17 years, the income base would not have grown as it has. The effect of changes in mortgage interest relief cannot be included in the analysis because most mortgage interest relief is given at source and therefore is not recorded on individual tax records.

*Table A*

| *Quantile group of taxpayers under the 1978–79 indexed regime Per cent.* | *Reduction in tax £ million* | *Average reduction £* |
|---|---|---|
| Top 1 | 9,900 | 36,900 |
| 2–10 | 6,800 | 2,800 |
| 11–20 | 4,100 | 1,500 |
| 21–30 | 3,200 | 1,200 |
| 31–40 | 2,600 | 960 |
| 41–50 | 2,100 | 770 |
| 51–60 | 1,600 | 610 |
| 61–70 | 1,300 | 470 |
| 71–80 | 890 | 330 |
| 81–90 | 530 | 200 |
| Bottom 10 | 300 | 110 |
| All taxpayers | 33,300 | 1,240 |

In contrast to these hypothetical figures, table B shows how the share of income tax actually paid by high income groups has risen since 1979, while the share of the income tax burden borne by low income tax payers has fallen.

*Table B: Calculations using the income base for each year*

*Per cent.*

| *Quantile group of taxpayers* | *Share of income tax in: 1978–79* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|
| Top 1 | 11 | 16 |
| Top 5 | 24 | 33 |
| Top 10 | 35 | 44 |
| Bottom 50 | 18 | 13 |
| All taxpayers | 100 | 100 |

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Holloway Prison

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions on which the previous Director General of the Prison Service brought to his attention the conditions at Her Majesty's prison Holloway. [8129]

**Miss Widdecombe:** I had regular discussions with the previous Director General of the Prison Service on a wide range of matters. The conditions at Holloway were raised during our discussions.

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaints or reports have been received regarding insect infestation in Holloway's mother and baby unit in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [12312]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 2 February 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what complaints have been received about the Holloway Mother and Baby Unit in 1995.

There were two reports about infestation in the Mother and Baby Unit at Holloway recorded in 1995.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female officers employed at Her Majesty's prison Holloway for each year since 1990; what is the predicted staff complement for 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [12267]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 2 February 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about male and female officers employed at Holloway prison.

The total number of officer grades employed at Holloway since 1990 is recorded as:

1990[1]: 286

1991[1]: 289

1992[1]: 291

1993[1]: 295

1994[1]: 308

1995: 324 (253 female/71 male)

[1]Information on the breakdown of male and female officers before 1995 is not available.

The predicted officer complement for 1996–97 is 336.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all *(a)* escapes and *(b)* other serious breaches of security at Her Majesty's prison Holloway for each year since 1990. [12269]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 2 February 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about escapes and other serious security breaches at Holloway prison since 1990.

The information requested is given in the attached table.

*Escapes from Holloway since 1990*

| | Escapes | Number of prisoners | Escapes from escort | | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Court | Hospital | |
| 1990 | — | — | — | 2 | — |
| 1991 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 1992 | 1 | 1 | — | 6 | — |
| 1993 | — | — | 3 | 2 | — |
| 1994 | 1 | 3 | — | 1 | 3 |
| 1995 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 |

*Serious breaches of security at Holloway since 1990*

| | Attempted escapes from prison | Attempted escapes from Escort | | | Other breaches of security |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Court | Hospital | Other | |
| 1990 | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| 1991 | 1 | — | 2 | — | — |
| 1992 | 3 | 2 | 1 | — | — |
| 1993 | — | — | — | 1 | Key/lock compromise |
| 1994 | 1 | 3 | 3 | — | — |
| 1995 | — | — | — | — | Key compromise |

## Residential Estates (Isle of Wight)

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what have been *(a)* the allocations and *(b)* the sums actually spent on maintenance on (i) the Camp Hill residential estate, (ii) Parkhurst residential estate and (iii) Albany residential estate on the Isle of Wight for the last five years. [11749]

(2) what has been the annual budget for the last five years for *(a)* maintenance on prison officers residential estates and (b) for residential estates where the Home Office retains a liability. [11748]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Barry Field, dated 2 February 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about expenditure on the maintenance of Prison Service and former Prison Service residential estates. In particular, the estates adjacent to Camp Hill, Parkhurst and Albany prisons on the Isle of Wight.

Information on the annual expenditure by each establishment on the maintenance and repair of Prison Service residential quarters and estates is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, information is available on the expenditure over the last five years (1990–91 to 1995–96) for Camp Hill, Parkhurst and Albany residential estates. Total expenditure during that period on maintenance and repair for roads, pavements, paths, sewers/drains, street lighting and verges has been as follows:-

Camp Hill: £5,750 (including £4,300 in respect of street lighting supply and maintenance).

Parkhurst: £55,680 (including £41,405 on maintenance of retained quarters).

Albany: £7,370 (this was in respect of street lighting supply and maintenance).

The average expenditure on maintenance is in the region of £750 per annum for each quarter, or about £1.5m per annum in total. Actual expenditure will vary between establishments and would include an element for improvements in many cases. Establishments do not have a formal allocation of funds for this purpose and expenditure is met from their local building and repair fund.

With regard to former prison officers' quarters estates where there are unadopted roads and street lighting, most of the properties have been sold, either to prison officers or to private owner/occupiers. Owners are responsible for paying a fair proportion of any expenditure on repairs or maintenance of the private roads and footpaths and the cost of street lighting. The Prison Service has the same liability for the properties which are still owned.

## Fire Cover (London)

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed reduction in fire cover in the London fire brigade; and what representations he has received on these proposals from *(a)* insurance companies and *(b)* property policy holders in London. [12867]

**Mr. Sackville:** Statutory responsibility for the provision of the fire service rests with the fire authority—in this case the London fire and civil defence authority. Under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947, my right hon. and learned Friend has to be notified of the fire authority's establishment—the number of fire stations, fire appliances and firefighting posts—as at 1 January each year. The fire authority may not reduce its establishment without his consent. He grants approval only where he is satisfied that the proposals have been sufficiently widely publicised, in sufficient detail and with adequate time, to enable any interested party to make representations; the representations have been considered by the fire authority; and that, after taking advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services, the nationally recommended standards of fire cover will be maintained.

My right hon. and learned Friend has received no application from the fire authority for his approval. However, he has received a number of representations, some of which may well have come from holders of property insurance policies, but, as at 31 January, none from insurance companies. Should the authority decide to make an application to reduce fire cover, any representations made to the Secretary of State would be taken into account when that application is considered.

## Laboratory Animals

**Mr. Mellor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 with particular reference to its proposals for *(a)* reductions in the number of animals used in laboratories and *(b)* a reduction in the suffering of laboratory animals. [12820]

**Mr. Sackville:** The animal procedures committee will review the working of the Act and offer advice to my right hon. and learned Friend. I expect that the review will consider the impact the Act has had both on the number of animals used in scientific procedures and on the extent of animal suffering.

### Amusement-with-prizes Machines

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the ages at which people may play on AWP machines in different categories of establishment; what representations he has received for standardisation of age; and if he will make a statement. [12852]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The playing of amusement-with-prizes machines in current use is not subject to any statutory age restriction. Amusement arcade operators who are members of the British Amusement Catering Trades Association—BACTA—operate a voluntary police whereby persons under 16 are not allowed in inland arcades and local school children of any age are not allowed in seaside arcades during school hours.

The Government have received representations from the amusement arcades action group. United Kingdom forum on young people and gambling and Dr. Sue Fisher at the university of Plymouth that all AWP machines should be subject to a statutory age limit of 18; and from the National Council on Gambling that all AWP machines should be confined to adult premises.

The draft Deregulation (Gaming Machines and Betting Office Facilities) Order provides for a machine with a £10 cash prize. Persons under 18 would not be allowed access to these machines in arcades. The machines would also be permitted in betting shops, where there is a statutory prohibition on access by persons under 18, and in liquor licensed premises and licensed bingo clubs, which are essentially adult environments.

### Women's Prisons

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women's prisons do not currently meet *(a)* fire compliance standards and *(b)* statutory and safety standards; and how much must be spent to bring each prison into compliance with those standards. [11494]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Tessa Jowell, dated 2 February 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many womens' prisons do not currently meet *(a)* fire compliance standards and *(b)* statutory and safety standards; and how much must be spent to bring each prison into compliance with those standards.

All prisons are subject to statutory standards set by the Fire Precautions Act 1971, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Food Safety Act 1990. These Acts are enforced by the Crown Premises Inspection Group of HM Fire Service Inspectorate, the Health and Safety Executive and local authority environmental health departments.

Inspectors have the authority to inspect and issue Crown Improvement and Prohibition Notices should any failures be discovered which are deemed to be a risk to health, safety or hygiene. No such notices have been served on a women's prison within the last three years.

In addition, all prisons are inspected by the Fire Safety Section of the Prison Service and the Home Office Health and Safety Services. Reports of the visits are sent to the governors and area managers concerned, who are required to deal promptly with any shortcomings discovered.

All female prisons, except Drake Hall, have had a full fire inspection within the last three years. Recommendations for improvements were made at each establishment. Drake Hall has been visited during its rebuilding programme and recommendations have been incorporated into all the living accommodation.

During the last two years, all the female prisons have been visited by the Home Office Health and Safety Service. In some cases minor faults were discovered in the fabric of the buildings, but in the majority of cases improvements to management systems were needed.

The cost of making improvements to the fabric of a prison is normally contained within the prisons maintenance budgets and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

### Illegal Drugs

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest estimate of the number of people involved in the illegal drugs market in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [12726]

**Mr. Sackville** *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* Since drug dealing is an illegal and, therefore, clandestine activity it is not possible to produce a reliable estimate of the number of people involved.

The number of offenders found guilty, cautioned or dealt with by compounding for drug offences is contained in table 1.1 of "Statistics of Drugs Seizures and Offenders Dealt with, United Kingdom, 1994", a copy of which is in the Library.

### Parole Board

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what reasons Paul Norney was not informed that he was required to appear before the Parole Board when his parole was last considered; for what reasons he was not asked to appear before the Parole Board in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland; when his parole is to be considered; and if he will make a statement. [12949]

(2) what factors led to Brendan Bond being refused parole by the Parole Board; and if he will make a statement. [12951]

(3) what factors led the Parole Board to require Stephen Nordone, Noel Gibson and Sean Kinsella to remain in Britain for three months after their release; and if he will make a statement. [12952]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* These matters are the responsibility of the Parole Board. I have asked the chairman of the Parole Board to write to the hon. Member and I will place a copy of his reply in the Library.

## HEALTH

### Helplines

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the helplines, or schemes which include a helpline service, for which his Department provides any funding, stating which are *(a)* independent organisations, *(b)* run by his Department or agencies of his Department or *(c)* of another classification; however many calls each received in each of the last five years; and how much money each received from his Department in each of the last five years. [9800]

**Mr. Horam** *[pursuant to his reply, 22 January 1996 c.13–14]:* I regret that there was an error in the table provided. A correct version is now listed.

| *Description* | *Run by* | *Number of calls* | *Cost £* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Blood Donor Line | Managed by the Central Office of Information for the Department of Health | 78,516 (April–December 1995) | 33,074 |
| Drinkline | Drinkline (non-profit making limited company) | 44,000 (October 1993–January 1996) | 516,000 (DH funding for 1993–94—1995–96) |
| Health Information Service | NHS—regionally provided service | 920,136 (April 1992–December 1995) | 7,772,745 (April 1992–March 1996 Includes all costs associated with establishing the service and in initially publicising its availability) |
| Health Literature Line (including the Organ Donor Line) | Managed by the Central Office of Information for the Department of Health | 255,885 (April–December 1995) | 108,026 |
| National AIDS Helpline and National Drugs Helpline | Network Scotland Ltd. (independent company contracted by the Department of Health) | 386,953 (April–December 1995) | 1,569,000 (estimated total 1995–96 cost) |
| National AIDS Helpline | Broadcasting Support Services and Network Scotland (contracted by the Department of Health) | 4,200,514 (January 1990–December 1994) | 6,038,000 |
| Sexwise Helpline | Managed by the Central Office of Information for the Department of Health | 784,016 (April–December 1995) | 366,854 |
| Committee Safety Medicines Freephone | Medicines Control Agency | 1,977 (January 1994–December 1995) | 7,510 (calls costs only) |

Details of other helpline services could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*Details of the Helpline Numbers are listed as follow:*

Blood Donor Line: 0345 711 711

Drinkline: 0345 32 02 02

Health Information Service: 0800 66 55 44

Health Literature Line: 0800 555 777

National Drugs Helpline: 0800 77 66 00

National AIDS Helpline: 0800 567 123

Sexwise: 0800 28 29 30

Committee Safety Medicines: Dial the operator and ask for Freephone CSM

### Dental Records

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his Department's policy regarding the transfer of patients' dental records when the patient is transferring from one NHS dentist to another. [12830]

(2) what is his policy regarding transfer of a patients' dental records if a dental practice leaves the NHS. [12831]

**Mr. Malone:** It is a condition of dentists' terms of service that dentists should provide, within 28 days of a request from registered patients leaving to join another dentist, a summary of the care and treatment given to that patient. Local family health services authorities provide a form, FP26, for that purpose.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### International War Crimes Tribunal

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the letter to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West of 29 September 1995 concerning the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, what further measures he now proposes as regards equipment, staff and funding to assist the tribunal in its work; what is the intended timetable for investigation, arrest, charging and trial; and if he will make a statement. [13397]

**Mr. Hanley:** The International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has announced indictments against 52 individuals. It has held preliminary hearings in the trial against Dusko Tadic, a guard at the Omarska Camp, the trial is due to start on 18 March.

The tribunal does not disclose its operational timetable.

As concerns the level of our contribution to the tribunal this year, I shall arrange for the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Upminister (Sir N. Bonsor) to write to the hon. Gentleman with details shortly.

### BBC World Service

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the grant in aid in each of the last five financial years, and in 1995–96 to date from his Department to the BBC World Service in constant prices. [12907]

**Mr. Hanley:** The figures are:

*BBC World Service grant in aid 1990–91 to 1995–96*

| | *Actual grant* | *At constant prices (1995–96)* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 146 | 174 |
| 1991–92 | 153 | 172 |
| 1992–93 | 163 | 176 |
| 1993–94 | 172 | 180 |
| 1994–95 | 174 | 179 |
| 1995–96 | 175 | 175 |

Figures are rounded up to the nearest million and do not include the Ministry of Defence's contribution to BBC World Service monitoring.

### European Council (Forthcoming Business)

**Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement on the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union. [13626]

**Mr. Hanley:** The answer is as follows:

SUBJECT: MONTHLY FORECAST OF BUSINESS FOR FEBRUARY 1996

1. The following Councils are scheduled:

February 12: ECOFIN Council;

February 26: FAC, Agriculture Council;

February 27: FAC, Agriculture Council.

2. The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

*12 February: ECONFIN*

ECONFIN will decide on 22 January whether to go ahead with this meeting. The provisional agenda we have received is as follows:

(possibly) Renewal of Community guarantees of EIB loans to Latin America;

(possibly) Audiovisual guarantee fund;

The fight against fraud—presentation of work for 1996;

(possibly) Tax on savings;

Carbon/energy tax.

*26 February: FAC*

Agenda not yet available.

*26–27 February: Agriculture Council*

Reform of the fruit and vegetable regime (possibly);

Bananas (possibly);

Reform of the wine regime (possibly);

Price fixing (possibly);

Hormones (possibly);

Animal welfare (possibly);

Inspection fees (possibly);

Pesticides (possibly).

### Iraq (Food and Medicines Parcels)

**Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the Post Office authorities the returning to sender of food and medicines parcels posted to Iraq which have been clearly marked in accordance with his Department's instructions. [13284]

**Mr. Hanley:** UN sanctions prohibit the export to Iraq of goods other than food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies. These require an export licence obtained from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Post Office will not accept any items for Iraq that do not have the appropriate licence.

### Departmental Expenditure

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11441]

**Mr. Hanley** *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Diplomatic wing expenditure on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and related expenses is:

1993–94: £28,792,720

1994–95: £25,790,597

The above includes expenditure on transfer journeys, medical journeys, local and regional travel, Queen's messenger travel, ministerial visits and subsistence, including accommodation costs. Figures for earlier years cannot be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs.

Estimated outturn figures for overseas expenditure for 1995–96 cannot be provided as the apportionment between UK and overseas expenditure can, under the present accounting system, be made only after such expenditure has been incurred. The allocation of funds for 1996–97 has not yet been determined.

The aid wing does not hold the information in the form requested. The total spent on travel and subsistence—including UK travel, hotel and associated costs both in the UK and overseas—is as follows:

1991–92: £1,066,000

1993–94: £1,375,000

1994–95: £1,374,000

1995–96: £1,514,000 (projected)

1996–97: £1,370,000 (estimate)

Figures for other years cannot be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs.

Expenditure by NDPBs and agencies is as follows:

*Natural Resources Institute*
1991–92: £166,000
1993–94: £178,000
1994–95: £112,000
1995–96: £179,000 (to date)

*Wilton Park*
1991–92: £2,456
1993–94: £7,834
1994–95: £19,742
1995–96: £15,000 (projected)
1996–97: £15,000 (estimate)

*Britain-Russia Centre*
Not funded from grant in aid.

*British Association for Central and Eastern Europe*
Not funded from grant in aid.

*British Council*
The British Council does not hold this information in the form requested.

*Commonwealth Institute*
1993–94: £5,798
1994–95: £7,114
1195–96: £19,875 (projected)
1996–97: £5,000 (estimate)

*Great Britain-China Centre*
1989–90: £1,813
1991–92: £3,178
1993–94: £7,580
1994–95: £3,964
1995–96: £2,655 (projected)
1996–97: £4,000 (estimate)

*Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission*
1979–80: £2,070
1989–90: £4,730
1991–92: £5,350
1993–94: £7,386
1994–95: £16,920
1995–96: £9,100 (projected)
1996–97: £10,020 (estimate)

*Westminster Foundation for Democracy*
1993–94: £19,764
1994–95: £29,814
1995–96: £13,000 (projected)
1996–97: not finalised

Figures for other years could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs.

The 1996 departmental report, due to be published in March, will provide details of FCO expenditure in recent years and expenditure plans for the years 1996–97 to 1998–99.

## WALES

### Llanelli (Development)

**Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what contribution was made by the Welsh Development Agency through the joint venture agreement between the agency and the Llanelli borough council to the development of south Llanelli in 1994–95; what is the estimated outturn for 1995–96; and what is the planned expenditure for 1996–97. [11829]

**Mr. Hague:** I will arrange for the chief executive of the agency to write to the right hon. Member and for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

### Redundancies

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many redundancies were declared in 1995; and what percentage of those redundancies were in manufacturing. [12425]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The only information available is from the quarterly labour force survey, which estimates the number of people who were made redundant in the three months prior to the survey. In Wales, an estimated 15,000 people were made redundant in the three months prior to interview in the spring 1995 labour force survey. The corresponding figure for the summer 1995 survey was 10,000.

The results from autumn 1995 and winter 1995 are not yet available. No reliable estimates relating to manufacturing can be made because of the relatively small sample size.

### Part-time Jobs

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were in part-time jobs in Wales at the latest available date. [12424]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The labour force survey for summer 1995 estimated that 300,000 people in Wales aged 16 or over worked part-time in their main job.

### Agriculture Department Employees

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time members of staff are currently employed at each of the Welsh Office agricultural department divisional offices. [12309]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The following full-time members of staff, excluding short-term casual staff, are currently employed at each of the agricultural divisional offices—as at 26 January:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Caernarfon | 141 |
| Carmarthen | 145 |
| Llandrindod Wells | 168 |
| Total | 454 |

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what reductions he estimates will take place in current staffing levels within the agriculture group of the Welsh Office in 1996–97; and what assessment he has made of his Department's capacity to meet the standards set out in "Helping Farmers in Wales" following these reductions. [12307]

**Mr. Jones:** Final decisions on the 1996–97 running cost budgets for individual groups have not yet been made.

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time members of staff are currently employed by the Welsh Office agricultural department in Cardiff; and at what grades. [12310]

**Mr. Jones:** There are the following full-time staff in the agriculture department in Cardiff—as at 26 January 1996:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Grade 3 | 1 |
| Grade 5 | 3 |
| Grade 7 | 5 |
| SEO | 4 |
| HEO | 13 |
| EO | 18 |
| AO | 9 |
| AA | 9 |
| PS | 4 |

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current ratio of Welsh Office agricultural department staff to the total number of farmers, partners and directors in Wales. [12308]

**Mr. Jones:** The ratio of current Welsh Office agricultural staff, excluding short-term casual staff, to the total number of farmers, partners and directors in Wales is 1:63 (rounded).

### Temporary Jobs

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of people who are in temporary jobs because they are unable to find permanent work. [12423]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The labour force survey for summer 1995 estimated that the number of employees in Wales aged 16 or over who were in a temporary job, and who gave the reason as being that they could not find a permanent one, was 48,000.

### Chernobyl

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent assessment he has made of the persistent environmental effects on Welsh farms of the radioactive fallout from the Chernobyl accident in 1986; and if he will make an assessment on the effect on the Welsh economy of the radioactive pollution. [12685]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** In Wales radiocaesium contamination from the Chernobyl accident affects certain upland areas of sheep grazing, predominantly where there is a high peat content. While there is a general decline from year to year in the activity rate of radiocaesium, the actual rate of decline in these areas depends on the interaction of a number of factors such as soil type, vegetation, weather, drainage and sheep grazing preference. The variable interaction between these factors does not enable an accurate forecast to be made of the length of time sheep controls will be required.

Regular monitoring of radiocaesium levels in sheep, and other relevant information, enables suitable areas to be identified for a comprehensive survey and assessment to determine the prospects for removing controls. Following such work, my right hon. Friend was able to life controls from more than 65 sq km in the Snowdon area on 17 January 1996. This reduced the area originally affected by sheep controls from more than 4,000 sq km to approximately 580 sq km.

It was recognised that the introduction of sheep controls would have some economic effect on part of the Welsh sheep industry. To mitigate this, the sheep compensation scheme was introduced in July 1986 to compensate farmers whose enterprises had been disrupted as a consequence of sheep controls. So far in Wales over £7,900,000 has been paid to farmers affected. This compensation has been paid primarily to recompense farmers for the inconvenience and disruption of sheep controls; payments for market losses as a result of the Chernobyl accident have been comparatively small.

### Fire Service Personnel

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors led to the decision to permit employees of the fire services to stand for election in local authority areas in their areas. [12561]

**Mr. Hague:** Employees of combined fire authorities can become members of unitary authorities, but cannot be representatives of their councils on the fire authority of which their council is a constituent.

The Government consider that the responsibilities of combined fire authorities are such that membership of a constituent council would not present any conflict of interest for an employee of the combined fire authority provided that the employee is not a representative of the council on the combined fire authority.

### National Parks Employees

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors led to the decision not to permit employees of the national parks to stand for elections to local authorities in their areas. [12489]

**Mr. Hague:** The planning and development control responsibilities of national parks require them to take decisions which directly affect the interests of individual residents and businesses in the parks. People in the parks should be confident that there is no possible conflict between an individual's interest as an employee of a national park authority and his position as a member of a local authority. The Environment Act 1995 preserves this position by providing that an employee of a national park authority is not only disqualified from being a member of that authority, but from being a member of any local authority represented on that national park authority.

### Industry Acts Expenditure, Gywnedd

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much expenditure was incurred in the county of Gywnedd during the financial year 1994–95 under the Industry Acts; and how many new jobs have been facilitated by such expenditure. [12491]

**Mr. Hague:** In 1994–95, companies in Gywnedd accepted assistance worth £4,438.025 under regional selective assistance, RSA; regional enterprise grants; SMART, small firms merit award for research technology,

and SPUR, support for projects under research, schemes. Of these, only RSA is job-related, and 600 jobs were forecast to be created and/or safeguarded.

### Non-departmental Public Bodies

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the grants paid by *(a)* the Welsh Office and *(b)* its NDPBs to supermarket chains in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1994. [12520]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The Welsh Office offered Tesco a grant of £2 million in 1989 to encourage it to relocate its administration centre to Cardiff. In 1992, an offer of £3.8 million was made to encourage it to locate a distribution centre at Magor. Details of individual payments within these offers are commercially confidential, but payments on both projects have been made during the period 1992 to 1994. No other supermarket chains have received Welsh Office grant assistance and no supermarket chain has received grant from Welsh Office public bodies.

### Offa's Dyke

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans his Department has to preserve the section of Offa's Dyke at Rhostyllen, near Wrexham, Clwyd, currently offered for sale; and if he will make a statement. [12872]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. T. J. Cassidy, to reply to the hon. Member.

*Letter from T. J. Cassidy to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 2 February 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question in which you asked about the Department's plans to preserve a section of Offa's Dyke at Rhostyllen which is currently offered for sale.

Cadw's interest arises as the Agency has day to day responsibility for the Secretary of State's functions under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. These include our work related to ancient monuments scheduled—that is protected—under the provisions of the Act. Much of Offa's Dyke is scheduled—including the section to which you refer.

Given the importance of the Dyke I can assure you that Cadw takes a close interest in the various sections which are routinely monitored by our Field Monument Wardens. In 1991 we commissioned a full field assessment of the Dyke which confirmed that the Welsh sections were appropriately scheduled including the section at Rhostyllen, currently offered for sale.

I understand that it is owned by British Coal and has been offered for sale as part of the company's disposal of its non-mining assets. Its sale will not affect its scheduled status. I am told by our professional staff that this section of the Dyke is in good condition, and we will draw the monument's importance to the attention of any new owner.

### Housing Stock (Alyn and Deeside)

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new moneys he plans to give to Alyn and Deeside district council to enable the authority to modernise more of its housing stock; if he will visit Alyn and Deeside district council and undertake a tour of inspection of the older council estates; and if he will make a statement. [12990]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend and I have no plans to change Alyn and Deeside district council's housing capital allocations or to visit council estates in the area. It is for the local authority to determine capital spending priorities.

### Medical Treatment Centres

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many treatments are available at each treatment centre; and what guidelines he has issued on the provision of free transport to each treatment centre for *(a)* pre-operative, *(b)* surgery and *(c)* follow-up consultations. [12964]

**Mr. Hague:** In 1995–96, the number of procedures available at each treatment centre is:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Surgical centre, Bridgend (hernia, varicose vein and some minor surgical procedures) | 1,080 |
| Ophthalmic centre, Bridgend (cataract procedures) | 1,060 |
| Orthopaedic centre, Rhydlafar (hip/knee replacement and joint revision procedures | 298 |

Patient transport services are provided free of charge for all visits to and from treatment centres for those patients with medical need as determined by their doctor.

### Health Service Referrals

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 25 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *400*, if he will list those Welsh health authorities which have stopped funding extra-contractual referrals until 1 April and in each case the estimated cost overrun of the health authority prior to the decision. [13016]

**Mr. Hague:** South Glamorgan and Dyfed health authorities have suspended funding of non-urgent extra-contractual referrals for the balance of the current financial year. The projected overruns when the decisions were made were £1.4 million and £1.5 million respectively.

### Health Service Materials Management

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the announcement of the award to Excel Logistics of the materials management contract under the market testing of the Welsh health common services authority, how the capital receipts for the disposal of Bridgend, Swansea and Whitchurch will be treated; and what undertakings have been given to NHS trusts concerning rebates or other financial consideration from the disposals in the price to be offered for materials management services. [13389]

**Mr. Hague:** NHS trusts have been told that capital receipts from the sale of existing stores will be available to contribute towards the restructuring of the procurement service following the award of the contract to Exel Logistics.

### Unexploded Bombs

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will undertake a survey of the waters in Cardigan bay

and the Irish sea to identify unexploded bombs; and if he will make a statement. [12490]

**Mr. Soames:** I have been asked to reply.

If left undisturbed, munitions on the sea bed present no significant risk to human health or to the marine environment. Accordingly, my Department has no plans to survey Cardigan bay or the Irish sea to identify munitions.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Fish Quotas

**Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the fish quotas for each EU country in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the last five years; and what were the national fish catches in each of the last five years. [13089]

**Mr. Baldry:** Detailed tables are being placed in the Library of the House showing

(i) the quotas allocated to each member state at the start of each of the years 1991 to 1995; and

(ii) uptake by each member state over the period 1991 to 1995 against their end-of-year quota i.e. after quota exchanges have been taken into account.

The quotas for each member state for the current year have not yet been published, but I will send them to the hon. Member as soon as they are.

### Live Animal Exports

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the enforcement of the requirements of article 4(1)(a) of Council directive 91/628: Ovine and Caprine Animals, in terms of identification and registration in accordance with the requirements of article 3(1)(c) of Council directive 90/425EEC. [12543]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* The Sheep and Goats (Registration, Identification and Movement) Order 1996, which implements the requirements on sheep and goats in Council directive 92/102.EEC on the registration and identification of livestock, came into effect on 1 February this year. The responsibility for enforcing this legislation falls to local authorities.

### Absenteeism

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11353]

**Mr. Boswell:** Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, selected aggregated data on sickness absence in respect of calendar years has been available since 1985 in the form of reports from HM Treasury and more recently the Civil Service Occupational Health and Safety Agency (OHSA). Figures for the Department based on these data, which necessarily include some of the agencies in the period 1990 to 1994, are as follows:

| *Year* | *Average number of days sick absence per staff year* |
|---|---|
| 1989[1] | 6.3 |
| 1990[2] | 7.5 |
| 1991 | 8.1 |
| 1992 | 8.0 |
| 1993 | 8.4 |
| 1994 | 7.4 |

[1] Figures are based on a 10 per cent. sample.
[2] Figures are based on a 20 per cent. sample.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Education Funding (Brent)

**Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is the standard spending assessment for Brent in the next financial year; and what is the actual projected spending; [12501]

(2) if she will ask for a report on the resources being made available to schools in Brent. [12562]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Brent local education authority's final education standard spending assessment for 1996–97 is £109.69 million, which represents an increase of £3.37 million—3.2 per cent—from 1995–96. It is for Brent council to decide on spending for 1996–97, when it sets its budget, and to determine the level of funding for the schools for which it is responsible. The Funding Agency for Schools will calculate the budgets for grant-maintained schools.

### Pupil-teacher Ratios (Brent)

**Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what reports she has received about pupil-teacher ratios in schools in Brent over the last six years. [12563]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Information on national and local pupil-teacher ratios is collected via the school census which is conducted every January and published in the annual HMSO statistical volume "Statistics of Education: Schools in England".

### Free Transport (Schools and Colleges)

**Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local authorities in England provide free transport to schools and colleges for pupils beyond the compulsory school leaving age. [12895]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** This information is not available centrally.

### Education Funding (Warwickshire)

**Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total amount of funds held back by Warwickshire local education authority. [13096]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The amount is £52,239,000. This figure is derived from the local management of schools budget statement for 1995–96 published by the local education authority under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988 and relates to all planned expenditure on mandatory and discretionary "excepted items". It does not include educational expenditure which falls outside the scope of the authority's general schools budget.

### Early Years Education

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what agreements her Department has entered into with *(a)* non-statutory bodies and *(b)* other persons, in connection with the administration of her proposed extensions to early years education; what advertisements for such services were issued; what (i) provisional arrangements and (ii) contracts have been entered into with which persons or bodies; and if she will place copies of relevant details and documents in the Library. [12908]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Following advertisements in *The Guardian, Financial Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Scotsman, The Herald* in Scotland, *The Economist, The Times Educational Supplement* and "Government Opportunities", Capita Managed Services Ltd. was appointed through a competitive tender to administer the issue and redemption of nursery vouchers in phase 1 of the scheme. Copies of both the invitation to tender and the contract with Capita Managed Services Ltd. have been placed in the Library.

### Mill Hill County High School

**Sir John Gorst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what decision has been reached on the proposals by Mill Hill county high school for partial selective entry commencing in September. [12544]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The proposals from Mill Hill county high grant-maintained school for partial selection in technology were approved on 1 February 1996.

### Administration and Education Spending

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* outturn spending on management and administration, *(b)* outturn spending on education, excluding further education, *(c)* *(a)* as a percentage of *(b)* for each year, *(d)* number of pupils, *(e)* *(a)* divided by *(d)*, *(f)* *(b)* divided by *(f)* and *(g)* *(e)* as a percentage of *(f)* for each year for each local education authority for the last two years for which figures are available. [12639]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The tables, which I have placed in the Library, show for 1992–93 and 1993–94, the latest years for which figures are available for all local education authorities, *(a)* total management and administration expenditure; *(b)* total education expenditure excluding further education colleges; *(c)* the percentage of management and administration within total education expenditure; *(d)* total pupil numbers of pre-primary and primary, secondary and special schools at January 1993 and January 1994; *(e)* management and administration expenditure per pupil; *(f)* total education expenditure (excluding further education colleges) per pupil and *(g)* *(e)* as a percentage of *(f)*.

### Teachers (Early Retirement)

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the first-year cost to the teachers' superannuation scheme of early retirements on the grounds of *(a)* infirmity and *(b)* premature retirement in 1994–95; and what was the amount of expenditure borne by local education authorities for early retirements among teachers in 1994–95. [13387]

(2) how many teachers were granted early retirement in 1994–95; and of these how many were on the grounds of *(a)* infirmity and *(b)* premature retirement. [13388]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The first-year costs to the teachers' superannuation scheme of early retirements on the grounds of *(a)* infirmity and *(b)* premature retirement in 1994–95 were £83.8 million and £49.8 million respectively. Information on the amount of expenditure borne by local education authorities for teachers' early retirements in 1994–95 is not yet available.

The total number of teachers who were granted early retirement in 1994–95 in England and Wales was 16,682. Of these, 6,075 were on the grounds of infirmity and 10,608 on the grounds of premature retirement.

### Jobseekers (Project Work Scheme)

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *560*, if she will identify the labour market data and pre-existing documents; and if this information is available to hon. Members in the Library. [13357]

**Mr. Forth:** My reply of 29 January explained the considerations that were taken into account when selecting the pilot areas. Information on claimant unemployment rates for travel-to-work areas is published in the *Employment Gazette*. Other information on claimant unemployment, such as small area statistics by duration, is available on the NOMIS database, to which the Library has access.

**Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *560*, if she will identify by name the other travel-to-work areas which were considered for the project work scheme; and what are the respective rates of unemployment and very long-term unemployment in these travel-to-work areas. [13358]

**Mr. Forth:** Officials considered all travel-to-work areas, according to the criteria explained in my reply of 29 January. The following list shows the travel-to-work areas which were under consideration as at October 1995, and from which the final two were chosen.

Birmingham
Bolton and Bury
Bournemouth
Bradford
Brighton
Bristol
Cardiff

Chesterfield
Coventry and Hinkley
Derby
Doncaster
Dudley and Sandwell
Dundee
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Hastings
Heathrow
Hertford and Harlow
Hull
Lanarkshire
Leeds
Leicester
Liverpool
Manchester
Mansfield
Medway and Maidstone
Middlesborough
Newcastle upon Tyne
Newport
Norwich
Nottingham
Plymouth
Portsmouth
Preston
Rotherham and Mexborough
Sheffield
Slough
South Tyneside
Southampton
Southend
Stockton on Tees
Stoke
Sunderland
Swansea
Wakefield and Dewsbury
Walsall
Watford and Luton
Wigan and St. Helens
Wirral and Chester
Wolverhampton

Information on claimant unemployment rates for travel-to-work areas is published in the *Employment Gazette*. Other information on claimant unemployment, such as small area statistics by duration, is available on the NOMIS database, to which the Library has access.

**Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *610*, if she will publish details of correspondence and telephone calls received in support of the Medway and Hull travel-to-work areas being chosen to pilot the project work scheme. [13359]

**Mr. Forth:** There were none.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Child Support Agency

**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what factors underlie the decline in the current year in respect of the success rate for parents with care seeking exemption from the requirement to co-operate with the Child Support Agency on the grounds of harm or undue distress in the current year; [12782]

(2) what is the CSA's success rate for tracing absent parents for each year since its establishment and how many specialist tracing actions since April 1993 have been abandoned; and how many cases remain outstanding; [12803]

(3) what percentage of cases were cleared by individual CSA centres during the first half of 1995–96 *(a)* in under 13 weeks, *(b)* between 13 and 26 weeks and *(c)* in over 26 weeks; [12795]

(4) how the CSA performed against its performance targets in the first nine months of 1995–96; [12812]

(5) how many employees the CSA currently has in each of the CSA centres and in the field; how many of these staff are on temporary contracts; and what plans there are to change the staff complement over the next financial year; [12791]

(6) what proportion of CSA accounts are currently in arrears; how many have had no payments; what is the average debt on a CSA account; what are the total arrears of child support maintenance; and if he will add this data to the CSA monthly statistics placed in the Library; [12809]

(7) how many of the deductions from earnings orders issued by the CSA remain in force; how many have been challenged by appeals to court; and how many of these challenges were successful; [12804]

(8) how many CSA cases involve self-employed absent parents; what proportion of these cases are subject to a dispute between the parents compared with employed cases; how many category C interim maintenance assessments have been issued since 18 April 1995; how many category A and D interim maintenance assessments relate to self-employed absent parents; and what proportion of the liability orders sought by the CSA relate to self-employed absent parents. [12792]

(9) how many times inspectors have been appointed under section 15 of the Child Support Act 1991; how many charges have been brought under section 15(9) of the Act for non-co-operation with an inspector; and how many employees of the Child Support Agency have been charged under section 50 of the Act for unlawful disclosure of information. [12786]

(10) what proportion of *(a)* all persons with care with CSA assessments, *(b)* persons with care on income support, and *(c)* persons with care on family credit have their child support maintenance collected by the CSA; and how many of each of these groups have had a request for collection via the CSA refused. [12810]

(11) how much child support maintenance has been paid through the CSA for each quarter since April 1993. [12808]

(12) what are the results so far of the review being conducted by the Child Support agency into the requirement to co-operate with procedures begun a year ago; when the final report will be made available; what exercises are being undertaken as part of this review by his Department and the Child Support Agency; and in what capacity Benefits Agency staff have been involved. [12784]

(13) what is the cost of DNA tests available via the CSA; and in how many cases DNA testing has been used before a paternity case has been referred to court. [12807]

(14) how many absent parents whose cases were taken on by the CSA to date during 1995–96 are on income support; in how many of these cases the Benefits Agency is making deductions at £2.35 from income support in lieu of child maintenance; how many of the maintenance assessments calculated using the child support formula during 1995–96 are minimum assessments; and how many absent parents not on income support are exempt from paying the minimum. [12802]

(15) how many assessments were reduced as a result of the 18 April 1995 changes to the child support formula; what was the average reduction; and what effect this will have had on the 1995–96 benefit savings. [12799]

(16) what proportion of absent parents are assessed to pay child support maintenance by the CSA at a rate lower than the maintenance requirement. [12796]

(17) how many of the persons with care sent maintenance application forms by the CSA to date during 1995–96 were *(a)* income support claimants, *(b)* family credit claimants and *(c)* private clients; [12805]

(18) what factors led to the current level of outstanding applications at the CSA at the end of November 1995; and when he expects the state of 200,000 outstanding applications to be reached; [12811]

(19) if he will give a breakdown of the cases cleared by the Child Support Agency without maintenance assessments in the current financial year; [12778]

(20) how many outstanding CSA cases involved a paternity dispute; what is the average time that these pending paternity cases have been awaiting resolution; and how many cases have been abandoned because of the inability to prove paternity. [12806]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(1) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency operations.

The trend changed with the introduction in late 1994, of a requirement to seek the PWC's authorisation to pursue maintenance. It increased awareness amongst PWCs that they did not have to co-operate with the Agency and led to an increase in the proportion of new cases seeking Good Cause. It is of note that whilst the number of cases where good cause has been turned down has gone up, the number accepted has remained fairly constant.

Following the Social Security Select Committee's recommendation that a review of the Good Cause process should be conducted, the Government charged the Agency with carrying out such a review. The report, to be published before the end of March 1996, will include detailed information about decision making by child support staff.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(2) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the success rate of specialist tracing of absent parents by the Child Support Agency.

In 1993/94 the success rate was 85%; in 1994/95 it was 66% and at the end of November 1995 the success rate was 63%.

Although the success rate is diminishing the actual number of absents parents that have been traced is increasing. In 1993/94 28,240 cases resulted in a successful trace, in 1994/95 this increased to 49,632 and in the first eight months of 1995/96 the Agency has been successful in 35,084 cases.

Since August 1994 to the end of November 1995 23,420 cases have been abandoned/withdrawn by the Agency. Information is not available for the period prior to August 1994.

At the end of November 1995 there were 17,145 cases that remained outstanding.

You may be interested to know that information on specialist tracing action is included in the Child Support Agency Statistical Information that is placed in the House of Commons Library every month.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(3) I am replying to your parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security on the percentage of cases cleared by individual Child Support Agency centres.

At the end of September 1995 159,041 cases had been cleared by the Agency. The percentage of these cases cleared by individual CSA centres during the first half of 1995/96 is shown in the table below for each of the categories required.

*Per cent.*

| | *Clearances* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *CSAC* | *(a) under 13 weeks* | *(b) between 13 and 26 weeks* | *(c) in over 26 weeks* |
| Dudley | 4.15 | 3.63 | 8.98 |
| Hastings | 5.41 | 4.06 | 8.76 |
| Falkirk | 3.35 | 2.52 | 7.56 |
| Plymouth | 4.41 | 3.84 | 10.38 |
| Birkenhead | 6.45 | 3.80 | 7.48 |
| Belfast | 3.93 | 3.75 | 7.55 |
| Agency | 27.70 | 21.60 | 50.71 |

Figures do not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(4) I am replying to the Parliamentary Question requesting information on how the Child Support Agency performed against its performance targets in the first nine months of 1995/96.

As December's information has not yet been published, the response covers the eighth months to the end of November.

At that point, the Agency's overall performance continued to represent a significant improvement over both the first year's performance and the situation at the same stage in 1994/95.

Details of performance against individual targets are as follows:

*"£300 million of maintenance to be collected, or arranged for direct payment from Absent Parent (AP) to Parent With Care (PWC), in 1995/96."*

This totalled £181.92 million for the year-to-date, with the total for the month continuing to increase. We are still on track to achieve this challenging target.

*"90% of payments made to PWC to be made within 10 workings days of receipt from AP."*

These have been made within 10 working days in 97% of cases. November was the eight consecutive month in which the target was achieved.

*"To achieve rapid continuing improvement in accuracy, so that in at least 75% of cases checked during March 1996 the cash value will be for the correct cash amount."*

Maintenance assessments were accurate in 71% of cases checked during November.

*"Where a client is dissatisfied with a Child Support Officer's decision and requests a review, 50% to be cleared within 13 weeks; 80% within 26 weeks; and no more than 20% to be older than 26 weeks at 31 March 1996."*

—52% of second tier reviews were cleared within 13 weeks.

—68% were cleared within 26 weeks.

—23% were outstanding for more than 26 weeks.

*"60% of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks, and as at 31 March 1996 no more than 10% of all maintenance applications received by the Agency to be over 52 weeks old."*

—The year-to-date figure at the end of November was 39%.

—Applications awaiting assessment for over 52 weeks stood at 14%.

*"To manage the Agency's resources to deliver its Business Plan within the gross vote (cash) budget allocation."*

The forecast outturn to the end of March 1996 continued to be in line with the budget.

I hope this is helpful for the moment, I will update the figures when the December information is published very shortly.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(5) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about staffing within the Child Support Agency.

The details you have requested regarding employees working within the six Child Support Agency Centres and in the field are shown in the attached table.

The Agency is still assessing the impact which the Public Expenditure Survey 1995 will have on the 1996/97 staffing complement.

I hope this is helpful.

| | *Permanent staff* | *Temporary contract staff* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Birkenhead | 773.5 | 13 | 786.5 |
| Dudley | 705.3 | 1 | 706.3 |
| Hastings | 714.5 | 48 | 762.5 |
| Falkirk | 721.9 | 4 | 725.9 |
| Plymouth | 722.5 | 67 | 789.5 |
| Belfast CSAC[1] | 594 | 110 | 704 |
| Field | 1,910.1 | 255.34 | 2,165.44 |

1. Staff shown as whole time equivalents.
2. Temporary contract staff are staff employed either on a casual basis or for a fixed term of between one and five years.
[1] Northern Ireland Civil Servants.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(6) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance.

The total Maintenance Debt as of 30/11/95 was £793.9m. This includes the debt for both Full and Interim Maintenance Assessments and arrears that have been rescheduled for future payment. Around 65% (£516m) of the £793.9m is provisional debt as it relates to interim maintenance assessments. In a further 16% (£130.3m) an agreement has been made with the absent parent for the maintenance to be paid either in instalments or at a future date; these cases are carefully monitored.

Information on the proportion of Agency accounts currently in arrears and how many have not received a payment is not currently available. This information will be available from the Agency's Debt Management System which will be introduced during 1996/97.

The average amount of debt on an Agency account is not currently available. The Financial Management System will provide this information from December 1995 when the number of cases with maintenance debt becomes available.

When the information you require from the Debt Management and Financial Management System is available, I will consider including this data in the monthly statistics placed in the library.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(7) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Deduction of Earnings orders (DEOs).

A scan of the Child Support Computer System which took place in January 1996 showed that there are just under 40,000 DEOs currently in force on regular payment accounts.

Information is not available on the number of DEOs that have been challenged in court, or the number of such challenges that have been successful.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(8) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about absent parents who are self-employed.

In August 1995 a computer scan of 5% of live cases on the Child Support Computer System showed that 3.9% of absent parents who have a full maintenance assessment were self-employed. I am unclear as to what is being referred to as "a dispute between the parents" and the Agency has no requirement to differentiate between the employed and self-employed until an assessment is calculated. Even if this phrase is taken to mean one or other parent has asked for a review or has appealed, we do not keep separate statistics on this basis.

Records show that 5 category C interim maintenance assessments have been issued since April 1995.

Finally, information is not held as to how many Category A and D interim maintenance assessments relate to self employed absent parents or the proportion of liability orders relating to self-employed absent parents. But in this last case, I can tell you that the great majority of liability orders relate to self-employed absent parents because the alternative of Deduction from Earnings Order would nearly always be appropriate for employees.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(9) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about sections of the Child Support Agency Act 1991.

Precise information on the number of time inspectors have been appointed under Section 15 of the Child Support Act 1991 can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost; this is a very rare occurrence. The Departmental Solicitors Office has confirmed that charges under Section 15(9) of the Act for non-cooperation with an inspector have been brought in one case.

It is a matter for the police to bring proceedings under Section 50 of the Act. I have no record of any Agency employee who has been charged under this section.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(10) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance.

You asked about parents with care using the Agency collection service. Information is not available in the exact form you requested but it is hoped that the following may be of use to you. Figures on the attached table are based on a scan of the live cases on the Child Support Computer System which took place in November 1995.

A breakdown of the proportions of each parent with care type using the collection service is not available.

There are no precise figures available for these groups relating to a request for collection via the Agency being refused, but a refusal would be extremely rare.

I hope this is helpful.

*Parents with Care*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *Maintenance assessments* | |
| Total number of assessments | 427,314 |
| Number of parents with care on Income Support | 347,337 |
| Number of parents with care on Family Credit | 49,582 |
| *Assessment, collection and enforcement service* | |
| Number of cases of all types where an account has been set up using the assessment, collection and enforcement service | 257,842 |

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(11) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security on how much child support maintenance has been paid through the Child Support Agency.

The table below gives a breakdown of maintenance paid through the CSA for each quarter, since information first became available.

| | *Maintenance £ Millions* |
|---|---|
| *1993–94* | |
| Q2 | 0.31 |
| Q3 | 1.47 |
| Q4 | 6.94 |
| *1994–95* | |
| Q1 | 9.09 |
| Q2 | 16.61 |
| Q3 | 19.39 |
| Q4 | 30.67 |
| *1995–96* | |
| Q1 | 26.46 |
| Q2 | 28.56 |

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(12) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency review into the requirement to co-operate procedures.

The Agency devised a detailed work programme to thoroughly examine all issues related to the requirement to co-operate procedures in order to address the concerns raised by the Social Security Select Committee. A number of special exercises were commissioned including the examination of client files, consultation with staff and consultation with external organisations.

The Agency, with the aid of external researchers, is in the final stages of analysing the results of the various exercises and expects to publish a report before the end of March 1996. Throughout the review the Agency liaised closely with all Departmental colleagues, including Benefit Agency staff who formed part of the working group established to take forward the review. This ensured a proper balance was maintained between protecting single parents and their children, and abuse of the Social Security benefit system.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(13) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about DNA tests.

The discounted DNA scheme was introduced in July 1995. Normally there are three separate tests involved for each case ie the parent with care, the alleged absent parent and the child. The total cost for discounted DNA testing is £426.92. This figure is inclusive of VAT and doctors fees. One of the advantages of the scheme was that it would effectively eliminate the need for cases of disputed paternity to go through the court system. Up to the end of November 1995 we have completed 904 discounted DNA tests; I am not aware that any of these cases have been referred for court action.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(14) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency operations.

You asked about absent parents (APs) maintenance and benefit status for 1995/96. The information is not available in exactly the form you requested but I hope the information contained within the attached table is helpful. The table does not show the number of APs with minimum assessments at 31/8/95, however 67,700 APs were paying between £0.01 and the current minimum amount of £2.35.

Figures are based on a 5% scan of live cases on the Child Support Computer System on 31 August 1995. All figures relate to live fully assessed cases at that date.

*Details of absent parents as at 31 August 1995*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Absent parents on Income Support whose cases have been taken on by CSA | 96,300 |
| Absent parents on Income Support where the minimum amount (currently £2.35) is deducted | 37,500 |
| Absent parents not on Income Support paying between £0.01 and the minimum amount (currently £2.35) | 30,200 |
| Absent parents not on Income Support paying NIL | 27,300 |

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(15) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the effect of the April policy changes on child maintenance assessments.

In April 1995 an exercise took place to consider all live cases on the Child Support Computer System and re-assess where applicable. Of the live cases re-assessed automatically by computer 33,000 resulted in a reduced maintenance liability averaging £8.33; of the cases requiring clerical re-assessment a further 7,000 saw a reduction in maintenance liability, but no information is held regarding the average reduced maintenance liability.

In addition, just under 4,500 absent parents have benefitted from either the award of allowances for property and capital settlements or from the award of an allowance for travel to work costs.

Figures relating to the impact of the April policy changes on benefit savings for 1995/96 are not yet available.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(16) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support maintenance.

The child maintenance requirement is a set amount based on the number of qualifying children which is the starting point of an assessment. An assessment is then made based on the full individual circumstances of both the absent parent and parent with care.

Information on the number of assessments that fall below the child maintenance requirement is not available.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(17) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many persons with care sent maintenance application forms by the Child Support Agency to date during 1995/96 were (a) Income Support claimants, (b) Family Credit claimants, (c) private clients.

At the end of November 1995 the Agency had issued the following Maintenance Assessments Forms (MAFs) for each of the above categories:

(a) 155,442 MAFs were issued to Income Support claimants

(b) 43,424 MAFs were issued to Family Credit claimants

(c) 13,147 MAFs were issued to private clients

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(18) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency applications.

The factors that led to the current level of outstanding maintenance applications have been well documented, and include the combination of new legislation, new systems and new staff at the outset of the Child Support Agency.

You asked when the Agency expects to reach a level of 200,000 outstanding applications. The Agency estimates that a normal head of work would be in the region of 200,000 to 250,000 cases in the process of maintenance assessment. The Agency currently has 392,000 cases at various stages in this process.

I am unable to state categorically when we will reach a steady state of 200,000 to 250,000 cases, but we are progressing towards this. The Agency has not yet agreed with the Secretary of State the priorities and performance targets for 1996/97.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(19) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about cases cleared by the Agency.

You asked for a breakdown of cases cleared in the current financial year without a maintenance assessment. I have based the reply on the first 8 months of the financial year, the period ending 30 November 1995.

During this period, out of 219,596 which were cleared, 130,228 cases were cleared without an assessment. As we have no business need to record a more specific reason for such clearances, I cannot provide a more detailed breakdown of these cases.

I hope this is helpful.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 1 February 1996:*

(20) I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency paternity cases.

At 30 November 1995 some 11,464 cases were outstanding in which paternity was disputed. There are a number of circumstances outside the control of the Agency which contribute to the delay in resolving the issue of paternity. The length of time taken to resolve a paternity dispute varies significantly with the complexity of the case, therefore no meaningful average can be given.

You asked how many cases have been abandoned because of the inability to prove paternity.

If DNA testing proves that the alleged absent parent is not the father of the child, the Agency will re-open discussions with the parent with care and consider further appropriate action.

If we think that there are reasonable grounds for an alleged absent parent to be judged the father of the child, even if he refuses DNA testing we will refer the case to a court for their judgement.

If we are not satisfied there are reasonable grounds for paternity to be accepted by a court we will suspend further action, but such cases may be periodically reviewed.

I hope this is helpful.

## Disregarded Funds

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's undertaking in his Budget speech, *Official Report*, 28 November 1995, column 1067, when he expects to bring forward regulations to increase capital disregard maximum from £8,000 to £16,000; and from which date the new regulations will take effect. [13015]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Regulations to increase the capital disregard maximum from £8,000 to £16,000 are expected to be laid before the House no later than 10 March. They will take effect from 1 April for housing benefit and 8 April for income support.

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of claimants declaring disregarded income; if he will list the amount of income disregarded; and if he will divide these data according to each category of claimant. [13363]

**Mr. Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

*Income Support recipients declaring disregarded income—February 1995*

| *Client group* | *Number of cases* | *Average weekly amount disregarded (£)* | *Estimated annual amount of income disregarded (£ millions)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Elderly | 455,000 | 36.79 | 870 |
| Sick or disabled | 249,000 | 43.87 | 568 |
| Lone parents | 74,000 | 18.08 | 70 |
| Unemployed | 44,000 | 7.97 | 18 |
| Other | 31,000 | 21.53 | 35 |

*Family Credit recipients declaring disregarded income—February 1995*

| *Client group* | *Number of cases* | *Average weekly amount disregarded (£)* | *Estimated annual amount of income disregarded (£ millions)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lone parents | 76,000 | 13.67 | 54 |
| Couples | 13,000 | 12,68 | 8 |

*Housing Benefit/Council Tax benefit recipients declaring disregarded income—May 1994*

| *Client group* | *Housing benefit* | *Council tax benefit* |
|---|---|---|
| Elderly | 169,000 | 264,000 |
| Sick or disabled | 57,000 | 75,000 |

*Housing Benefit/Council Tax benefit recipients declaring disregarded income—May 1994*

| *Client group* | *Housing benefit* | *Council tax benefit* |
|---|---|---|
| Lone parents | 96,000 | 86,000 |
| Unemployed | 7,000 | 12,000 |
| Other | 188,000 | 184,000 |

*Source:*
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries May 1994 and February 1995.
Family Credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.
Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample without Income Support taken at the end of May 1994.
*Notes:*
1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand, amount of income disregarded to the nearest million.
2. A breakdown by category of claimant is not available for Family Credit.
3. Disability Working Allowance data is not available in this form.
4. The client Groups used are as follows:-
"Elderly"—claimant or partner aged 60 or over.
"Sick or Disabled"—claimant receives either the Disabled or Severe Disability Premium.
"Lone Parent"—claimant receives the Lone Parent Premium.
"Unemployed"—Income Support–claimant registers as unemployed.
—Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit–claimant receives Unemployment Benefit.
"Other"—all other cases with disregarded income.
5. Figures refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
6. There will be an overlap between the numbers on each benefit, as a person may receive one or more of the named benefits.
7. Information on the amount of disregarded income is not collected for Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit.
8. For the purposes of disregarded income both benefit and other income are included.
9. The annual amount of income disregarded has been estimated by multiplying the number of cases by the average weekly amount of income disregarded and multiplying by 52 to calculate an annual amount.

### Appeals Legislation

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to amend social security laws in respect of appeals to *(a)* tribunals and *(b)* the social security commissioners. [13217]

**Mr. Burt:** Regulations are being laid on 7 February which will amend the Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1986. The changes are to the provisions relating to appeals to tribunals made outside the normal time limits and the way in which chairmen record the proceedings of tribunals. Regulations relating to the procedures before the Social Security Commissioners are the responsibility of my noble friend the Lord Chancellor.

## DEFENCE

### Army Headquarters

**Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the location of the headquarters of each Army *(a)* division and *(b)* brigade, indicating to which division each brigade reports and for each brigade which Regular and Territorial Army infantry battalions are under command. [12137]

**Mr. Soames:** I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Gulf War Syndrome

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of carrying out an epidemiological survey to establish the existence of the alleged Gulf war syndrome. [12329]

**Mr. Saomes:** The costs of the epidemiological surveys, which I announced on Tuesday 30 January in my reply to the hon. Member for South Shields, (Dr. Clark), *Official Report*, column *607-08*, have yet to be determined.

### Language Training

**Mr. George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* academic and *(b)* non-academic (i) part-time and (ii) full-time staff are employed in the defence school of languages. [12819]

**Mr. Soames:** Details of the staff employed at the defence school of languages are as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *Military academic* | |
| Full-time | 13 |
| Part-time | 0 |
| *Military non-academic* | |
| Full-time | 19 |
| Part-time | 0 |
| Total | 32 |
| *Civilian academic* | |
| Full-time | 19 |
| Part-time | 1 |
| *Civilian non-academic* | |
| Full-time | 32 |
| Part-time | 1 |
| Total | 52 |

In addition to the above there are, at present, a further 22 civilian academic staf employed on a casual basis.

**Mr. George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of language training within the responsibility of his Department. [12818]

**Mr. Soames:** The MOD's requirement for language training is regularly reviewed. The defence school of languages is being restructured as part of the defence costs study. This will take effect on 1 April 1996. Changes include the creation of a European language wing teaching French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian; and the integration of the hitherto single service, individual language training organisations.

### RAF Deployments (Morocco)

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what efforts have been made to obtain authorisation from the Moroccan authorities for flights at less than 300 ft

about ground level during Royal Air Force deployments to that country. [12890]

**Mr. Soames:** I regret to advise that my answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *811*, concerning the minimum permitted altitude of RAF training deployments to Morocco during 1995 was incorrectly stated as 300 ft above ground level. On further investigation it has been established that we received approval to carry out low flying training at a minimum height of 200 ft above ground level. In the event, though, the RAF only flew sorties down to 250 ft.

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what weapons and electronic warfare range facilities are available to the Royal Air Force under the arrangements with the Moroccan authorities for bilateral exercises. [12888]

**Mr. Soames:** None.

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, numbers and types of aircraft involved, numbers of sorties and minimum permitted altitudes for all Royal Air Force deployments to Morocco since November 1995; and what is the date of the next scheduled deployment. [12889]

**Mr. Soames:** There have been no RAF deployments to Morocco since November 1995. Further deployments remain under consideration, but none have yet been scheduled.

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *811*, which other nations participated in the training exercise in Morocco in April 1995; and what arrangements have been established with other air forces for co-ordination of future training deployments to Morocco. [12915]

**Mr. Soames:** The arrangements with Morocco referred to in my answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *811*, are bilateral in nature. No other nations participated in the low flying training exercise held in Morocco in April 1995 and no arrangements have been made with other Governments to co-ordinate future training deployments to Morocco.

### Training Facilities (Morocco)

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for provision of flying training facilities in the UK to the Moroccan air force. [12886]

**Mr. Soames:** We have no such plans.

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facilities in the UK have been made available to the Moroccan authorities as a result of the 1993 military co-operation accord. [12887]

**Mr. Soames:** No facilities have been made available to the Moroccan authorities as a result of the 1993 accord, although we encourage the presence of Moroccan students on courses at UK military training establishments.

### Parachute Jumps

**Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military parachute jumps were made in each of the last five years; and how many injuries were sustained as a result. [12939]

**Mr. Soames:** The total number of military parachute jumps and injuries sustained requiring medical treatment in the years 1991 to 1995 were as follows:

| *Year* | *Jumps* | *Injuries* | *Percentage of injuries* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 42,964 | 65 | 0.15 |
| 1992 | 42,957 | 105 | 0.24 |
| 1993 | 49,212 | 92 | 0.18 |
| 1994 | 48,608 | [1]94 | 0.19 |
| 1995 | 42,861 | [1]49 | 0.11 |

[1] Includes one fatality.

### Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* ex-service men and *(b)* ex-service women suffering from combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder. [12904]

**Mr. Soames:** Records are not held by my Department for ex-service men and women suffering from combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder—PTSD—as the responsibility for their care lies with the national health service. Veterans from conflicts dating as far back as world war one may be suffering from PTSD, formerly known as battle shock. It is therefore not possible to give a meaningful estimate.

### Helicopter Flying School

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the defence helicopter flying school. [12273]

**Mr. Soames:** An invitation to tender for the provision of a commercially owned and maintained helicopter fleet for the defence helicopter school was issued by the Ministry of Defence on 17 August 1995. Three responses were received on 14 December 1995. The bids, which include a number of support activities at RAF Shawbury and the school of army aviation at Middle Wallop, are now being evaluated.

We expect to announce the winning bid in May this year.

### Mines

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what weapons systems are deployed in the armed forces which can deliver mines from a land-based system from less than 500m. [12327]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The weapons systems which are currently in service with the United Kingdom armed forces which can deliver mines from a land-based system from less than 500m are Ranger and Barmine. Ranger projects mines over a short distance while Barmine lays them directly on, or under, the surface of the ground.

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# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

**SIXTH SERIES** **VOLUME 270**

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## SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

### *Scope and arrangement of the Index*

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Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

### *Abbreviations*

*Bills* 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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